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ISIS IN THE PACIFIC: ASSESSING TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE THREAT TO THE HOMELAND

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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ISIS IN THE PACIFIC: ASSESSING TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE THREAT TO THE HOMELAND

Wednesday, April 27, 2016

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:07 a.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Peter T. King [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives King, Katko, Higgins, Keating, and Vela.

Mr. KING. The Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will come to order. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony from 4 very distinguished experts regarding Islamist ideology and Southeast Asia.

I would like to welcome the Members of the subcommittee and express my appreciation to the witnesses who are here today. I recognize myself for an opening statement.

The spread of Islamist terrorism, around the world, is a major concern for U.S. Homeland Security. Addressing this threat requires steadfast monitoring and proactive actions in every corner where ISIS and al-Qaeda ideology is spreading. There were indications of ISIS and Islamist ideology spreading throughout parts of Southeast Asia that are reminiscent of this violent ideologist expansion in Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa.

In recent years, there have been several high-profile terrorist plots in the region, primarily linked to violent Islamist extremist networks.

In 2016, there has been a number of attacks and security concerns throughout the region. In January, ISIS claimed responsibility for a coordinated attack in Jakarta, Indonesia that claimed 8 lives and wounded dozens more.

In February, the British and Australian Governments issued terror warnings for travelers going to Malaysia.

On April 9, ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack in which 18 Filipino soldiers were killed and more than 50 wounded. A few days later, Islamist terror group Abu Sayyaf, which has been linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS, beheaded 2 Filipino hostages. In Bangladesh, 5 secular bloggers and a publisher have been murdered in

the past year in attacks that appear to have been inspired by terrorists ideology.

Just this past Monday, Islamist militants killed Xulhag Mannan, an editor of Bangladesh's first LGBT magazine. The U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh confirmed that Mr. Mannan was an embassy employee and worked with USAID. A group linked to al-Qaeda in the Indian continent, AQIS, claimed credit for the attack.

Also, on Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau announced that Abu Sayyaf has killed John Ridsdel, a Canadian citizen, who had been kidnapped from a resort in the Philippians last September. Our thoughts and prayers go out to both of their families.

Estimates of Southeast Asian fighters that have traveled to Syria to join ISIS range between 800 to more than 1,200. Public reporting highlights the creation of an ISIS military unit in Syria comprised of individuals recruited from Malaysia and Indonesia, known as the Malay Archipelago Combat Unit. Similar to what we have seen with Australians and Western Europeans, there are indications that some Southeast Asian recruits from this unit are trying to direct and inspire pro-ISIS attacks in the region.

The presence of Islamist terror groups in Southeast Asia is not a new development. There are historical connections between the Southeast Asian region and Islamist terror groups.

Al-Qaeda used a number of major cities in the region for meeting sites, including planning the September 11 attacks. While many have speculated that while al-Qaeda's influence has declined, in January 2016, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, released a statement specifically addressing Southeast Asian Muslims and encouraged sympathizers in the region to attack U.S. interests. With both al-Qaeda and ISIS seeking to recruit and radicalize in the region, the United States must be proactive in working with regional governments to counter the ideology and identify potential threats.

Through today's hearing, we will hear from counterterrorism and regional experts about the current influence of ISIS in the region, efforts to address the threat, and what more the United States and allied nations should do to prevent this region from becoming a bigger source of fighters, funding, and operational plotting.

Many are skeptical that the violent Islamist groups, extremist groups of Southeast Asia could present a real threat to U.S. allies, interests in the U.S. homeland; this is the same skepticism that ignored the threats from Yemen, Nigeria, and Libya until they had grown out of hand. While rightfully focussing on Syria and Iraq in our fight against ISIS, we should not ignore the growth of extremist activity and ideology in other parts of the world.

[The statement of Chairman King follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETER T. KING

APRIL 27, 2016

The spread of Islamist terrorism around the globe is a major concern for U.S. homeland security. Addressing this threat requires steadfast monitoring and proactive actions in every corner where ISIS and al-Qaeda ideology is spreading.

There are indications of ISIS and Islamist ideology spreading through parts of Southeast Asia that are reminiscent of the violent ideology's expansion in Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa. In recent years, there have been several high-profile terrorist plots in the region, primarily linked to violent Islamist

extremist networks. In 2016, there have been a number of attacks and security concerns throughout the region.

In January, ISIS claimed responsibility for a coordinated attack in Jakarta, Indonesia that claimed 8 lives and wounded dozens more. In February, the British and Australian governments issued terror warnings for travelers going to Malaysia. On April 9, ISIS claimed responsibility for an attack in which 18 Filipino soldiers were killed and more than 50 wounded. A few days later, Islamist terror group Abu Sayyaf, which has been linked to al-Qaeda and ISIS, beheaded 2 Filipino hostages.

In Bangladesh, 5 secular bloggers and a publisher have been murdered in the past year in attacks that appear to be inspired by terrorist ideology. On Monday, Islamist militants killed Xulhaz Mannan, an editor Bangladesh's first LGBT magazine. The U.S. Embassy in Bangladesh confirmed that Mr. Mannan was an Embassy employee and worked with USAID. A group linked to al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) claimed credit for the attack.

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The presence of Islamist terror groups in Southeast Asia is not a new development. There are historical connections between the Southeast Asian region and Islamist terror groups. Al-Qaeda used a number of major cities in the region for meeting sites, including planning the September 11, 2001 attacks.

While many have speculated that al-Qaeda's influence has declined, in January 2016 Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, released a statement specifically addressing Southeast Asian Muslims and encouraged sympathizers in the region to attack U.S. interests. With both al-Qaeda and ISIS seeking to recruit and radicalize in the region, the United States must be proactive in working with regional governments to counter the ideology and identify potential threats.

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Many are skeptical that the violent Islamist extremist groups in Southeast Asia could present a real threat to U.S. allies, interests, or the U.S. homeland. This is the same skepticism that ignored the threats from Yemen, Nigeria, and Libya until they had grown out of hand. While rightfully focusing on Syria and Iraq in our fight against ISIS, we should not ignore the growth of extremist activity and ideology in other parts of the world.

I thank all of the witnesses for being here today and I recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.

Mr. KING. I thank all the witnesses for being here today. I will ask if you want to make an opening statement or should we wait for Brian and have him come in when he does it? Wait for Brian?

I will go ahead with the witnesses. Okay. We will go ahead with the witnesses. When the Ranking Member arrives, his prerogative, he can make an opening statement. Other Members are reminded that statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

APRIL 27, 2016

I would also like to thank the witnesses for appearing to testify to examine terror groups operating in Southeast Asia and their allegiances to other terrorist groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. These terrorist groups have a long history of seeking to exploit this region, which includes the nation with the highest population of Muslims.

While most countries in Southeast Asia operate secular governments, terrorist groups continue to make progress at radicalizing and inspiring attacks.

ISIL has stepped up its efforts to recruit in this area. While estimates vary, reportedly between 600–1,200 foreign fighters from Southeast Asia have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join ISIL.

Earlier this year, Islamic militants attacked downtown Jakarta wounding at least 23 people and leaving 8 dead, including 3 civilians and 5 militants. ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack.

In one of the most horrific attacks in Indonesian history, in 2002, a bombing in Bali killed over 200 people, most of them Western tourists.

With assistance from the United States, Southeast Asia continues to make strides in its counterterrorism efforts. While we must encourage these countries' efforts to counter the spread of jihadist violence, we must also be concerned that some countries may use these efforts as a guise to suppress opposition.

We must continue to promote the expansion of democratic ideals and principles in Southeast Asia while also weeding out the jihadist elements in these countries that seek to destroy these freedoms.

The relatively small number of terrorist attacks in recent years is a testament to the effectiveness of the military and police counterterrorism efforts in these nations.

Today, I look forward to hearing testimony about the evolving threat in these nations and how the countries are responding to counter this threat.

Mr. KING. What I would like to do now is introduce our witnesses. The first witness is Mr. John Watts, who is a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security. Prior to joining the Atlantic Council, Mr. Watts was a staff officer at the Australian Department of Defense and an officer in the Australian Army Reserve. Mr. Watts holds a master's degree in international law from the Australian National University, and a BA in international studies from the University of Adelaide.

Mr. Watts, you are the kick-off witness, and I recognize you.

STATEMENT OF JOHN T. WATTS, NONRESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW, BRENT SCOWCROFT CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, ATLANTIC COUNCIL

Mr. WATTS. Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman King, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity to talk to you about this important issue. From the start, Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham, otherwise known as IS, ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh, has had a global ambition. Its long-stated goal is to endure and to expand. It has sought to find fertile new safe havens and high-profile targets to attack.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIS is under siege on multiple fronts. In recent months, it has suffered a number of high-profile defeats and has given up substantial amounts of land to its various adversaries. As ISIS is squeezed within its self-proclaimed caliphate, the importance of finding new safe havens and new targets increases in order to escape allied bombing campaigns and to reinforce its narrative of success.

The recent bold attack by ISIS-aligned terrorists in Jakarta along with indications of additional planning activities in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand, appear to indicate an increased interest of success by ISIS in establishing itself there. The calibrating the level of threat that they pose requires consideration of a number of factors both encouraging and concerning.

Southeast Asia is an attractive target for ISIS ambitions due to large Muslim populations, history of terrorist activities, and a long-standing desire by groups there to establish a Southeast Asian ca-

liphate. There is a precedent for this. Darul Islam was an Islamic insurgent movement that grew during World War II in opposition of Dutch rule. Following the Declaration of Independence in 1949, it found itself at odds with the new Indonesian Government and used the political instability and weak governance at times to grow in influence.

By the late 1950s, it controlled extensive territory in West Java, South Sulawesi, and Aceh provinces. Following a failed assassination attempt on the president, the Indonesian Government cracked down on the group. By the late 1960s, it had been effectively destroyed. The remaining elements of the group scattered across Southeast Asia and went underground.

In the 1990s, remnants of that group developed into another with similar goals known as Jemaah Islamiyah. JI was formed as a transnational network across Southeast Asia and sent soldiers to Afghanistan to train.

Following the forced resignation in 1998 of Indonesia's second authoritarian President Suharto, JI fighters returned to Indonesia and used the, again, weak instability, the political instability and weak government to emerge and to renew insurgencies across several provinces, and to conduct high-profile attacks, including the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, the Jakarta bombings of the Australian Embassy in 2004, and several international hotels in 2005 and 2009.

Following the first Bali bombing, the government cracked down on the group, and after a series of high-profile operations, many of its leaders were killed or captured with a group remaining as a degraded form today.

The legacies of these groups are an important element in examining the terrorism in Southeast Asia today. As with DI, key leaders or veterans of JI went to ground and are now emerging as central players in the current evolution of the militant groups. It is also worth noting that those areas once controlled by DI harbored lingering Islamic movements seeking autonomy, which have on occasion broken out into open insurgency.

ISIS has been targeting Southeast Asia aggressively with media messaging for some time, and local language has been styled to appeal to the populations. For some segments of the population, this has been a clarion call. A number of groups have sworn allegiance and there have been thousands who declared their support at public rallies. There are approximately 3,000 pro-ISIS websites in Southeast Asia with more than 70 percent coming from Indonesia. As you mentioned yourself, Chairman, there are approximately 700 Indonesians who have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight, which is nearly doubled that 400 that traveled to Afghanistan in the 1990s.

We need to keep these numbers in context, though. Seven hundred out of an Indonesian population of 250 million is minuscule. The numbers of people traveling from Malaysia are about on par with Australia, despite having much larger Muslim population. The vast majority of Southeast Asian populations reject Islamic extremism and groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama, which have 50 million supporters, preach the inclusive version of Islam that emphasizes tolerance and rejects ISIS rhetoric. In fact, some Indonesian

jihadist groups have rejected ISIS because of its brutality and called it un-Islamic.

Globally, the areas and populations ISIS has been successful in attracting recruits, some face either economic hardship, weak political governments, authoritative leaders, and/or persecuted minorities, or a combination thereof. In Southeast Asia, these conditions are no longer readily apparent.

Southeast Asian populations live in generally stable, well-governed, and prosperous nations, and are not as oppressed or politically disempowered as Muslim populations in other parts of the world. While some still struggle with poverty, economic opportunity, corruption, and adequate infrastructure, the region is broadly prosperous, and most people are experiencing improving economic conditions.

The final reason for remaining optimistic about the attacks was that the Jakarta bombings were amateur in nature. The training and weapons used were poor, and the effect was very limited with more insurgents dying than victims.

I am out of time. I can continue if you would like wrap-up?

Mr. KING. Yes.

Mr. WATTS. While Southeast Asian law enforcement is also highly effective at targeting groups following the Bali bombings in 2002, the campaign by the Indonesian police killed over 50 militants and arrested over 500 and the group, Jemaah Islamiyah, is a shadow of its former self.

That being said, there are some concerns that we still need to be aware of. Despite the fact that they are broadly effective, the recent attacks as well as the bombing in Thailand at the Erawan Shrine, show that terrorist attacks can and will continue to happen, and no police force is 100 percent effective at stopping them all.

Moreover, while the groups have sworn allegiance to ISIS, do not currently have the capability or possibly intent to ban together and strike on a national level. If ISIS reprioritizes its strategy and looks at its current situation, it may reprioritize the effort and the resources it puts into Southeast Asia, and that threat scenario can change rapidly.

Sources from Syria and Iraq have indicated there is currently a split between various ISIS leadership factions as to whether they should prioritize, retain their current territory at all cost or devolve into a decentralized international terrorist organization.

If it does the latter, the likelihood of increased resources flowing to Southeast Asia could raise quickly. As modern intolerant Muslim majority countries, Malaysia, Burma, and Indonesia are of great symbolic importance to ISIS, because they repudiate the extremist rhetoric they espouse by demonstrating a better alternative to it.

The success of Southeast Asian societies are antithetical to the apocalyptic and sectarian message ISIS promotes. Muslim majority countries are an important target—particularly Indonesia is the Muslim majority country, but their appeal there has been extremely limited and remains on the absolute fringe of the already fringed jihadist population.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Watts follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOHN T. WATTS

APRIL 27, 2016

Chairman King, Subcommittee Ranking Member Higgins, Full Committee Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for this opportunity to testify today on this important issue.

From the start, the Islamic State of Iraq and Al Sham, otherwise known as IS, ISIS, ISIL, or Dae'sh, has had global ambitions. It has long stated its goal is to endure and expand. It has sought to find fertile new safe havens and high-profile targets to attack for a long period of time and has committed resources to achieving that outcome, targeting various populations around the world with its powerful messaging.

In Iraq and Syria, ISIS is under siege on multiple fronts. In recent months it has suffered a number of high-profile defeats and has given up substantial amounts of land to its various adversaries.[1] As ISIS is squeezed within its self-proclaimed caliphate, the importance of finding new safe havens and new targets increases, in order to escape allied bombing campaigns and to reinforce the narrative of success.

South-East Asia (SE Asia) is a tempting prize for ISIS, and the possibility of them gaining a stronghold there is deeply concerning. SE Asia is home to large Muslim populations, including the world's largest Muslim-majority country: Indonesia. The region also has a history of Islamic-motivated insurgencies, terrorist attacks, and for a time a declared caliphate.

The recent bold attack by ISIS-aligned terrorists in Jakarta, along with indications of additional planning activity in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand, appear to indicate an increase in interest and success by ISIS in establishing itself there. Calibrating the level of threat that they pose requires consideration of a number of factors, both encouraging and concerning. My testimony today is separated into 4 parts: First I will present some broad history and context of the roots of modern terrorism in SE Asia. Then I will present several reasons for why the nature of the SE Asian region will limit ISIS' success there, followed several reasons to be concerned. Finally I will provide an assessment of how we should balance those opposing factors.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

As stated above, ISIS has been open about its ambition to expand its reach globally. SE Asia is an attractive target for ISIS ambitions due to the large Muslim populations, history of terrorist activity and a long-standing desire by groups in the region to establish a SE Asian caliphate. Indeed, for a time a caliphate was declared over territory seized by Islamic militants from the group Darul Islam (DI).

DI was an Islamic insurgent movement that grew during World War II in opposition to Dutch rule in Indonesia. Following the declaration of Independence in 1949, DI found itself at odds with the new Indonesian government and used the political instability and weak governance of the time to grow in influence. By the late 1950's, DI controlled extensive territory in West Java, South Sulawesi, and Aceh provinces and declared the establishment of an Islamic State of Indonesia.

Following an attempted assassination attempt on Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, the Indonesian Government cracked down on the group. By the late 1960s, the group had been effectively destroyed, but remaining elements went underground and scattered to other SE Asian countries. These remnants sought to carry out small terrorist attacks—often against religious targets—and retained a dream of establishing a true caliphate across SE Asia.[2]

In the 1990's, remnants of that movement developed into another group with similar goals, known as Jemaah Islamiyah or JI. JI formed a transnational network across SE Asia, and sent fighters to camps in Afghanistan. Following the forced resignation in 1998 of Indonesia's second authoritarian President, Suharto, JI fighters returned to Indonesia and renewed insurgencies in several provinces and plotted major terrorist attacks. JI was responsible for a number of high-profile terrorist attacks across SE Asia, including the Bali Bombings in 2002 and 2005, and in Jakarta

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[1] Liz Sly, "In Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State is in retreat on multiple fronts" for *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2016, accessed at *https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/in-syria-and-iraq-the-islamic-state-is-in-retreat-on-multiple-fronts/2016/03/24/a0e33774-f101-11e5-a2a3-d4e9697917d1_story.html*.

[2] Fanscisco Galamas, *Terrorism in Indonesia: An Overview*, for Instituto Espanol de Estudios Estrategicos, Research Paper 04/2015, accessed at *http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2015/DIEEEINV04-2015_Terrorismo_en_Indonesia_FcoGalamas_-ENGLISH.pdf*.

the bombing of the Australian Embassy in 2004 and several international hotels in 2005 and 2009. Following the first Bali Bombing, the Indonesia Government once again cracked down on the militants, and after a series of high-profile operations, many of its leaders were killed or captured with little of the group remaining today.

The legacy of these groups are an important element of an examination of terrorism in SE Asia today. As with DI, key leaders and veterans of JI went to ground, and are now reemerging as central players in the current evolution of militant groups. It is also worth noting that those areas once controlled by DI harbor lingering Islamic movements seeking autonomy, which have on occasion broken out into open insurgency or religious violence.

On the morning of Thursday, 14 January 2016, a suicide bomber detonated his charge in a Starbucks coffee house in downtown Jakarta. Gunmen then seized civilians in the street outside and engaged in a firefight with police, throwing several home-made grenades and firing assault rifles. The attack ended with 4 civilian deaths, 23 injured and the killing of 5 terrorist attackers. The style of attack differed from previous terrorist incidents in Indonesia, which often involved targeting of buildings frequented by foreigners with sophisticated car bombs. In the early 2000s, religious buildings and symbols such as churches were often a focal point of violence, while more recently attackers have gone after Indonesian police and authorities. This assault clearly sought to imitate the Paris attacks, but were ineffective and amateurish. Nonetheless, they were bold and brazen, and show a degree of sophistication in planning and coordination, and would have required substantial local support and networks to execute.

With a new terrorist threat emerging at the same time that foreign fighters are travelling to and returning from an overseas jihadist battleground, there are worrying echoes of JI's rise in the early 2000s. To understand the implications of this attack, it is necessary to consider how ISIS has gone about expanding its global reach.

ISIS achieves this goal through several means. In Iraq and Syria, their forces infiltrated governments and societies, and brought them down from the inside when the time was right. This approach has been highly successful in weakly-governed regions, and ISIS has sought to destabilize some areas in order to create the conditions for their success. Beyond their immediate area of interest, however, ISIS has expanded predominately by accepting the allegiance of local groups seeking to align with the most successful jihadi brand. This approach can be seen occurring in SE Asia with the likes of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Southern Philippines: An Islamic group that has sworn allegiance to ISIS, but whose fight for autonomy is decades old and the alignment with the current terrorist super group is likely a pragmatic move as much as ideological one.

ISIS has been able to directly support terrorist attacks using returned foreign fighters in areas that can be easily travelled to from their main area of operations—in particular Europe and North Africa. Attacks that have been attributed to ISIS in more distant locations, such as the United States and Australia, have generally been conducted by "self-starter" lone wolves—individuals or small groups inspired by ISIS rhetoric but lacking in direct support or training.

SE Asia has been an objective for ISIS for some time, aggressively targeting the region with media and messaging developed in local languages and style to appeal to SE Asian populations. There are some segments of the population for whom this has been a clarion call. A number of groups in the region have sworn allegiance to ISIS and there have been public rallies where thousands have declared their support for the terrorist group. There are approximately 3,000 pro-ISIS websites in SE Asia, with more than 70% coming from Indonesia. Worryingly there are reportedly 700 Indonesians who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to fight with ISIS, nearly double the 400 that travelled to Afghanistan in the 1990s. There are also reportedly around 100 Malaysian and 100 Fillipinos, enough to form a SE Asian battalion there, known as Katibah Nusantara.[3] While there are some indications these numbers may be inflated, there have also been several hundred who have been detained before they could leave their home country. It can also be assumed that there are even more individuals and groups with a broad sympathy to the goal of reestablishing a caliphate in SE Asia, even if they don't completely agree with ISIS' methods.

[3] The Soufan Group, Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq, December 2015, accessed at *http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG__ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf*.

REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

The parallels with the emergence of JI and signs that ISIS is gaining some traction amongst local populations are concerning, but there are several reasons why the situation today is very different to what it was a few decades ago. First of all it is important to contextualize the numbers. Seven hundred people out of a population of 250 million is miniscule, and the numbers of people travelling from Malaysia are about on par with Australia, despite it having a much larger Muslim population.

The vast majority of SE Asian populations reject Islamic extremism. Following the January attacks in Jakarta, Indonesians took to twitter, trending the hashtag #KamiTidakTakut (we are not afraid). Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has 50 million supporters, preaches an inclusive version of Islam that emphasizes tolerance and rejects ISIS rhetoric.[4] Islamic organizations that have pledged support to ISIS have elicited a backlash from community leaders and even some fellow jihadist groups have rejected ISIS as un-Islamic on account of its brutality. This indicates that despite targeted messaging and a legacy that would seem to align with many of ISIS' objectives, they are unlikely to attract broad support.

Globally, the areas and populations that ISIS has been successful in attracting recruits and support from are facing economic hardship, weak political governance, authoritative leaders, persecuted minorities, or a combination thereof. In SE Asia, these conditions are no longer readily present. There are several persecuted Muslim minorities as well as authoritative governments, such as in Myanmar and to a lesser degree Thailand. But the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia are inclusive and tolerant democracies with avenues available to achieving political aims, particularly in the latter two. Indeed, Islamic parties have been formed in Indonesia, but have only been able to achieve very limited support. SE Asian populations live in generally stable, well-governed, prosperous societies and are not as oppressed or politically disempowered as Muslim populations in other parts of the world. And while some areas in SE Asia still struggle with poverty, economic opportunity, corruption and inadequate infrastructure, the region broadly prosperous and most people are experiencing improving economic conditions. ISIS' message therefore has limited appeal to them.

As an example of how the region has changed, it is worth comparing the Indonesia of 20 years ago with today. Then it was suffering the effects of near-economic collapse following the Asian Banking Crisis. Separatist insurgencies and violence had flared in a number of provinces, including in Aceh, West Papua, Central Sulawesi and East Timor, the latter of which would go on to be granted independence. The forced resignation of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, marked the end of nearly 50 years of authoritarian rule. Today, the recent election of President Joko Widodo, commonly known as Jokowi, is a watershed moment as he represents the first democratically-elected leader from outside the political establishment. Indonesia's economy has slowed recently, the poverty rate has fallen from 18% a decade ago to 11% today, and GDP per capita has more than doubled in the same period. Inequality and development of rural areas are still problematic and the benefits are not evenly spread, but the World Bank predicts 5.1% economic growth this year, up from 4.8% last year.[5] While it still has areas for improvement, Indonesia is trending in a positive direction.

Another reason for optimism in the region is the competence and capability of the police and military forces there. In Indonesia, for example, during the decade following the first Bali bombings police operations killed over 50 and arrested over 500 terror suspects, including key leaders and bomb-makers. Their response to militants is led by their counter terrorism force, Detachment 88. Set up after the shock of the Bali bombings, Detachment 88 is a specially-trained counter-terrorism team that receives support and training from the United States and Australia. These operations have degraded Jemaah Islamiyah and prevented any high-profile attacks between 2009 and 2016. It's important to note, however, that Indonesia's success in countering terrorism isn't a result of just its offensive law enforcement capabilities, but also extensive intelligence networks, field craft and turning militants into informants through rehabilitation and community outreach programs.

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[4] Joe Cochrane, "From Indonesia, a Muslim Challenge to the Ideology of the Islamic State" in *The New York Times*, Nov 26, 2015, accessed at *http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/27/world/asia/indonesia-islam-nahdlatul-ulama.html*.

[5] World Bank, *Indonesia*, accessed on April 22, 2016 at *http://data.worldbank.org/country/indonesia#cp_fin*.

The final reason for remaining optimistic about the current ISIS threat in SE Asia is that their only known attack was highly ineffective. On the one hand, a coordinated attack such as that takes significant support networks and resources to execute. And the brazen nature of it—attacking downtown in broad daylight—differentiates this group from others that have sworn allegiance to ISIS, such as Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) and Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT) who appear to lack the capacity for similar attacks and are limited to local targets in regional areas.[6] Despite the support, planning, and coordination necessary to stage such a bold attack, the ultimate effect was limited. The number of injured was substantial, but more attackers died than victims. The attack was amateurish and the training and weapons appear to be poor. For the attack to have had such limited impact it can be assumed that those involved lacked training and resources.

REASONS FOR CONCERN

There are nonetheless a number of reasons that the prospect of an emergent ISIS cell in SE Asia is of concern. While the Jakarta attack was amateurish and ineffective, ISIS has shown itself to be a learning organization that can adapt and improve over time. The European cell behind the devastating attacks in Paris and Belgium had previously experienced several failures from which it learned and improved. While the Indonesian police arrested a dozen people following the January attack, it is likely that there is a still larger network that could learn from the experience and improve in the future. As foreign fighters return from Iraq and Syria, they may bring know-how and experience with them.

While SE Asian law enforcement agencies are broadly effective, the recent Jakarta attacks and the August 2015 bombing in Thailand at the Erawan Shrine, which killed 20 people, are reminders that terrorism can still strike across the region. No police force can stop every attack. Considering the long history of terrorism in the region, any signs of a reemerging trend is cause for concern. It remains to be seen if these incidents were outliers or indicate deeper failures within the respective forces.

As noted earlier, with a few exceptions SE Asian nations are relatively prosperous, politically stable with tolerant and moderate societies. As such, the potential for ISIS to apply the approaches that have worked for it in the Middle East are unlikely to work in SE Asia. They are unlikely to be able effectively infiltrate government agencies en masse, attract large sections of the population, or sufficiently destabilize governments to create political vacuums. The threat of large pieces of territory falling to ISIS is very low. But there are still remote areas, including some with sympathetic local populations, which could be used to create bases and training camps which would pose a significant threat to regional security. The likelihood of an insurgency reemerging is far lower than in the past, but local outbreaks of violence are possible.

Moreover, while the groups that have sworn allegiance to ISIS do not currently have the capability, or possibly even the intent, to band together and strike on a national level, an influx of resources could quickly change that threat scenario. Groups like Ansharud Daulad Islamiyah (ADI), which has a presence across several provinces in Indonesia, and the Ahlus Shura Council in the Philippines, see themselves as the beginnings of a SE Asian Islamic State, even if they do not yet control any territory.[7] Many of the armed groups in the region are motivated primarily by specific political goals or for financial gain. There are various other insurgent and secessionist groups throughout the region of various ethnic and religious composition. The region comprises numerous different ethno-linguistic group, and many grievances of individual groups directly relate to their specific circumstances and political grievances. Nonetheless, there are sufficient numbers of groups that could align with ISIS' ideology and in any case we have seen that ISIS can be highly pragmatic in creating alliances. It is plausible that they could reach a mutually beneficial arrangement with unaffiliated groups that do not share its ideology in order to achieve mutually beneficial objectives if the need arose.

Sources from Syria and Iraq have indicated that there is currently a split between various ISIS leadership factions as to whether they should prioritize retaining their current territory at all costs, or to devolve into a decentralized international terrorist organization. Whichever way the group goes, a push into SE Asia could be reprioritized and become a focal point for their plans: Either as the target of more

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[6] Thomas Murphy, *When IS is not IS: Terrorism in Indonesia*, Australian Institute of International Affairs, March 1, 2016, accessed at *http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australian_outlook/when-is-is-not-is-terrorism-in-indonesia/*.

[7] Navhat Nuraniyah, "More than a Fan Club", for *Inside Indonesia*, Oct–Dec 2015, accessed at *http://www.insideindonesia.org/more-than-a-fanclub*.

attacks or in an attempt to seize territory outside the Middle East. While ISIS-aligned groups may not currently be sufficiently resourced to pose a significant threat, if SE Asia became a high priority for ISIS they may find that they have as many resources as they want. There are indications that this is already underway, some analysts believe that ISIS is determined to establish a foothold in SE Asia this year, most likely in Mindanao in the Philippines or Sulawesi in Indonesia.[8]

As moderate and tolerant Muslim-majority countries, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia are of great symbolic importance to ISIS because they repudiate the extremist rhetoric they espouse by demonstrating a better alternative to it. The success of SE Asian societies are antithetical to the apocalyptic and sectarian message that ISIS promotes. Muslim majority countries are an important target, and Indonesia in particular has special symbolic meaning as the largest Muslim-majority nation in the world.

The final cause for concern is the size of the population. While we have seen that there is only a fraction of the population sympathetic to ISIS' cause, in such a populous region, even a small fraction could represent a significant number of people. Moreover, while the numbers of people in the region that are currently suspected to be linked to ISIS is minuscule, recent history has made it clear that it does not require a large group of people to create a tragic and far reaching effect. Those few who have been swayed by ISIS' appeal are likely to be the most hard-core fringe of the existing fringe elements of society with jihadist leanings.

ASSESSMENT

Several recent terrorist attacks have reminded us of the threat the region has faced from Islamic extremists in the past. That one of them was clearly connected to ISIS, and with indications that several other plots were being planned, these fears are justified. The possibility of an ISIS foothold in one of the most populous and dynamic regions of the world is deeply concerning. The region's history of insurgency and political instability and the success of ISIS in expanding its brand globally give these fears credibility.

However, the moderate and tolerant societies of SE Asia have broadly rejected the ISIS ideology and its brutal methodology, and have shown that they are resistant to its messaging. While there remains some areas of concern, the region is sufficiently tolerant, politically stable and prosperous that it is unlikely that insurgencies will re-emerge in a wide-spread manner, even in remote areas. In fact, the region provides a great case study of how a moderate and inclusive approach can benefit all groups within a society, and should be held up as an example for other regions to aspire to. Many of the countries in the region have done this through quiet competence, empowering their populations and looking to develop on their own terms in their own way. The United States and its allies have played a role in supporting the countries within the region in achieving that, and we should continue to do so while identifying lessons to apply elsewhere.

As ISIS is pressed within the confines of its self-declared caliphate, it is having to reconsider its priorities and strategy. While it is unlikely to be defeated in the near term, the organization is reacting to this pressure by seeking to open new fronts and strike at soft targets further afield to maintain their narrative of success. While ISIS has long sought to generate a presence in SE Asia, its investment to date has been modest and relatively ineffectual. The change in its circumstances may change their calculus and see them increase the resources they commit to their SE Asian affiliates. Among other setbacks, ISIS no longer has the ability to generate revenue in the way it has in the past, and there are signs that financial constraints are impacting their ability to fund their operations. It would be dangerous, however, to underestimate their capabilities, and if SE Asia increases in priority it is possible that the embryonic cells there may receive sufficient resources to become a significant threat. SE Asia, and in particular Indonesia, is an attractive target for ISIS, and it likely that they will continue to pursue their objectives there.

Moreover, one of the greatest threats that ISIS poses is inspiration to lone wolves and self-starter terrorist groups. While the currently-identified terror threats in the region may not pose a significant risk, there is always the possibility of a new one emerging. We have seen how difficult it is, even in Western nations, to stop self-motivated lone-wolf attackers.

It is therefore likely that there will be more terrorist attacks in SE Asia in the future. Whether they are funded by ISIS, inspired by them, or indeed motivated by a completely separate political grievances. The regional law enforcement agencies

[8] Rohan Gunaratna, "ISIS in Philippines a Threat to Region" in *The Strait Times*, Jan. 12, 2016, accessed at *http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/isis-in-philippines-a-threat-to-region*.

understand the threats they face and are proactively seeking to diffuse them, but they will be unlikely to stop them all. At present, few of the extant militant groups have the capacity to undertake a significant attack, and there are rifts between the key jihadists. Many jihadist groups in Indonesia have actually rejected ISIS out of repugnance for their brutal tactics. But while many of the groups are primarily motivated by local grievances, those who have aligned themselves with ISIS are true believers who have been directly inspired by the global movement beyond any local considerations.[9] These individuals are highly motivated to see an ISIS-linked SE Asian Islamic province realized. And while the percentage of individuals is exceptionally small, even the smallest fraction of such a large population is cause for concern.

I would like to thank the committee for holding a hearing on such an important topic. The threat of an emerging ISIS foothold in SE Asia is of great concern. But by providing opportunities such as this to examine the key issues in more depth we will be better placed to respond to it.

Mr. KING. Mr. Watts, thank you. Thank you very much for that.

Our next witness, Mr. Patrick Skinner, is the director of special projects of the Soufan group. He is a former CIA case officer, specializing in counterterrorism issues. In addition, he has law enforcement experience with U.S. Air Marshals and U.S. Capitol Police as well as search and rescue experience in the U.S. Coast Guard.

Thank you for your service, and thanks for being here today. Mr. Skinner.

STATEMENT OF PATRICK M. SKINNER, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL PROJECTS, THE SOUFAN GROUP

Mr. SKINNER. Thank you for having me, Chairman King, other Members of the subcommittee.

I will try to break it down into 2 threats. There is a long and well-deserved assumption that Southeast Asia is not fertile ground for extremism. As pointed out, 99.9 percent, the vast majority of people, reject that, but that is also true in a lot of places.

There has been decades of extremism in the area. As you mentioned, there is a threat of terrorism that has run for decades, before Afghanistan, before 9/11, but continuing all the way through it. So when it comes to ISIS, particularly, I break it down into 2 threats. You have the threat of the foreign fighters. Again, 700 Indonesians, maybe 1,200 in total, 50 Malaysians, those are wildly—I mean, those are really positive numbers per capita. I mean, compared to, like, Tunisia or Saudi Arabia. But as we have seen in Paris, it just takes a handful of people to come back and destabilize, especially when there is already political tensions and economic tensions not as severe but as always an undercurrent.

So the difference between Paris, and the difference between Jakarta, so one killed 130, one killed 4 plus the attackers themselves, was training. It is not lack of opportunity. It is not lack of target. It is training.

So there is a real concern. Now, everything with foreign fighters can always be either overhyped or downplayed, and so it is hard to split the difference, because it is such an unknowable. But it is certainly knowable that the difference between success and failure, between cartoonishly bad plot, that are still tragic, but they are not

[9] *The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia*, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, IPAC Report No. 13, September 24, 2014, accessed at *http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/09/IPAC__13__Evolution__of__ISIS.pdf*.

a national security incident, is training. ISIS has demonstrated the ability to—though Syria has been a live-fire training ground for 3 years, for this group, and perhaps longer. As you have seen in the European Union, and will certainly see in Southeast Asia, the ability of governments to actually track extremist foreign fighters is widely overstated. Even in the most technologically-advanced countries, we are not tracking these people. You know, we are building this hindsight, after-the-fact counterterrorism machine. So I think that it is—you should expect that some of these people who have left, not all want to come back, you know, to fight. Some just want to come back, because they are disillusioned, and that is a positive development, but there will be people that will come back, and I think that we have to presume that they will be undetected.

Now, these services are really good. So that is one side to the threat is, not lone wolves, but you can look at them like that, the little small cells where people come back, and they know what they are doing, and that is a bad thing.

Another issue, and it is also an unknowable, but we can begin to assume this might be the case, is that there are existing sanctuaries that Islamic State would love to plug in. There is no such thing as a clandestine caliphate. They need sanctuary. They actually need a place for these people to go to where they can say, this is where our flag is.

Places like the southern Philippines are a really attractive option for them, because Abu Sayyaf has proven that they can be around for decades. They have proven that they can battle the Philippine police and the military at least to a standstill. So the danger is that you take these already lethal groups that are like parasites, that are plugged into the local economies with kidnapping, you know, for ransom, smuggling, extortion, and then you add the ISIS notoriety, you add their funding, perhaps, but you also add that lethality that these groups have but not on the Islamic State scale.

So the concern is you have returning foreign fighters who will add a level of professionalism, if you want to use that word, to attacks. That is the difference between Brussels and Jakarta. Those are really big differences. One it is a local crime issue, another is you don't want too many of these attacks. But then the bigger threat is the instability of the regions. They are not going to get better immediately, and these places need help, especially in the Philippines. That is a military problem.

So ISIS is going to try to plug into that. It is an open question, but it is likely that they will declare, like at least a wlilayah, a state there. They haven't done it yet. They have accepted Abu Sayyef on their, you know, the pledge of allegiance, but they haven't said, okay. We are going to have a wlilayah. If they do that, that is a clear sign that they are going to move hard into the region.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Skinner follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PATRICK M. SKINNER

APRIL 27, 2016

There is no longer any question as to if the Islamic State will attempt to establish some presence in Southeast Asia; the group has already done so and intends to do

more. The larger and far more pressing question is how successful will it be applying its motto of "remaining and expanding" in the region. Much like the overall issue of foreign fighters, the issue of the Islamic State's potential power projection in and from Southeast Asia is one prone to simultaneous and conflicting exaggeration and downplaying of the threat. Currently the extremist threat across several countries in the region is limited but it is growing.

It will take concerted and thoughtful multi-national efforts to limit the threat to manageable levels. Action and support now will have significant returns on investment; the longer the problem festers, the more costly and less effective the corrective measures will be. The threat can be summed up as such: It is a trend line heading towards a fault line if not addressed. Failure to counter the threat and ideology of the Islamic State in Southeast Asia will have severe near-and-long-term consequences.

In terms of numbers of foreign fighters estimated to have traveled to Syria for extremist purposes, southeast Asia is a relative success story. The high end of estimates is that 1,000 people from the region have made the decision to travel. Other estimates suggest 600 to 700, with most of those coming from Indonesia. Malaysia and the Philippines each have seen perhaps 100 of their citizens go to Syria; Singapore reports just 2. Given the large population of the region, the overall and per capita numbers of foreign fighters are a positive indication of a region resistant to the the twisted Islamic extremism espoused by groups such as the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.

The low numbers of people traveling to Syria also means a relatively low level of returnees, an issue that is a real concern world-wide and in Southeast Asia, given the damage a handful of trained fighters can do on a civilian population. The difference between the November 2015 Paris attacks that killed 130 and the January 2016 Jakarta attack that killed 4 (plus the 4 attackers) was training. The risk of trained fighters slipping undetected into countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, or the Philippines and plugging into existing extremist groups such as Abu Sayaf and serving as trainers and force multipliers is a real risk.

The risk is greatest in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, with the Philippines having the most severe persistent extremist threat in the form of Abu Sayaf. The group has pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a pledge accepted by the Islamic State. As the fortunes of the Islamic State worsen in Iraq and Syria, it is likely the group might announce a new state or wlilayah in Southeast Asia. The southern part of the Philippines, where the central government is unable to exert consistent control, would make an ideal sanctuary for the Islamic State.

There have always been pockets of persistent and violent extremism in the region. Geography works against the central governments in the expansive island countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The arc of returning foreign fighters is a long one, with the 1980s and 1990s fighters who returned from Afghanistan still creating problems with groups such as Abu Sayaf and Jemaah Islamiyah.

The Islamic State has already worked its way into Southeast Asian criminal terror networks, as al-Qaeda had previously and continues to do so. Kidnapping, piracy, and smuggling provide much-needed consistent revenues for terrorist groups in the region. On April 25, 2016, 2 days ago, Philippine president Benigno Aquino III ordered the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to immediately conduct operations to reduce 4 hostages taken by Abu Sayaf in September 2015. The order came as the deadline for ransom had passed. Along with Abu Sayaf, smaller extremist groups Ansar al-Khilafah, Katibat Marakah al-Ansar, and Katibat Ansar al-Sharia have also pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

While the region has a well-deserved reputation and reality for being resistant to religious extremism, that resistance is being severely tested. Concerns over wahhabist mosques and madrassas continue, particularly in Malaysia. The long-held assumption that Southeast Asia isn't "fertile ground" for religious extremism is less true now than ever. Malaysia has begun to crack down on what it calls extremist mosques, but the scope of the problem is rather large given the 30-year effort, funded by Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, to spread wahhabism in the region. Vulnerable communities already disaffected from the central government can be coated in this "kerosene of intolerance" from extremist mosques, needing the smallest spark to ignite into sustained extremism against anyone perceived as different or threatening.

Furthermore, the Islamic State has shown it doesn't need "fertile ground" to thrive; like a weed it simply needs to take root anywhere and then spread. Places outside the government's effective control, which exist in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, are more than enough for the group to settle in and then work its way into the major cities. There will be several indications when this process begins in earnest.

First, attacks will increase in both frequency and lethality. These attacks will more resemble Paris than Jakarta, unfortunately, as the value of combat training and terror sanctuary become evident. The successes in the region over the last 15 years in combating terrorism and reducing large terrorist attack were hard-earned and sadly will have to be re-earned again as the threat level rises to levels not seen previously due to the size and spread of the Islamic State.

Second, there will be a slow building of pressure and then attacks against bloggers, authors, newspapers, and other voices that run counter to the "us versus them" ideology of bin-Ladenism. This is happening now in Bangladesh, where persistent political violence and gangs have merged with the extreme ideology of the Islamic State to create a deadly environment for anyone with a different viewpoint. Silencing other voices is crucial to the Islamic State's monopoly of message. Intimidating and assassinating people with platforms such as newspapers or websites is straight out of the extremist playbook. It will be a sign that governments have failed to adequately counter the threat if these types of crimes begin to pop up in Kuala Lumpur, Manila, or Jakarta. Once that begins, it is exceedingly difficult to break the pattern.

Countering this threat now and for the long-term is a challenge with which the region will need substantial assistance from the United States and other countries. There are long-standing ties and liaison that have proven extremely effective and beneficial in addressing the threats of the past but that will need to be reassessed and likely increased to match the new reality. Militarily, the Philippines will continue to need help combatting Abu Sayaf and other extremist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. Legally and politically, countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia are trying to balance civil rights with the increased need to detain people with extremist ties and intentions. Malaysia has arrested over 100 people on suspicion of ties to the Islamic State, and has enacted the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) which increased the length of pre-trial detentions. Indonesia is considering similar legislation as well. It will be, as it is in every country, a delicate balance between liberty and security, with excessive legal persecution likely to lead to more of the behavior it was intended to prevent. Lastly, each country will need to increase its respective efforts at countering violent extremism both ideologically and socially. Singapore has been in the forefront of this, though its model will be difficult to scale for its much larger neighbors. Increased assistance from the United States in all 3 facets of the fight against the Islamic State in Southeast Asia is needed to help avoid much greater threats.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Skinner.

Our next witness is Ms. Supna Zaidi Peery. Did I get that okay? You can correct me.

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Zaidi Peery.

Mr. KING. Okay.

She is an attorney and a strategic policy analyst at the Counter Extremist Project, a not-for-profit, nonpartisan, international policy organization that combats the growing threats from extremist ideology. Ms. Peery's areas of expertise include the roots of extremist, foreign policy, human rights, immigration, and development issues.

She previously worked policy and intelligence analysis for the banking sector in New York City. Ms. Peery has written extensively on foreign policy, human rights, and religion for more than a decade.

We welcome you today, and thank you for appearing. You are recognized.

STATEMENT OF SUPNA ZAIDI PEERY, RESEARCH ANALYST, COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Thank you. Chairman King, Ranking Member Higgins, and Members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.

ISIS' position is to increase its threat to the United States and our allies in Southeast Asia by collaborating with local militant groups. In response, regional governments should aggressively seek

out preventive policies to combat violent and nonviolent Islamist activity in the region. These policies should include an aggressive push against the proliferation of Islamist propaganda on-line especially on social media. Concurrently, regional governments must support and amplify counter messaging spread by modern Muslim organizations like Sisters in Islam in Malaysia, and Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia, which Mr. Watts mentioned.

Islamists, especially ISIS, skillfully manipulate regional and local problems and incorporate them into the Islamist message of global Muslim victimhood. Currently, there are more than 3,000 pro-ISIS websites in Southeast Asia. Approximately 70 percent of these websites are hosted on servers in Indonesia. This is an issue that the Indonesian Government can't address with working with the private sector. Muslim youth can easily come into contact with this extremist rhetoric on-line and become vulnerable through radicalization.

Nonviolent Islamist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and Islamist televangelist like Zakir Naik empower ISIS by similarly advocating for a caliphate to replace local governments. In Southeast Asia, Hizb ut-Tahrir events fill football stadiums by the thousands. Zakir Naik reaches millions through his cable station, the Peace Network and speaking engagements, which are later posted on-line.

Earlier this month alone, Zakir Naik spoke at an event in Indonesia where he stated 9/11 was an inside job, among other questionable statements. The situation in Southeast Asia can be compared to the evolution of events in the United Kingdom where Islamist propagandist Anjem Choudary never reflected the views of the majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom, but the group he cofounded, al-Muhajiroun, is blamed by British law enforcement probably 50 percent terror plots in the United Kingdom from 1995 to 2015. Choudary's fringe status has not prevented him from undermining stability and security in Great Britain.

Equally, extremist activity in Southeast Asia can dramatically and negatively impact the region in the future if it is not curbed now.

In the Philippines, for example, militant group Abu Sayyaf pledge allegiance to ISIS in 2014 despite being considered primarily a criminal organization. It is possible that the affiliation benefit Abu Sayyaf by raising its stature, making its kidnap-for-ransom business a more serious threat to foreign governments, including the United States.

Abu Sayyaf reportedly beheaded a Canadian hostage, John Ridsdel, this week who was working on a mining project in the Philippines and vacationing at the time of his kidnapping. Abu Sayyaf had demanded ransom, but and apparently did not receive it by the group's self-imposed deadline. Any support ISIS and Abu Sayyaf give each other raises a security risk to local governments in the region as well as to the United States, which ISIS identifies as a target through its on-line outlets.

Moreover, ISIS affiliated extremists in Bangladesh, which borders the Southeast Asian country of Burma, killed 2 more advocates of secularism on April 23 and April 25 of this month, bringing the death toll of liberal writers in the country to 8 since 2015. These victims do not include the foreigners and religious minorities

that have also been targeted by Islamic extremist in Bangladesh in the last few years.

Instability in Bangladesh has negative effects in Southeast Asia since extremists from Bangladesh have allegedly attempted to recruit from the Muslim Rohingya refugee population along the Burmese border. ISIS propaganda on various platforms play the images of starving Rohingya over and over again, striking deep emotional cord amongst some vulnerable Muslim youth around the world to do something to help their fellow Muslims. Jihadist recruitment preys upon these emotions. There are similarly videos and images played on ISIS platforms of the Syrian crisis, children, family, family suffering with no support from the outside.

ISIS has targeted neighboring Malaysia as well. ISIS met multiple militant groups last fall in the Philippines to plan attacks to be committed in Malaysia. ISIS also has a presence in Indonesia where pro-ISIS militants attacked a Starbucks cafe in Jakarta killing 4 on January 14 of this year.

Bahrun Naim is considered the brains behind the operation, and he is connected to ISIS propagandist Abu Jandal in Syria, and pro-ISIS ideologue Aman Abdulrahman. Abdulrahman has translated pro-ISIS propaganda from Arabic to Bahasa Indonesian on-line to help recruit jihadists.

It should be important to note that ISIS propaganda includes multiple languages along multiple platforms to ensure that his message is, indeed, global.

Thus, the activities of ISIS and local militant groups in Southeast Asia confirm that extremism is on the rise in the region. But, yet, it should still be pointed out, as my fellow witnesses have mentioned, the numbers of actual extremists are low. But if the United Kingdom is to serve as an example, more aggressive policies to challenge extremist rhetoric are critical to prevent extremism from spreading to the same level as in other parts of the globe in Southeast Asia in the future.

Consequently, we at CEP recommend that regional governments create policies to work with the private sector to take down extremist propaganda. Second, local governments should replace the extremist rhetoric with moderate voices.

Two examples out of many from the region include, Nahdlatul Ulama, which is an Indonesian clerical body that supports the indigenous and peaceful interpretation of Islam called Nusantara Islam. The Ulama represents approximately 40 to 50 million members already. The Ulama has already denounced extremist rhetoric by ISIS using the hash tag, we are not afraid, as a social media campaign.

A second moderate voice is the Wahid Institute, founded by Yenny Wahid, the daughter of former Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid. She is quoted as saying, we are not just coming out with a counternarrative. We are coming up with a counteridentity, and that is what all of this is about. We believe we are good Muslims, but to be good Muslims, we don't have to accept the recipes that are handed out by some radicals from the Middle East.

Raising such pluralist voices will not only challenge ISIS extremism but also marginalize separatist rhetoric espoused by groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and individuals like Zakir Naik.

To conclude, Southeast Asia has an opportunity now to respond properly to the growing extremist threat by addressing important identity issues and providing alternatives to the extremist messages turned out daily by ISIS and other Islamist groups; otherwise, the threat to the region, other countries, including the United States will only grow.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Zaidi Peery follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SUPNA ZAIDI PEERY

APRIL 27, 2016

Chairman King, Ranking Member Higgins, and Members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the threat from ISIS in Southeast Asia. My name is Supna Zaidi Peery. I am a strategic policy analyst at the Counter Extremism Project, a not-for-profit, non-partisan, international policy organization that combats the growing threat from extremist ideology.

ISIS could become a threat to the United States and its allies in Southeast Asia through its collaboration with local militant groups if regional governments do not aggressively seek out countervailing and preventative policies to combat violent and non-violent Islamist activity in the region. This includes an aggressive push against the proliferation of Islamist propaganda on-line, and on social media. Concurrently, regional governments must support and amplify counter messaging promulgated by moderate Muslim organizations like Sisters in Islam in Malaysia and Nahdlatul Ulema in Indonesia.

BACKGROUND

Islamist extremism predates the arrival of ISIS in Southeast Asia. While the number of violent extremists in the region is currently low compared to the number in the Middle East and South Asia, ISIS, like other violent militant groups, and non-violent Islamist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, is skilled at manipulating regional and local problems and incorporating them into its Islamist message of global Muslim victimhood. This creates an environment where Muslim youth who come into contact with Islamist messaging on-line or in person become vulnerable to radicalization.

The most glaring example of this problem in Southeast Asia is the Rohingya crisis on the Burma-Bangladesh border. The ethnic group's citizenship has been challenged by the government, which argues that the Rohingya are historically from Bangladesh, not indigenous to Burma. Consequently, without status it is difficult for the Rohingya to find work in Burma. Many attempt to flee, with some creating new lives in nearby countries like Malaysia. Other families, in the hundreds of thousands, fester at refugee camps on the border between Bangladesh and Burma.

Pro-ISIS militants from Bangladesh have allegedly attempted to recruit men from these refugee camps. It is unclear if these recruiting attempts were part of a new strategy to expand extremist activity to Burma.

ISIS has increased its profile and presence in Bangladesh as well in the last year, where increasingly aggressive domestic Islamist militant groups have killed foreigners, religious minorities, and secular bloggers.

Technology enables extremist messaging that fuels radicalization, recruitment, and incitement to violence. There are more than 3,000 pro-ISIS websites in Southeast Asia, and 70 percent of these websites are hosted on servers in Indonesia. These websites feature translations of ISIS ideology as well as YouTube channels, Twitter, and other platforms exploited by extremists.

ISIS propaganda is strengthened by purported non-violent Islamist groups in Southeast Asia as well. Islamist messaging encourages a separatist and supremacist attitude among otherwise moderate Muslims. Thus, as the Hudson Institute states, purported non-violent Islamist groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir spread a mindset that jihadi recruiters can exploit to encourage militancy.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an Islamist movement founded in the Middle East that has chapters in more than 40 countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia. The group advocates an identical message to that of ISIS—regime change in favor of a caliphate. Rather, than support indiscriminate violence to realize their vision, HT hopes to convert key figures in society—like the military—so a coup can bring about a peaceful change in government. HT events in Indonesia regularly attract more than 5,000 men, women, and children.

Separately, so-called peaceful Islamist events host religious televangelists like Zakir Naik, who teaches a supremacist interpretation of Islam alien to Southeast Asia. His on-line presence, including YouTube channels, satellite, and cable television, has grown his network called "Peace TV." The station and its 24/7 Islamic programming reach hundreds of millions of men and women around the world in numerous languages.

On April 13, 2016, Naik spoke at an event in Indonesia attended by hundreds where a young woman asked how "brothers" could be killing each other. She was referring to the conspiracy that the majority of 9/11 victims were Christian and the perpetrators were Muslim. Naik[1] responded by stating that 9/11 was an inside job by perpetrated by the White House. His evidence included a documentary called "Loose Change," a conspiracy-theory-inspired series produced between 2005 and 2009.

Naik also spoke in Malaysia. His topic of choice was a speech on why Islam is better than Hinduism. Fearing communal tensions, Naik's invitation was rescinded. The ban was lifted when he agreed to adjust his speech to "Islam and Hinduism."

The propaganda spread by organizations like HT and individuals like Naik lays the effective groundwork for groups like ISIS and is just as dangerous. It chips away at the tolerant and pluralist societies that currently exist in Southeast Asia. Worse, once individuals are softened to a worldview setting Muslims apart and above all others, the radicalization of Muslim youth towards violence becomes more likely.

The situation in Southeast Asia can be compared to the evolution of events in the United Kingdom. Propagandist Anjem Choudary by no means reflects the majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom. Yet, he is finally on trial now for his alleged support for ISIS in the United Kingdom, and has spent decades advocating for sharia law. Choudary is responsible for founding al-Muhajiroun[2]—which British law enforcement blames for at least 50 percent of terror plots in the United Kingdom from 1995 to 2015. Apparently, Choudary's fringe status did not prevent him from doing major harm in the United Kingdom.

Worse, the separatist ideology of Choudary, and his mentor, Omar Bakri Mohammad, who founded the London-based chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir, may be responsible for the lack of integration in some Muslim communities in the United Kingdom.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Presently in Southeast Asia, militant Islamist groups are localized for now mainly in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In these locations, extremists have traditionally targeted their attacks on law enforcement and government, rarely attacking public spaces.

However, ISIS' propaganda in the region increases the future risk for more indiscriminate acts of terrorism, as well as the targeting of foreigners, religious minorities, and U.S. interests. The Bali bombing, for example, was committed by the Indonesian militant group Jemaah Islamiyah, with the help of al-Qaeda, in retaliation for the U.S.-led Global War on Terror.

In the past year, there have been indications of growing support in general for sharia among some Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, as well as growing support for ISIS. For example, the monarchy of Brunei instituted sharia law in 2013. Brunei is physically nestled on a small corner of a much larger Malaysian island. Cross-border influence is very possible.

In 2015, a retailer in Malaysia selling pro-ISIS merchandise was finally shuttered, despite local law enforcement having knowledge of the items in the store, including ISIS flags, T-shirts marked with statements like "Mujahideen cyberspace," and images of Kalashnikovs. The merchandise was produced in Indonesia.

In December 2015, the BBC published photos of HT members protesting in front of American Mining Company Freeport, in central Jakarta. HT propaganda argues that allowing Western firms to extract Indonesian minerals is un-Islamic.

Further anecdotal evidence indicates the influence of ISIS is growing in Indonesia. In February 2015, the BBC reported that students outside Jakarta declared their allegiance to ISIS. This was not an isolated incident, as other ISIS supporters have organized parades and demonstrations advocating ISIS' message in Indonesia as well.

INDONESIA

A very small minority of Indonesians have sought an Islamic state since 1949, when the Darul Islam movement was formed.

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[1] *http://video.wapgrab.com/watch?v=p__iT0S__r__Ak.*

[2] *http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3007180/The-terror-group-UK-s-terror-plots.html.*

A new wave of radicalization emerged in the 1980s, with al-Qaeda spreading its extremist message, like ISIS today, to near and far-flung Muslim communities from its headquarters in the Middle East. Al-Qaeda has funded militancy, including training camps in Southeast Asia since.

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)[3] made international headlines with bombings targeting tourists in Bali in 2002 and 2005, killing more than 200 in each incident, but the group has a long and violent history spanning decades. JI is also known for its ties to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, as well as the 1995 failed "Bojinka" plot, an attempt to bomb 12 U.S. commercial airliners in the span of 2 days.

Founded by Abu Bakar Bashir[4] and Abdullah Sungkar to overthrow the secular Indonesian state through political disruption and violence, JI seeks to establish a regional caliphate that would encompass Indonesia, Malaysia, Mindanao (southern Philippines), southern Thailand, Singapore, and Brunei. Bashir pledged loyalty to ISIS in July 2014, but the group also has links to al-Qaeda[5] and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a Philippines-based terrorist organization.

ISIS propaganda and networking between Southeast Asian militants serving in Syria and those at home in Malaysia and Indonesia has created a nascent but powerful network supporting extremism from the Middle East to South Asia.

This was best illustrated on January 14, 2016, when pro-ISIS militants attacked a Starbucks café in Jakarta, killing 4 innocent people. The pro-ISIS militant responsible for the attack is Bahrun Naim. He is believed to be connected to ISIS propagandist Abu Jandal in Syria and pro-ISIS ideologue Aman Abdulrahman, who is currently behind bars in a maximum security prison in Java, Indonesia.

Abu Jandal is one of many Twitter propagandists CEP monitors and has repeatedly tried to force Twitter to take down. Jandal uses Twitter as a platform to advocate for ISIS as well as promote other extremist accounts. Via Twitter, Abu Jandal has condoned violence against civilians, including the victims of Paris's January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks.

Aman Abdulrahman is believed to be responsible for the extensive translation of pro-ISIS propaganda from Arabic to Indonesian. His materials are available on a website called al-Mustaliq.com. He is also the ideologue behind at least 9 other local Islamist groups, including:[6]

- Tawhid wal Jihad group
- Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid
- Mujahedin East Indonesia
- Mujahedin West Indonesia (MIB)
- the Bima group
- NII Banten also known as Ring Banten
- Laskar Jundullah
- the Islamic Sharia Activists Forum or Forum Aktivis Syariat Islam (FAKSI)
- and the Student Movement for Islamic Sharia or Gerakan Mahasiswa Untuk Syariat Islam (Gema Salam).

THE PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, the Muslims of the southern-most islands of Mindanao have for centuries sought independence—first from Spain, then from the United States, and now from secular Philippine rule. The most recent vehicle for this pursuit of independence is the militancy of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), an Islamist terrorist organization that seeks to establish an independent Islamic state in the southern Philippines. ASG was founded by and named after Abdurajak Janjalani, who took the nom de guerre Abu Sayyaf, "Father of Swordsmen."

ASG is known for kidnapping innocents, including Westerners, for ransom and beheading captives if their demands are not met. ASG's brutal decapitations date back to 2001, predating the notorious beheadings by al-Qaeda and ISIS. ASG's relationship with al-Qaeda brought extra attention to the Philippines as a battleground in the U.S.-led Global War on Terror. In the summer of 2014, ASG leaders pledged allegiance to ISIS and its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,[7] drawing focus back to ASG's presence in the southern Philippines and its potential threat to other areas of Southeast Asia.

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[3] *http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/jemaah-islamiyah-ji.*
[4] *http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/abu-bakar-bashir.*
[5] *http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-qaeda.*
[6] *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQbqNl__lacg&ebc=ANyPxKp3MFwU2bBA6eexRCPM-jrun__w8LCmzzJWGttu4HycGzDSHpmItLQWhxfwH1Mwa-QeT-wisO1IfjE-lA44nZoNW8hfekg.*
[7] *http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi.*

MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, as Brookings [8] reported last December, ISIS conspires to initiate new attacks in major cities like Kuala Lumpur, as highlighted in a memo released by Malaysian police in December 2015. The memo stated that on November 15, 2015, representatives of Abu Sayyaf, ISIS, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) met in person in the Philippines and conspired to commit terrorist attacks in Malaysia. The police memo added that there were allegedly Abu Sayyaf and ISIS militants already present in a number of cities, including Kuala Lumpur.

This is troubling, not only because it puts Malaysia on the radar of terrorist targets, but because it indicates possible increased extremist recruitment in the country. Malaysians are already vulnerable to extremism because of Islamization programs that the government began in the 1980s. These efforts were made to appease and integrate extremist elements already existing in the country at the time. Instead, they normalized extremist rhetoric. In 2014, for example, current Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak "hailed" the courage of ISIS fighters. Another former prime minister, Mahathir Mohamad, is also known for repeating extremist rhetoric-including, ironically, blaming Israel for the growth of ISIS.

Thus, ties are already present between ISIS and local militant groups in Southeast Asia. Consequently, it is imperative that the regional governments go beyond law enforcement initiatives and create proactive policies to deter further growth in ISIS' influence. The United States should continue to provide support for measures that work to prevent violent extremism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Remove Extremist Content On-line and on Social Media

The first step is to assist regional governments in their effort to remove extremist propaganda from the internet and social media in the region. First, Southeast Asian governments must create policies and work with the private sector to take down extremist propaganda on-line. Indonesia is of particular importance, given its role as the host to approximately 70 percent of the pro-ISIS websites in the region.

2. Counter Violent and Non-Violent Islamist Messaging

Regional governments should consider the separatist messaging of groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and televangelists like Zakir Naik in the same category as ISIS propaganda. All 3 encourage a separatist identity among otherwise pluralist Southeast Asian communities. It is an alien interpretation of Islam in the region that can easily be fought off with a stronger spotlight on moderate Muslim organizations. Otherwise, even the non-violent Islamist messaging feeds radicalized youth straight towards jihadist recruiters.

3. Improve Criminal Laws in Indonesia

First, encourage the Indonesian government to criminalize membership in militant groups like ISIS, fundraising for extremist groups and activities, and leaving the country to train at jihadist camps. Unlike Malaysia, it is not illegal to support ISIS in Indonesia. To date, law enforcement in Indonesia has had to fall back on more generic charges related to terrorism.

Address prisoner radicalization. Prison activity is not monitored as closely as it should be in Indonesia. This leaves petty criminals vulnerable to radicalization in prison. A report by the U.S. Agency for International Development found that "Due to overcrowding and limited resources, Indonesian prison officials struggle to isolate jihadist inmates from the general jail population." Moreover, pro-ISIS prisoners are able to proselytize to inmates openly.

Encourage regional governments to support moderate Islamic groups to boost the role of aggressive, preventative messaging. De-radicalization programs initiated after the Bali bombings were limited to those involving law enforcement and the judiciary. Instead, public messaging, engagement by the media and in schools are all necessary ingredients for success.

4. Support the Moderate Islam Indigenous to Southeast Asia

In Indonesia, for example, the indigenous and peaceful interpretation of Islam is called Nusanatara Islam. The clerical body that supports this interpretation is called Nahdatul Ulema. Nusanatara Islam has approximately 40–50 million followers. On social media, Indonesian Muslims denounce ISIS using the hashtag #WeAreNotAfraid.

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[8] *http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/12/16-malaysia-danger-from-islamic-state-chin.*

Yenny Wahid, the daughter of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid, founded a research center in Jakarta focusing on religion and pluralism called the Wahid Institute. The motto listed on the organization's website says, "Seeding Plural and Peaceful Islam."

Ms. Wahid is quoted as saying, "We're not just coming up with a counter narrative, we are coming up with a counter identity, and that's what all this is about. We believe we're good Muslims but to be a good Muslim we don't have to accept the recipes that are handed out by some radicals from the Middle East."

Sisters in Islam (SIS)[9] is a Malaysian organization focused on promoting universal human rights, including advocacy for women through an Islamic lens.

SIS has challenged the legality of child marriage, polygamy, and hudood laws (sharia laws governing adultery and other personal matters). SIS drafts original Islamic legal theory and jurisprudence as well, including the defense of free speech, protections for apostates against prosecution, and other human rights issues.

CONCLUSION

The governments of Southeast Asia can look to Europe and the United Kingdom as an example of what not to do. Islamist activity, when it appeared decades ago, was treated as something innocuous. But unchallenged, it grew as an ideology that has become not only a real security threat to the West, but a de-stabilizing and stigmatizing force for innocent Muslim citizens as well.

Southeast Asia has an opportunity now to respond properly to the growing extremist threat by addressing important identity issues and providing alternatives to the extremist messages daily churned out by ISIS and other Islamist groups. Otherwise, the threat to other countries like the United States will only grow over time.

Mr. KING. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Our next witness is Dr. Joseph C. Liow. He is a senior fellow in the Brookings Center for East Asia Policy Studies. He is concurrently a professor and dean at the Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore. He is the author and editor of 11 books or monographs. Dr. Liow holds a doctorate in international relations for the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Dr. Liow, you are recognized. Thank you very much for being here today.

STATEMENT OF JOSEPH CHINYONG LIOW, SENIOR FELLOW, FOREIGN POLICY, CENTER FOR EAST ASIA POLICY STUDIES, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Mr. LIOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the committee, thank you for this honor and privilege to be here today. Let me start by saying that any assessment of the ISIS threat in Southeast Asia must begin with the observation that terrorism is not a new phenomenon in the region. It goes as far back as the era of anticolonial struggle, but gathered pace after 9/11 with a series of attacks perpetrated mostly by the al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist organization.

Against this backdrop, recent ISIS-inspired attacks in Jakarta and the southern Philippines serve as a timely reminder of the threat that terrorism continues to pose to Southeast Asian societies.

Related to ISIS, the threat takes 3 forms. First, the danger of attacks perpetrated by local groups or individuals inspired by ISIS. These groups or individuals might not have direct links to ISIS central. Rather, they possess local grievances for which the extrac-

[9] *http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/page.php?54.*

tion that is ISIS provides impetus and inspiration, usually via internet. Jakarta was an example of this.

Second, the threat pulls by returnees from Syria and Iraq. In particular, the possibility that hardened militants would return with battlefield experience and operational knowledge to either plan or mount attacks back in the region. Thankfully, this has not yet happened.

Thus far, the returnees in custody are deportees, who failed in their attempt to get to Syria and Iraq in the first place.

Third, the threat posed by militants who will soon be released from prison. At issue here is the weak prison system, particularly in Indonesia and the radicalization that occurs within prisons. We should bear in mind, though, that not all of these soon-to-be-released militants are ISIS supporters or sympathizers. In fact, the vast majority are members of militant groups known to be anti-ISIS. There will be about 100 or so released from Indonesia at the end of the year.

So how serious is the threat posed by ISIS? The threat is certainly real and warrants our attention for reasons I already mentioned. By the same time, we must take care not to exaggerate it. Let me make 3 points in that regard.

No. 1, when we speak of ISIS in Southeast Asia, we have to be mindful of the fact that at present, there is no such thing as an ISIS Southeast Asia, nor has ISIS central formally declared an interest in any Southeast Asian country. For the most part, we are dealing with radical groups and individuals who have on their own taken oaths of allegiance to ISIS.

No. 2, the number of Southeast Asians fighting in Iraq and Syria remains comparatively small. We are talking of, at most, 700 mostly from Indonesia. By way of comparison, thousands are coming from Europe. In addition to this, a large proportion of Southeast Asians' death, I would say around 40 percent, comprise women and children under the age of 15.

No. 3, in our anxiety over ISIS, we must be careful not to miss the forest for the trees. There are multiple militant groups operating in Southeast Asia. Many are at odds with each other. Not all seek affiliation to or are enamored of ISIS.

In fact, I would argue that the greater long-term threat comes from a rejuvenated Jemaah Islamiyah, which has a larger network and is better funded than the pro-ISIS groups in the region currently.

What about terrorism in Southeast Asia more generally? Here, too, it is imperative that we keep things in perspective. Yes, for Southeast Asia today, the question of terrorist attacks is, unfortunately, no longer a matter of if but when. Even if the influence of ISIS diminishes over time, and it will, terrorism is part of the lay of the land and will not be eradicated any time soon. But terrorism, whether perpetrated by ISIS or Jemaah Islamiyah is not an existential threat to Southeast Asian societies.

All indicators are that from an operational perspective, the threat remains at a low level. Of course, given the resilience and evolutionary nature of terrorism, this situation might well change. As I alluded to earlier, one possible factor that could prompt a

change is a deliberate shift of attention on ISIS central to Southeast Asia.

This, however, seems unlikely for now, as ISIS is preoccupied with its immediate priority of holding ground in Iraq and Syria and expanding its fight in Libya, Yemen, and Europe.

A final observation, without being complacent, we should also recognize that regional governments are, today, better equipped and prepared to deal with the threat compared to a decade-and-a-half ago, although capacity can and should be further improved with cooperation among themselves and with help from the United States. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Liow follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOSEPH CHINYONG LIOW

APRIL 27, 2016

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the subject of the threat of ISIS in Southeast Asia. It is a pleasure and privilege to appear before you today.

My name is Joseph Chinyong Liow. I hold the Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asia Studies at the Brookings Institution, where I am also senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Program. I am, concurrently, dean and professor of Comparative and International Politics at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, in Singapore. I am a citizen of the Republic of Singapore. The views expressed here in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as those of the Brookings Institution, the S. Rajaratnam School, or indeed, the government of Singapore.

I have been asked to offer my assessment of terrorism in Southeast Asia especially in relation to ISIS. Let me begin by saying that any assessment of the threat posed by ISIS in Southeast Asia must begin with the observation that terrorism is not a new phenomenon in the region. During the era of anti-colonial struggle, terrorism and political violence were tactics used frequently by various groups. Since 9/11, Southeast Asia has witnessed several terrorist incidents perpetrated mostly by the al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist organization and its splinter groups. These incidents include the October 2002 Bali bombings, the August 2003 J.W. Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta, the bombing of Super Ferry 14 in the southern Philippines in February 2004, the September 2004 Australian Embassy bombing in Jakarta, further bombings in Bali in October 2005, and further bombings at the J.W. Marriott (again) and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Jakarta in 2009. From this last series of attacks to the Jakarta attacks earlier this year, there has not been a major urban terrorist incident, although sporadic violence had continued in the form of clashes between security forces and militant groups, especially in the southern Philippines and also in Poso, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.[1] In 2010, Indonesian security forces discovered a major militant training camp in Aceh which involved a number of jihadi groups. Several reasons can be cited to explain this hiatus: Improved counterterrorism capabilities of regional security forces, disagreements within the jihadi community over the indiscriminate killing of Muslims, and rivalry and factionalism among jihadi groups that have reduced their capabilities and operational effectiveness.

Against this backdrop, the ISIS-inspired attacks in Jakarta on January 14, 2016, the April 9, 2016 attack on Philippine security forces in the southern island of Basilan conducted by groups claiming allegiance to ISIS, and a recent spat of kidnappings in southern Philippines serve as a timely reminder of the persistent threat that terrorism continues to pose to Southeast Asian societies. ISIS has emerged as the signal expression of this threat, in part, because of the speed with which it has gained popularity in the region. When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced on June 28, 2014 (the first day of Ramadhan) that a caliphate had been formed by ISIS, the announcement captured the imagination of the radical fringes across Southeast Asia. The announcement was followed by a comprehensive and effective propaganda campaign that conveyed the impression of ISIS' invincibility and

[1] There were bomb attacks in Bangkok during this time but these were not linked to ISIS or any other Muslim terrorist groups. There were also bombings in Myanmar in 2013, but the identity of the perpetrators remains unknown.

validation from god. July and August that year witnessed a series of *bay'at* (pledge of allegiance) to ISIS taken by radical groups and clerics from Indonesia and the Philippines. It was the audacity of its announcement of the caliphate and forcefulness of its communications strategy that set ISIS apart from other groups. In September, the Southeast Asian dimension of ISIS was given something of a formal expression with the formation of Katibah Nusantara, a Southeast Asian wing of ISIS formed by Malay and Indonesian speaking fighters in Syria. Katibah fulfills several functions: It provides a social network to help Southeast Asian recruits settle in, training for those among them who would eventually take up arms, and communications with the network of pro-ISIS groups operating in Syria. By dint of these developments, the threat posed by ISIS in Southeast Asia is real, and it has been growing since mid-2014. Nevertheless, the extent of the threat should also not be exaggerated.

THE ISIS THREAT IN PERSPECTIVE

On present evidence, no ISIS-aligned group has developed the capability to mount catastrophic, mass casualty attacks in the region. Four civilians were killed in the Jakarta attacks. By comparison, 130 were killed in the Paris attacks, on which the Jakarta attacks were purportedly modelled. Because of improved legislation and operational capabilities that have gradually developed over the years since the October 2002 Bali bombings, Southeast Asian governments have managed for the most part to contain the threat posed by terrorist and jihadi groups.

An accurate assessment of the number of Southeast Asians currently in Iraq and Syria is difficult to make. Most reasonable estimates place the number at 700–800. The majority are Indonesians, with an estimated 100 Malaysians as well, and a few from Singapore and possibly, the Philippines. In both real and proportionate terms, these figures are a mere fraction of the recruits coming from Europe and Australia.[2] Nor do they all carry arms. A significant number (about 40%) are women and children below the age of 15. These women and children have followed the men to Syria in support of their efforts to fight in a holy war, and also to live in a pristine "Islamic State". Of the Southeast Asians who carry arms, some have already been killed in the conflict zones, especially in battles with Kurdish forces. Finally, not all Southeast Asians fighting in the conflict zones are fighting for ISIS. There are some known to be fighting with other rebel groups as well as the al-Nusra Front.

In keeping with the need for proper perspective, we should also bear in mind that despite the hype, there is at present no "ISIS Southeast Asia," nor has ISIS central formally declared an interest in any Southeast Asian country. For the most part, the presence of ISIS in Southeast Asia is expressed in the form of radical groups and individuals who have taken oaths of allegiance to ISIS. In other words, the ISIS phenomenon is imbricated with indigenous jihadi agendas and movements. This should prompt a further consideration: The appeal of ISIS in Southeast Asia differs depending on the country. In Malaysia and Singapore, it has mostly been the eschatological ideology and theology of ISIS that has attracted a following. In Indonesia, while ISIS does have religious appeal, other reasons have also been cited to explain its attraction. These include kinship networks and loyalties, group/personal rivalries, and personal and pragmatic interests. As a consequence, the jihadi landscape in Indonesia is considerably more complex and variegated compared to other Southeast Asian countries. In the southern Philippines, groups that have long engaged in violence for political and criminal reasons are now claiming allegiance to ISIS. It is also worth noting that while Khatibah Nusantara was established in Syria as the Southeast Asian wing of ISIS, not all foreign fighters from the region have joined it. For instance, rather than aligning themselves with the Indonesian-led Khatibah, some Malaysians are known to be fighting alongside French, Algerian, and Tunisian foreign fighters instead. A likely reason for this is rivalry and disagreement with the Indonesian leadership.

A final observation is in order, regarding the pressing matter of foreign fighters returning to Southeast Asia. Given how terrorism in Southeast Asia was previously catalyzed by returnees from the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union, it should hardly be surprising that the scenario of hardened militants returning from Syria with ideology, operational knowledge, and front-line experience to mount attacks in the region is one that exercises security planners. This is a potential threat that cannot be taken lightly. But it should also be viewed in context. Three points are instructive in this regard:

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[2] Edward Delman, "ISIS in the World's Largest Muslim Country: Why are there so few Indonesians joining the Islamic state?" *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2016.

First, the returnees known to regional governments and currently in custody are essentially deportees who failed in their efforts to gain entry into Syria. They are not fighters who have returned of their own accord or were sent back by ISIS central for purposes of launching attacks in the region;

Second, in the 1980s, the primary objective of Indonesian radicals and jihadis in Afghanistan was not so much the defeat of Soviet forces, but to obtain training and experience in order to return to fight the repressive regime of President Suharto as revenge for its hardline position against Muslim groups. With the democratization of post-Suharto Indonesia, this situation no longer holds;

Third, given the currency of ISIS' eschatology at least among certain segments of its Southeast Asian support, it stands to reason that many among them could well decide to stay the course in Syria to fight the great end-times battle.[3] This is more likely now that ISIS has been losing considerable swathes of its "Islamic State" territory—approximately 40% in Iraq and 10% in Syria, and has called for a new front to be established in Libya. In other words, while the threat of returnees wrecking havoc is certainly real, there are equally compelling reasons why many foreign fighters might in fact not return to Southeast Asia. In this respect, the greater threat may well be that the idea and phenomenon of ISIS would provide greater inspiration for local jihadis to continue waging what are essentially localized struggles.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM IN INDONESIA

Indonesia was the victim of the first ISIS-inspired attack in Southeast Asia. This occurred on January 14, 2016, when self-proclaimed followers of ISIS set off bombs at a Starbucks outside the Sarinah mall and at a nearby police outpost, and gunfire broke out on the streets at Jalan Tamrin in the heart of Jakarta.[4] While the casualty toll was limited, it could have been higher had the militants succeeded in conducting the attack on a much larger and more popular shopping mall, as was the original intent (but they were discouraged by the tight security at that mall).

The fact is that while Indonesia is often touted for its "moderation" in Islamic thought and practice, a radical Islamic fringe has been part of the Indonesian social and political landscape for a long time. During the Second World War the Dutch East Indies (as Indonesia was then known) was occupied by imperial Japan. Towards the end of the occupation, the Japanese military administration deliberately adopted a policy of politicizing the Muslim population and encouraging the assertion of Islamic identity. While the intent was to stoke indigenous ill-will against the Dutch, it effectively created, radicalized, and empowered an entire generation of youth, many of whom eventually took up arms not only against returning British and Dutch forces, but later also against the Republican Indonesian government that was subsequently established. Their rallying cry was jihad; and their objective was the implementation of Islamic law as a fundamental organising principle for post-independence Indonesian society. Led by charismatic self-proclaimed religious leaders such as Kartosuwirjo, radicalized youth established the Darul Islam Indonesia movement (Islamic State of Indonesia) and waged armed struggle against the Dutch. This armed struggle continued after transfer of power in 1949, this time against the Republican government in Jakarta. The Darul Islam movement presented an alternative vision of Islamic society to Indonesians, a vision they were prepared to usher into reality through the use of political violence. While generations of Darul Islam leadership have since been eliminated, the vision itself, and many of the networks built on it, remained intact and informs much of present-day radicalism and jihadism in Indonesia, including the forms that are aligned with ISIS.

Meanwhile, the mainstream of Indonesian society was itself in the throes of an Islamisation process triggered as much by internal factors as it was by the widely-discussed phenomenon of the "global Islamic resurgence." Since the constitutional debates in 1945, a segment of the Indonesian political class has agitated for the implementation of *shari'a* in the country. These efforts were defeated by due process in 1945, 1959, and 2001, but have never been entirely eliminated. Many chose to read this as indicative of the unpopularity of Islamic strictures as a formal principle of governance. Yet, other segments of the Muslim leadership saw this as evidence of an urgent need for greater Islamic proselytization—*da'wa*—in Indonesia.

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[3] Narrated by Ibn 'Umar that the Messenger of Allah said: "O Allah bless us in our Shām! O Allah bless us in our Yemen." They said: "And in our Najd" He said: "O Allah bless us in our Shām! O Allah bless us in our Yemen." They said: "And in our Najd" He said: "Earthquakes are there, and tribulations are there." Or he said: "The horn of Shaitan comes from there."—Jāmi' al-Tirmidhi.

[4] Sidney Jones, "Battling ISIS in Indonesia," *New York Times*, January 18, 2016.

For the first three-quarters of President Suharto's 32-year New Order rule, Muslim activism was depoliticized and circumscribed. This had the effect of catalyzing a vibrant Islamic intellectual milieu as Islamic social movements moved underground and into the campuses. Among other things, it found expression in the rise of a number of da'wa groups and Muslim student associations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their activities flourished with funding from Saudi Arabia. Similar to what happened in neighbouring Malaysia, before long graduates of these groups and associations would come to control the levers of power as they entered the buraucracy and positions of leadership.

Fast-forward to the fall of Suharto in the late 1990s, this vibrant "apoliticized" milieu quickly morphed and surfaced as a dynamic terrain of Islamic activism comprising groups with multiple shades of doctrinal affiliations. Many of these were reformist and liberal groups that embraced democracy and human rights as wholeheartedly as they did Islamic culture and tradition. But another less appealing side also emerged, comprising groups that drank from the wells of Darul Islam radicalism. The most vivid, but by no means only, expression of this phenomenon was the Jemaah Islamiyah, created by the late Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, two Indonesian Islamic clerics of Arab origin with deep roots in Darul Islam as well as the da'wa movement. What is significant about Jemaah Islamiyah is the fact that it was built not only around Afghan veterans, but more importantly, kin networks of Darul Islam supporters and their disaffected descendents. Jemaah Islamiyah, as we know, masterminded a number of terrorist attacks in Indonesia through the 2000s, the most devastating being the Bali bombings. Less visible to the world—but no less bloody—was the violence perpetrated by Jemaah Islamiyah and other jihadi groups in the Eastern Indonesian islands of Sulawesi, Maluku, and North Maluku. Since the 2009 attacks on the J.W. Marriott and the Ritz Carlton hotels in Jakarta, Indonesian jihadi activity has moved away from targeting foreigners and has focused on the Indonesian police. This pattern held until the ISIS-inspired attacks in Jakarta in January 2016 in which civilians were also killed.

After a frustrating initial period of denial, the Indonesian government eventually managed to circumscribe the activities of Jemaah Islamiyah and killed and/or captured a considerable number of its leadership and membership. Yet, Jemaah Islamiyah still exists. More disconcertingly, it has consolidated, and has not disavowed violence in pursuit of its objective of the creation of an Islamic state. Likewise, notwithstanding 2 peace accords, residual grievances and the threat of violence continues to cast a long shadow over places like Poso in Central Sulawesi, which remains a hothouse for jihadi activity including those of self-proclaimed ISIS militants. The fact that Uighurs were found in the training camp of Santoso's pro-ISIS group, *Mujahidin Indonesia Timur* or the Mujahidin of Eastern Indonesia, in Poso further attests to a new phenomenon—foreign fighters who are using Poso for purposes of training and, possibly, transit to Syria.[5]

It is important to mention that in Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah are at odds with ISIS for reasons of theological and personality differences. Ironically, because of their anti-ISIS position, Jemaah Islamiyah has been granted a public platform from which they have readily denounced ISIS. An example is how Abu Tholut (Imron), a convicted terrorist serving a prison sentence in Indonesia, has been given airtime to criticize ISIS. While any denunciation of ISIS is understandably welcome, the fact that the Indonesian government is enlisting Jemaah Islamiyah, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations and whose membership includes hardline militants, to do this cannot but give pause. As mentioned earlier, Jemaah Islamiyah, which has a following that is far larger than ISIS in Indonesia, has never renounced the use of violence to achieve its ends. In fact, Jemaah Islamiyah has over the years managed to regroup, consolidate, and recruit.[6] Finally, a significant number of Jemaah Islamiyah members currently imprisoned are expected to be released towards the end of the year when their sentences run out. Indonesia does not as yet have any strategy to deal with released terrorists in terms of rehabilitation. Simply put, the arid reality is that while ISIS is commanding attention today, it may well be Jemaah Islamiyah—with its organizational strength, funding, and more established support base—that will pose a graver terrorist threat in Indonesia.

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[5] "Two Chinese Uighurs Killed in Poso Terrorist Shootout," *Jakarta Globe*, March 16, 2016.

[6] "Extremist group Jemaah Islamiyah active again, recruiting and collecting funds," *Straits Times*, February 15, 2016.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM IN MALAYSIA

There are an estimated 100 Malaysians in Syria and Iraq, of which more than 10 are women. More than 10 are also known to have already been killed on the battlefield, mostly in Syria (one known casualty in Iraq as of 2015). Although there has not been a successful terrorist attack in Malaysia, police raids in recent months have uncovered efforts to mount such operations in the country, including an alleged attempt to kidnap the country's political leadership. In 2015 alone, more than a hundred alleged ISIS-sympathizers were arrested in the country.

Any attempt to understand the context and nature of the terror threat posed by ISIS in Malaysia must begin with an examination of the climate of religious convervatism and intolerance in the country, to which the UMNO-led "moderate" government has contributed by way of its institutions, affiliates, and policies. This climate of religious conservatism and intolerance has created fertile conditions for ISIS ideology to gain popularity, to wit, the reality is a far cry from the "moderate" image of Malaysia that the government of Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak has tried to portray.

Islam has unfortunately become heavily politicized in Malaysia. Malaysia's dominant political party, UMNO, is a Malay-Muslim party that was created with the main objective of, at least in theory, promoting and defending Malay-Muslim supremacy. According to the party's narrative, this supremacy is coming under siege from various cultural (read: non-Malay) and religious (read: non-Muslim) quarters and hence has to be staunchly defended. Given that Malaysia has a Malay-Muslim majority population, it should come as no surprise that UMNO's chief political opponents are also Malay-Muslim parties who equally brandish religious credentials as a source of legitimacy. The consequence of this is a condition whereby the political parties try to "out-Islam" each other, leaving non-Muslims and minority Muslim sects and movements marginalized in their wake. But the politics merely expresses the perpetuation of an exclusivist brand of Islam that is divorced from the religion's historically enlightened traditions, and which has no intention to encourage pluralism or compromise. Because politics in Malaysia is now a zero sum game as UMNO struggles to cling on to power by focusing on its religious credentials, religion has also become a zero sum game.

Related to this is the fact that this politicization of Islam is taking place against a backdrop of a state which has taken upon itself to police Islam and curtail any expression of faith that departs from the mainstream Shafi'i tradition. Yes, the *ummah* may be universal and Islamic confessional traditions may be diverse, but in Malaysia there is very little room for compromise beyond the "Islam" sanctioned by the state. The Shi'a are legally proscribed, and several smaller Islamic sects are deemed deviant and hence, banned. All this happens despite the existence of constitutional provisions for freedom of worship. Needless to say, attempts by various fringe quarters in Muslim society to move discourse away from an overly exclusivist register have run up against the considerable weight of the state, who appoint and empower religious authorities that define and police "right" and "wrong" Islam.

Finally, rather than extol the virtues and conciliatory features of Islam's rich tradition, many Malay-Muslim political leaders have instead chosen to use religion to amplify difference, to reinforce extreme interpretations of Malay-Muslim denizen rights, and to condemn the "other" (non-Muslims) as a threat to these rights. For fear of further erosion of legitimacy and political support, the Malay-Muslim leadership of the country have circled the wagons, allowing vocal right-wing ethnonationalist and religious groups to preach incendiary messages against Christians and Hindus with impunity. In extreme cases, they have even flippantly referred to fellow Malaysians who are adherents to other religious faiths openly as "enemies of Islam." Until recently even state-sanctioned Friday sermons have on some occasions blatantly taken to referring to non-Muslim Malaysians as "enemies of Islam."

Granted, Malaysia is now a member of the anti-ISIS coalition, and its leaders have finally started to act against inflammatory rhetoric targeted at non-Muslim and minority Muslim sects. Yet, given the reality that is the religio-political climate in Malaysia today, it should hardly be a surprise that Malaysia is now struggling to deal with the appeal of extremist ideas of a group such as ISIS. Such is the potential depth of this appeal, ISIS sympathizers have been found even within the security forces (although some news reports have exaggerated their numbers). A particular concern for Malaysian authorities is the proliferation of Malay-language radical websites and chat groups that are pro-ISIS in orientation. This indicates that there is clearly a Malaysian audience for ISIS-related propaganda. It also renders the dangers of self-radicalisation more acute, and the prospects of "lone-wolf" terrorism more likely.

Unlike the 1990s, when they were caught offguard by the return of Jihadis from Afghanistan, regional security forces have been alert to the threat that potential returnees from Syria and Iraq might pose. In part, this is because counterterrorism has already been a matter of policy priority since the 9/11 attacks (when investigations revealed that some of the planning took place in Southeast Asia) and the Bali bombings in October 2002. The declaration of the caliphate in mid-2014, and revelations that Southeast Asians were fighting in Syria, have further hastened counterterrorism efforts in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

In Indonesia, counterterrorism operations mounted by both Detachment–88 (Densus–88 or National Police Counterterrorism Squad) and the BNPT (National Counterterrorism Agency) have pinned down militant ISIS sympathizers in Poso, Central Sulawesi. In Malaysia and Singapore, security agencies have used internal security legislation to curtail ISIS-inpired activity and arrest suspected ISIS sympathizers. In the Philippines, while several militant groups have sworn allegiance to ISIS, their activities remain confined to the southern regions of the archipelago, in Sulu, Basilan, and Mindanao. That being said, authorities in Philippines are worried that an attack may happen in Manila.

In response to the Jakarta attacks earlier this year, Indonesia is currently in the process of tabling significant amendments to existing laws pertaining to terrorism (Law No. 15/2003 on Terrorism). The general objective behind these revisions appears to be to allow security forces to pre-empt acts of terrorism rather than merely react to them after they have occurred. A series of recommendations for legal reform have been submitted to the parliament to that effect, and await parliamentary debate. These recommendations include, among other things, introduction of some form of detention without trial for purposes of investigation, a redefinition of terrorism (to include not just physical acts but also hate speech, symbols, etc), swifter approval of electronic surveillance, and the arrest of individuals involved in military training overseas and the revoking of their citizenship (this is a direct response to the problem of Indonesian foreign fighters in Syria).

There has also been considerable pushback against the ideoogy of ISIS, although more can certainly be done. Indonesia is home to 2 of the largest Muslim mass movements in the world—Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. NU and Muhammadiyah claim memberships of 40 million and 30 million respectively. Both are considered mainstream Muslim organizations widely accepted and popular among Indonesians (hence their large memberships). Their leaders and clerics are respected internationally as Islamic scholars of considerable repute. Noteworthy too, is the fact that both have launched their own programs to counter the narrative of ISIS, and indeed, of other radical groups. Similar efforts at countering the ISIS narrative can be observed in Malaysia and Singapore, albeit on a smaller scale. Nevertheless, such efforts could perhaps be further enhanced by greater cooperation and collaboration among them, especially given that the threat posed by ISIS is transnational in nature.

The situation in their prison system poses a major problem for Indonesian counterterrorism efforts. Pro-ISIS and pro-Jemaah Islamiyah Jihadi ideologues have been recruiting easily in Indonesia's prisons. At issue is how these radical clerics, such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir and Aman Abdurrahman, the chief ISIS ideologue in Indonesia, are allowed to mingle with "gen pop" on a regular basis (in fact, Aman Abdurrahman and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir were in constant communication over text messaging while both were in different prisons—Ba'asyir in Pasir Putih and Aman in Kembang Kuning—and it is likely that Aman eventually persuaded Ba'asyir to swear allegiance to ISIS, which he did on July 8, 2014 only to rescind it later).[7] This being the case, their radical ideas and sermons have enjoyed easy access to a ready, disaffected audience. In addition to this, corruption, incompetence, poor monitoring, and poor supervision of visits have all contributed to the ease with which radical ideas propounded by jihadi ideologues and recruiters are allowed proliferate among "gen pop". Hence, reform of the prison system is urgent, if not an absolute priority.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the region as a whole is the policing and governance of the triborder waters encompassing the Sulu Sea (Philippines), waters off Sabah (Malaysia), and the Celebes/Sulawesi Sea (Indonesia). This porous and ungoverned region has presented, and will continue to present, a major problem by virtue of the ease of movement for militants and terorrists across borders (see attached picture). This region has developed their own political economy over many decades, which involves not just the movement of militants and terrorists, but also

[7] Yuliasri Perdani and Ina Parlina, "Govt to tighten prison security following Ba'asyir's 'baiat,'" *Jakarta Post*, July 7, 2015.

human and arms trafficking. Local authorities are often either unable to curtail such activities or, indeed, complicit in them. The challenge posed by the ungoverned space in this triborder area will require multi-national cooperation to surmount. None of the regional states can do it alone. They do not possess the capabilities required to police this vast and complex space, nor the authority to do so given that such efforts will necessarily involve cross-border operations. Moreover, as evident from the difficulties faced by regional security forces to apprehend militants from Jemaah Islamiyah and other groups ensconced in the Sulu archipelago, this region has already emerged as a safe haven for terrorists. With the "Pivot" strategy in place, the United States should consider exploring how to facilitate cooperation among regional states on this matter. There is also a definitive U.S. interest in this, given that American citizens have been kidnapped before by groups operating in this region.

At present, there is on-going conversation and exchange of intelligence and information in various forms between Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. But cooperation needs to be taken a step or two further, to involve joint patrols and where necessary, joint operations. Of course, such efforts could run up against rigid mindsets, obsolete paradigms, and the perennial reluctance to compromise sovereignty, but the harsh reality, as mentioned earlier, is that none of the regional states are capable of doing this on their own. Much in the same vein, cooperation between agencies within the various Southeast Asian governments—specifically, between the military, police, and intelligence—can also be improved. These 2 areas are where the United States can perhaps make a contribution by way of training programmes and transfer of operational knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of the phenomenon of ISIS in Southeast Asia and the traction it appears to have garnered is illustrative of how resilient but also evolutionary the threat of terrorism has become. Because of this, regional governments must remain vigilant to ISIS-related developments, particularly in terms monitoring both returnees as well as communications between militants in Syria and their counterparts and followers back home. They must equally be prepared to evolve with the threat in terms of counterterrorism strategies, narratives, and cooperation.

At the same time, in our anxiety over ISIS, we must be careful not to miss the forest for the trees. There are multiple groups operating in Southeast Asia that are intent on using some form of political violence to further their ends. Many are at odds with each other; not all are seeking affiliation to, or enamored of, ISIS. Indeed, while ISIS appears an immediate concern, a case can be made that the longer term, possibly more resilient, terrorist threat to the region may not come from ISIS but from Jemaah Islamiyah, for reasons explained earlier. It is also imperative that the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia be kept in perspective. Whether from ISIS or Jemaah Islamiyah, the threat of terrorism is not an existential one for Southeast Asia. Though eliminating terrorism altogether would be a tall order, the threat is certainly manageable if the correct balance of perpective and policies are taken, and cooperation among regional states is enhanced.

The operational capabilities of Southeast Asian militant and terorrist groups, including those aligned to ISIS, remains limited. There is little evidence that groups have developed the sophistication and know-how to mount mass casualty attacks. However, we must be mindful that given the resilient and evolutionary nature of terrorism in Southeast Asia, this situation could well change. One possible factor that could prompt this change is a deliberate shift of attention of ISIS central to Southeast Asia, leading to the dispatch of hardened fighters to the region. This however, seems unlikely for the present as ISIS is preoccupied with its immediate priority of holding ground in Iraq and Syria, and possibly expanding its fight to Libya and Europe.

ISIS-related activity in Southeast Asia poses no immediate threat to the American homeland. Thus far, there has also not been any indication of any specific desire on the part of ISIS-inspired militants to target offshore American interests such as embassies and/or commercial enterprises. This does not mean however, that there is no need for vigilance. The Jakarta attacks could be indicative of a return to the targeting of foreigners. Meanwhile, U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition successes in Syria and Iraq might elicit a call from ISIS central to its sympathizers and supporters world-wide to strike at the United States. On this score, it would serve U.S. interests to cooperate even more closely with regional partners in the fight against ISIS, and more generally, terrorism, in Southeast Asia.



Mr. KING. Let me thank all the witnesses for their testimony. We have been joined by the Ranking Member.

Brian, do you want to make an opening statement or submit for the record?

Mr. HIGGINS. I will submit for the record.

Mr. KING. Okay. The Ranking Member will submit his statement for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Higgins follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BRIAN HIGGINS

APRIL 27, 2016

Violent extremists in Southeast Asia are not a new phenomenon. For decades, Separatist movements have committed bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations in the region.

With the emergence of ISIL and al-Qaeda the intensity of these attacks has only gotten more devastating.

Over the past 2 years, in Malaysia alone, there has been a spike in terrorism-related arrests and detainments totaling nearly 160 Malaysian citizens.

In 2002, a militant group tied to al-Qaeda bombed a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia killing 200 mostly Western tourists and injuring countless more.

There have also been numerous suicide bombings targeting U.S. interests in the region, which have resulted in countless deaths.

Earlier this year in January, militants attacked a busy shopping and tourist district in downtown Jakarta resulting in 8 deaths and numerous injuries.

ISIL has taken responsibility for the January attack, which employed similar techniques used in the Paris, and Belgium attacks.

Counterterrorism efforts in the region have had some success. The capabilities of the militant group, Jemaah Islamiyah or JI which has ties to al-Qaeda have been significantly degraded by the region's efforts.

Unfortunately, terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIL seemed poised to fill the void left by this and other groups.

ISIL has targeted its extremist propaganda to the region in Malay and Pilipino languages.

ISIL's aggressive recruitment efforts in the region must be matched by equally aggressive security efforts to contain supporters and limit their influence.

While we cannot overstate the reach of al-Qaeda and ISIL's terrorist networks, we must not encourage the countries of Southeast Asia to respond to threats where there are none.

While it is important to remain vigilant and respond to credible threats, it is also important to acknowledge that experts predict the threat from Southeast Asia will remain relatively low.

Against this backdrop, we should encourage the governments of Southeast Asia to respect the rights and liberties of their citizens and discourage officials from using their counterterrorism efforts to restrict civil liberties and freedoms.

I look forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses today about terrorist threats in Southeast Asia, and how we can shape U.S. policy to counter their efforts.

Mr. KING. At the outside, I want to thank Ranking Member Higgins for his support on this hearing and all the hearings prior to this.

My question is, sort-of, broad-based and it will be to all of you, and it follows up on the conclusion of Dr. Liow's testimony. One thing that the European nations seem to realize since the attacks in Paris and Brussels, that there should be more cooperation among countries in Europe.

I would ask you, do the countries in Southeast Asia, do they consider this a regional threat? Is there a level of cooperation among them? Also, considering the outstanding work that is done by Australia, are they involved in any of this sharing of information? Is their information shared and other regional plans?

I will start with Mr. Watts.

Mr. WATTS. Thank you, Chairman. Good question. I will leave some of the details about the coordination between some of the other governments in the region to the other speakers. I can't say specifically, because I haven't had first-hand knowledge, and I wouldn't. You know, it would be Classified if it was, of the degree to which the Australian Government shares information with Indonesia and other governments in the region. I can tell you, there is close cooperation.

One of the key elements that we didn't bring us with Detachment 88 in Indonesia, which is a counterterrorism unit that was stood up after the Bali bombings and was funded and had trained support from both the Australians and the United States, FBI, and others in terms of building capacity. That group is a spearhead. Their approach to counterterrorism is something that we can learn lessons from. It is not just about offensive capabilities. It is about understanding through intelligence networks the lay of the land. It is about our running rehabilitation programs and getting a message through to, you know, potential jihadists or actual jihadists and turning them away, and that has had around about a 50 percent success rate at rehabilitating insurgents.

One of the things that is going to come through a lot of the discussions here has been many of the problems here are hyper-local. ISIS or al-Qaeda or whatever is just the current brand that they are attaching to. The actual discontent or the political motivations from many of these groups go back many, many years. Abu Sayyaf is a good example. They have been fighting for decades. The degree to which they are actually interested in ISIS' ideology, is very questionable. It is probably a pragmatic move, as was stated, in order to raise their profile and get more funding.

If ISIS goes away, if al-Qaeda goes away, those problems don't go away, those political discontents. So what that means is most

of the groups are focused on their issues within their own territory. There is a handful of ideologues, who have a broader intent to, you know, kind-of, ban the groups together, but it seems to be a very, very small portion of the jihadists who actually want to do that. So the majority of the counterterrorism action needs to be hyper-local, focused inward by the governments themselves onto the local conditions. Even within Indonesia, you know, across the 6,000 inhabited islands, you know, the provinces themselves need to focus on the issues within their provinces as much as across the country as well.

So I believe there would be sharing. I can't tell you to what degree that sharing happens, but I will say that United States, and Australia, is already providing a lot of support, particularly to Indonesia, and that's been a large part of success in combating Jamar Islamir in the early 2000s.

Mr. KING. As I said, I am aware, certainly, with our country, the tremendous amount of intelligence sharing with Australia. Thank you.

Mr. Skinner.

Mr. SKINNER. Yes. As I said, Detachment 88 is a really good success story that can be modeled, you know, in Malaysia and in the Philippines. You have the ASEAN level of—where they—it is not threat information, but it is the policies and capabilities. Then you go down to the global counterterrorism forum, the JCPF, which all of the countries in the region are—they are very active and have a really good hub and is anchored by Australia.

The capacities differ and also the threats differ. The Philippines, they have a big problem in the south, and that is almost beyond a CT effort. That is a military effort, and the United States is providing a lot of support. We have been for years, and we are increasing it again.

Malaysia has less of an organized group threat than they do—they just have a lot of people that have extremist tendencies. They are pretty good at arresting them. They have a very good day intelligence service, and they have a really good counterterrorism police.

Indonesia, their problem is the resurgent Jemaah Islamiyah. I agree that the depth and the history and the network of a JI in Indonesia just dwarfs Islamic State. Now, Islamic State might make a push. They are sympathizers. I know that Singapore and Malaysia obviously where they are border crossings, they have relatively day-to-day intelligence sharing. The same with Indonesia a little bit between Singapore.

It is just the threat. It is so different in all these places. So it is hyper-local. But I haven't seen that—or having talked to these people, I haven't heard that lack of intelligence sharing is an issue. I mean, if the threat grows more broadly, then, yeah, of course, it will be, because even in the best functioning governments or bureaucracies, things get through the cracks. But I think that they are probably doing well. What they need is, you know, local solutions which are in their hands which we can empower.

But I really believe that rule of law, counterterrorism specialties like Detachment 88 are something that is very hard to overstate how much positive work they did after Bali. So if that could be rep-

licated, and it is in varying degrees, that is a really low-cost approach with a huge payoff.

Mr. KING. Ms. Peery.

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. While I agree that the issues are very local and engagement with communities will require specific policies between governments and their respective provinces, I do think the region has an opportunity as a region to meet and at least discuss certain macro issues from immigration to at least having unified laws with regard to banning travel to join a militant group or going to training camp. This, for example, varies greatly between Malaysia and Indonesia.

Malaysia had out loud—excuse me—outlawed travel for training in militant groups long before Indonesia addressed the issue. I believe as of last year, even in Indonesia, it was not illegal to join ISIS, but it had been in Malaysia for some time prior.

Immigration, and traveling between the region and going to, you know, Europe and other parts of the world, these are opportunities to have better security measures and potentially even unify them in a way, at least travel can be tracked.

So there are opportunities for these countries in the region to compare and contrast what is going on and how they are being affected by each other. For example, as I mentioned, if ISIS can meet different militant groups in the Philippians last fall to talk about attacking Malaysia, there is a reason for Malaysia and the Philippines to talk to each other. I assume that intelligence sharing is happening, but as Mr. Watts mentioned, I am sure a lot of it is because it is happening now. These are Classified details that we are not privy to. But the details and community issues, whether it is Mindanao or Aceh, that is local.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Ms. Peery.

Dr. Liow.

Mr. LIOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Yes, there is a bit of information sharing and intelligence sharing amongst these security services of, say, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines. One of the problems, though, is that they are so—within individual countries, there are so many intelligence services or branches involved that it gets complicated. The information you get from agency A as compared from agency B is—could be different. So that poses a problem. That speaks to the issue of within these individual countries, interagency cooperation needs to be improved. But over and above that, from a regional perspective, I think the challenge now is for these regional states to go beyond information sharing, to actually consider, if I may say so, joint operations. I think it is about time they look into that.

We think that—well, I think that it is very important to consider that simply because of the problems in the tri-border area that a number of my fellow panelists alluded to. This is between the Sulu Sea, the Celebes Sea, in Indonesia, and the waters off the coast of Sabah. These are really ungoverned areas, ungoverned waters, and these form very effective communications and networks for militant groups and terrorist groups, and it has been the case for decades. Regional states have not been able to mount any sort of joint operations to deal with this threat.

Part of the problem is because they have their own baggage. Right? For example, the Filipinos and the Malaysians are concerned that if you push cooperation too far, this issue of the Philippine—the dominant Philippine claim to Sabah, for example, will surface. So it does run into these issues, but at least as far as trying to cope with the threat of militancy and terrorism is concerned, I think that some serious thought should be given to joint operations or even having some sort of joint security presence in that tri-water area in the form of a base or center or something to that effect.

Mr. KING. Okay. What exact area are you talking about now?

Mr. LIOW. It is the waters that border southern Philippines——

Mr. KING. Right.

Mr. LIOW [continuing]. Which is the Sulu Sea, northern Sulawesi, which is the Celebes, that is C-e-l-e-b-e-s, and the waters off the coast of Sabah in Borneo.

So I have a map in my testimony where it shows exactly what this area is.

Mr. KING. Great. Thank you.

Ranking Member, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just—Ms. Peery, you indicated in your testimony that the largest population, Muslim population, in the world is in Indonesia, and 70 percent of those supporting websites are from Indonesians. But Southeast Asia has been pretty effective in suppressing ISIS. So could you just reiterate the reasons as to why that is?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Certainly. Can you hear me?

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes.

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Okay. Sorry.

So the point I was trying to make was, in part of being proactive about moving extremist rhetoric away from the populations that are vulnerable to radicalization, one of the biggest issues is the fact that there is approximately 2,000 websites, pro-ISIS websites, in the region. The fact that 70 percent of the servers that host these websites come from Indonesia actually give Indonesia a wonderful opportunity to be a proactive and aggressive. Very quickly change the dynamic of ISIS' communications, because the vast majority of the hosting is coming from companies within Indonesia.

I agree with you that in absolute numbers, we are not looking at a huge extremist problem. We have over 140 million Muslims in Indonesia and approximately 300 that have gone to become foreign fighters. But what I am concerned about on a broader level is the ideology and the attitude of separatism, that the ISIS message is spreading in these societies where prior to this extremist rhetoric, Indonesia has and continues to maintain overall a much more pluralist interpretation state.

So in preventing a future change, which is why I mentioned what is happening in the United Kingdom as kind-of a case study of what you don't want to become if you are not proactive now.

Mr. HIGGINS. So Indonesia is effective in integrating the Muslim population?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. I am sorry?

Mr. HIGGINS. Indonesia is relatively effective in integrating——

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Well, not even just that. It is Islam that has been practiced for centuries have always been different. One of the issues with extremist rhetoric is that it is foreign-born, and it has come to the region from funding or extremist groups and then it is proliferated through their proselytizing. So for Indonesians who don't have the identity issues that is prevalent in places like Pakistan or the relatively new Nation State of the Middle East, they know who they are; they know what their culture is.

Mr. HIGGINS. Is there an estimate as to how many Indonesians are in Iraq and Syria as ISIS fighters?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. The numbers, depending on the source, vary as low as 300-something and go upwards of 800.

Mr. HIGGINS. Is there an ISIS presence in India?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. At a speculative level right now. There isn't enough information coming in yet to show that there is. But there is—excuse me. There is AQIS, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic subcontinent, and with that umbrella branch trying to unite Islamist groups between Afghanistan and Bangladesh including India, there is increased pro-ISIS activity from Pakistan and Bangladesh and with India sitting right at the center of it and being a specific target.

It is, again, low numbers right now, but the activity is legitimate. So these are—the conversations we are having today it is so important to keep on discussing the roles that extremist rhetoric is playing in these societies and trying to balance how we can practically push back without being alarmists or without being unnecessarily aggressive.

Mr. HIGGINS. As Iraq and Syria continue to retake territory previously held by ISIS, what is the impact of that phenomenon on ISIS activity in Indonesia?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. To be fair, I think that would be speculation on all our parts. But in my opinion, it would be an opportunity for them to focus on other regions where they have cells or have individuals that are sympathetic to their world view. If they are going to lose territory in one place, they are going to try to get more elsewhere, because for them their mission statement is global.

Mr. HIGGINS. But doesn't ISIS lose a very important component to its recruiting tool if it is perceived to be retreating as opposed to expanding?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Possibly, but there are enough organizations that are like-minded from al-Qaeda to Hizb ut-Tahrir to not remove the risk of radicalization from the communities.

Mr. HIGGINS. The point I am trying to make is this: That if our strategy by sending more U.S. troop personnel to Syria and Iraq to combat the ISIS expansion, and if that is successful, aren't we, in effect, undermining ISIS's ability to grow in other regions?

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. Not necessarily.

Mr. HIGGINS. Everybody agree with that?

Mr. WATTS. Again, it is speculative to decide. There is going to be 2 sides to it. The one is for every action there is a counter reaction. So as we squeeze them in one area, they are going to look to survive. Again, endure and expand has been a key motto for them.

So there is currently a debate amongst some of the senior leaders in Syria and Iraq as to whether they should maintain their terri-

tory, because that is the central message of why they differentiate from other terrorist groups, that they have actually established the caliphate that many others talk about and aspire to. They have actually done it. If they lose that talking point, their narrative is undermined.

However, the group has been squashed before, almost within an inch of its life, and it's come back. It's done that because it knows how to go to ground and disperse. So if the pressure on them becomes such that they make a decision that they can no longer hold the territory, they will make the pragmatic decisions. As much as they are idealists, they are a very pragmatic organization, and they will look for ways to spread that.

Going to your earlier question about why has there not been a larger attraction in Indonesia. I agree with everything that Ms. Zaidi said, but it also goes to the fact that those areas are politically empowered. The Muslims in those countries have actual political processes to achieve their ends. There are fundamentalist Islamic parties in Indonesia that have tried to go through the Democratic process, and have been rejected by the majority of voters.

The difference between Indonesia and, say, Yemen or Egypt or any of the other countries, perhaps, in the Middle East is that the economic situation is better there. The political system is stable. They have political mechanisms to pursue their objectives and, therefore, they don't have to resort to the more violent extremes. It also has to do with culture and messaging and many, many other things, religious traditions, but at a very simple level, that is a really important differentiator between countries in Southeast Asia and countries in the Middle East, and that is why it is hard to compare the 2.

Mr. LIOW. Thank you, Mr. Higgins. Just to add on to some of the points that my colleagues have raised. In other—let me start with the issue of why there are so few Indonesians. I think we have to bear in mind 2 things.

No. 1 is that you have in Indonesia an increasing need conservative Muslim society. So I am not entirely sure about—or I am not entirely persuaded by this—the orthodox view that you know, Indonesian, Islam has always been—I mean, for the most part, but they have always had a radical fringe since the 18th Century.

So the question is, where does it get from conservative society to pro-ISIS? I think that is a very big jump. That leads me to my second point.

In Indonesia, in the radical Muslim intellectual community, there is a very intense debate going on now about this issue of whether Muslims are legitimate target of terrorist acts. This is where a lot of the militant groups defer. This is where Jemaah Islamiyah has major differences with the pro-ISIS groups, because they are of the view that we should be minimizing Muslim casualties; in fact, from Bali 2002, they have been having this debate already.

So this, I think, explains why on the one hand, you see a very conservative trend in Indonesians, slightly, but on the other hand, it doesn't quite translate to pro-ISIS support.

Also, just very quickly, there is also the issue of why Indonesians and Malaysians are going to fight in Syria and Iraq in the first

place. Speaking to a number of Malaysian detainees, it is very interesting. For them, they buy into the eschatological logic of ISIS, that they are fighting the end-time battle in Syria. So if that is the case, it stands to reason that they won't want to come back. They want to fight the end times in Syria as they are called to.

In the case of Indonesia, on the other hand, a number of the people who have joined pro-ISIS groups have done so not so much because of doctrine of theology but because of personal allegiances to individual ideologues and leaders, which also means they can shift. Indeed, if we manage to push back ISIS, you might actually see that. You know, because a lot of them came from the Jemaah Islamiyah background. They could very well move back.

I will end with an example of Abu Bakar Bashir, who we all know is the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, who made an oath of allegiance to ISIS but has since retracted that oath of allegiance saying that now he understands better what ISIS is about, and he doesn't quite agree with them today. So that phenomenon can happen as well.

Mr. SKINNER. Just real quickly. I think whatever—so the effort that we are putting into Iraq and Syria, whatever threat that might come from squashing them there and like the ink blot where it goes somewhere else, and in particular here, Southeast Asia, I think that is a manageable risk.

Now, it is a real risk, and it needs to be addressed, but I think it pales in comparison to the damage that if they lose that self-proclaimed caliphate in Raqqa, the damage that does to their global brand, because a lot of their world-wide allegiance is superficial bandwagoneer. It appeals to a certain criminal mind set and a lot of disaffected people.

So the damage to do to that group, No. 1, it is categorically imperative to help Syria and Iraq to get rid of this, because for them it is an existential threat. So applying pressure there and toppling them there, yeah, it might lead them to look for other places. Libya is proving harder than they ever thought, because they don't have that secretarian wedge. I mean, they don't have that wedge in Southeast Asia either. They have maybe ethnicity, but it is going to be hard for them to play that card. So they are going to try to tap in to preexisting networks that have a sanctuary, which is a couple of places, but I think that the risks are managable.

But, yeah, it is a real—you know, you would be foolish not to think that if they get pushed out of there, they need a physical place. Foreign fighters have to go somewhere. They have to have a place to put the black flag. It is not all propaganda. They need some kind of on-the-ground reality.

Mr. KING. Mr. Katko.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a couple of questions. I just want to follow up on what you said with respect to the importance of having a caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

First of all, Syria and Iraq are probably more unstable than most places in the world, and that was easier for them to establish it there. But also one thing we haven't mentioned, it is fair to say that the money flow is also important in Syria and Iraq?

They have oil, and they have resources they can tap into there that they may not have access to elsewhere. Without money, they are going to be less effective. Is that fair to say as well?

Mr. SKINNER. Yes. I mean, foreign fighters like to be paid. You know, their logistics like to be paid. They are able to buy weapons at—you know, they are not hurting for weapons in Iraq and Syria. So cutting their money, there isn't a downside to that. So if they move—if they splinter and some of them go to establish or rely or even a caliphate in Southeast Asia, it is going to be a shell of the organization.

Syria and Iraq are the perfect place for them to thrive. They will not have that type of—they will have to revert back down to a terrorist group instead of a proto-state.

Mr. KATKO. All right. Thank you.

In my other capacity, in my other subcommittee I am on in Homeland Security, I was put in charge of what is called the Foreign Fighter Task Force, so I am interested in the flow of foreign fighters. I know from Western Europe that there is thousands upon thousands of people that they believe went, and they think there are hundreds in the United States. I think both of those numbers are probably dramatically lower, because we only know what we know. We don't know what we don't know as far as some who may have gone there.

So I want to kind-of probe you as to Southeast Asia. I know these numbers sound very low, but how much confidence do you have in the numbers about the foreign fighter flow from Southeast Asia to Iraq and Syria? Anybody can take that.

Mr. SKINNER. Yeah, it is probably low, but maybe not as dramatic as—the thing is, foreign fighters, especially—it is so weird. They were radicalized in open source. They were basically social media announcing the radicalization. Then the government—you could count this up, and we did a lot of that, and the numbers would come close to what the U.S. Government, with all their information, would come up. Because these people weren't trying to hide. But these were really lagging indicators.

By the time you count these things that is a year or 2 ago, I think that we dramatically underestimated what was happening in 2013 and 2014, and that we are probably now trying to catch up. We think, oh, no, the flows are still that. So basically, that is why the estimates were all over the map.

In 2014, we completely underestimated the size of the group, but also the size of—I mean, there were a lot of people going there. Now we have got to understand that—I think the United States and Department of Defense put out a number yesterday that it's really dropped. It took several years for that to happen. It wasn't just closing a border. It was everybody stopped—and most of these people are stopped at the airport. I would say, again, we constantly overestimate our ability to track foreign fighter extremist travel. I mean, even here, I—there are people that have gone that we don't know. So it would be foolish to think that in Indonesia, that that number is exactly 600. Because it could literally be between like 500 to 700, but that is that we know of, and that is what they announced. Some of it is open source, some of it is not open source.

So I really think that—in my old job, I was always optimistic. The problems were never as bad as they seemed. We haven't proven the ability to monitor this, and we are way behind the curve.

Mr. KATKO. Mr. Watts.

Mr. WATTS. Thank you, sir. Excellent question. I haven't studied this in detail, so I can't say with any confidence in numbers, specifically, but I will say that the—what I had seen when I read in the research, there is some very, very specific information where they have spoken to the individuals involved, and they can actually track specifically, you know, person No. 1 went to his friend and asked how to get to wherever, and he got knocked back and went to friend No. 2. He got in touch with friend No. 3. They had some very specific information.

As mentioned before, the counterterrorism efforts in Indonesia in particular are very sophisticated. They rely on heavy intelligence and human sources. They have informants within some of these groups. They know where they are, even if they can't affect them, they know where they are. They know where the networks are. They know who the key personnel are.

So I absolutely would agree. We can't say specifically how many the numbers are, and we can't really be sure, but I think that we can have some confidence they are not radically different to what they are, because, you know, there would be some sign-up within these networks. The informants would have picked it up. You know, these groups are quite tight-knit. There is literally a handful of key personnel who everyone knows and speaks to and interacts with. So I think we have some confidence that while they might not be exactly what we see, they are not going to be radically different to the numbers that have been quoted.

I just point out with the foreign fighters. As much as the foreign fighters coming back, I would like to reinforce the comment that was made earlier, those that are going over predominantly want to be there because they want to be there, not because they want to come back and bring the skills back. It is a very different mentality.

But even if ISIS went away or even if al-Qaeda went away, the terrorist threat in Indonesia will not, necessarily, or Southeast Asia will not necessarily be less, because, again, those motivations for those groups, the political grievances, are local as much as they are in the broader ideological state. It doesn't necessarily shift the threat analysis.

Mr. KATKO. That is a perfect segue to my question for Dr. Liow, or more of an observation, really.

You have indicated, I think, in your testimony that you must take care not to exaggerate the threat of ISIS in Southeast Asia, and that ISIS right now isn't the biggest threat there. I think that is consistent with what Mr. Skinner is saying in his testimony as well. That is understood. I mean, it is not the biggest problem right now.

But I think it is probably different in Western Europe than it is for Southeast Asia right now. But despite that, can any of you tell me if there is any particular area of Southeast Asia where you are most concerned about the possible rise of ISIS-related activity?

Mr. LIOW. Maybe I will start.

A specific area, I think, would be the Sulu Archipelago Basilan, the island of Basilan, because again, as I mentioned earlier, it is ungoverned space. The Philippine military—I mean, I have friends in the Philippine military, but if you look at—the Chairman mentioned the operations on the 9th of—on April 9. I think that was quite an embarrassment for the Philippines special forces, and it is not an isolated incident either.

So the capability, the capacity that the Philippines has to manage—to deal with the threat in that area is very low. It is very low, which is why I—my view is that we have to really look beyond just joint information sharing. You have got the information. You have got the data. They still cannot do anything with it. We need to really look at operations.

The United States to some extent is already present there. The Australians I think would take an interest as well as a number of Southeast, Malaysia, Singapore, as well. But you know it runs into issues of sovereignty and things like that. But that area, in terms of a specific geographical area that would be a source of concern, that would be it. Whether it is ISIS, whether it is Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Sayyaf, et cetera, it is all happening there.

If I could just react very quickly to your earlier point?

Mr. KATKO. Sure.

Mr. LIOW. About the numbers. I agree with my colleagues. It is not a precise science. I think that at least the figures I have seen are about 700 in total of Southeast Asians, by far the majority from Indonesia, a handful from Singapore, and there are suspicions of a handful from Philippines as well but not confirmed. I think we have to bear in mind two things.

The first thing, as I mentioned in my testimony that certainly, in the case of Indonesia, we have noticed a large number of the men and children who are going there because they are relocating; they are doing the hijrah. Right? The families are relocating to the pristine Islamic State. They are going to stay there. They are going to grow up there for better or for worse.

The second point is there is quite a significant casualty count as well. As far as the Malaysians are concerned, if they work on the premise that there are about 100 there, figures I have seen—and you can actually get it off YouTube, where there is a number of clips where militants talk about—they actually talk and film information about operations that they have conducted a few years—a few days prior, and there are at least about 12, 13 Malaysians that have already been killed in Syria and Iraq. Mostly in Syria, one in Iraq.

In the same manner, Indonesians as well, we are talking about 40 or 50 of them. So this is about roughly about 15 percent, 20 percent of the figures that we are talking about. So there is a casualty count as well. I just wanted to put that up.

Mr. KATKO. I thank you.

Mr. Skinner.

Mr. SKINNER. Yes, I agree. There are 2 ways to look at it. The south Philippines would be the perfect large-scale ISIS presence, because that area is not going to be controlled any time soon, hasn't been for decades. That provides them a sanctuary, a place to literally stay and to recoup or to rebuild and also to plant. I

mean, that is what they do. That is why we tried to deny sanctuary.

So if they got there, I would probably say that is the No. 1 spot.

Another concern is what we are seeing in Bangladesh is truly horrifying, because we are watching in slow motion, but real time, how this extremism works. It is not that they have the best message, they just need to be the monopoly of the message. To do that, it is not a metaphor. They literally kill the messengers. So we always talk about credible voices and these people need to stand up, well, they are, and they are getting slaughtered.

In Bangladesh, that would be a night—I mean, I focus on counterterrorism, and that would be a nightmare scenario. Bangladesh is, for all their—all its problems, a relatively stable society. They have a lot of good politics, but so do we.

I think what we are watching there is this slow motion slaughtering of other voices and they are targeting—these are not randoms. They are going at, you know, certain alternative voices and mainstream, even. So if you start seeing that in Jakarta, you start—every now and then you see a blogger killed in Jakarta, or new—you know, weird newspaper killed in Kuala Lumpur. You see that a couple of times, that is a real sign of a society that there are not just gangs and criminal gangs, which ISIS is basically a criminal gang, but they are making a push to frighten. All they want is people not to speak up. They don't really care if they believe them or not, they just want them to be scared. Hacking people to death with machetes, it doesn't cost anything and the payoff is huge.

I think that southern Philippines would be a territorial gain for ISIS, and they might try to go there and they might not. I mean, if I were them, I would. There is no cost, why not, because it is so uncontrolled. But if you start seeing in the cities attacks on media, news, bloggers, radio personalities, that is a real, real bad sign.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you.

Mr. Watts.

Mr. WATTS. Thank you, sir. I just want to point out a few other areas. As I mentioned in my testimony, some of these areas have grievances going back 50, 60 years, back to the independence of Indonesia. Any of those areas that, you know, have links way back to Darul Islam are areas of potential hot spots, again, in Indonesia, specifically and Poso in central Sulawesi, there is known cells there. Some of the groups are operating out of there. Again, the Indonesian Government and police forces know this. They are watching it. They are conducting operations as we speak to try and eliminate that. There is a local sympathy for the broader cause if not the methodologies.

The area that I think is of great concern is Aceh. Aceh is for a long time been an area of insurgency with Indonesia. It has sought autonomy for a long time. It has been very quiet in recent years, but that is mostly due to tsunami from, you know, about a decade ago. There was a huge amount of piracy in that region. There was a huge amount of insurgency in that region. Quite literally the pirate boats got wiped out by the tsunami. The impact it had on the

region saw that the insurgence and the government forces come to together to try and repair.

We are now seeing the effects of that wear off, and we are seeing all the animosity start to grow out again. There has already been some training camps identified in Aceh. It is an area with, again, long-standing discontent, political grievances. There is a deep sense of needing autonomy for the region, and whether or not, it is Islamic as well and they want to see Sharia law imposed, but it is autonomy as much as anything.

Again, whether ISIS is there, whether Jemaah Islamiyah is there, that area is going to continue to be a hot spot where insurgent groups and terrorist groups are going to want to operate out of.

Mr. KATKO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Katko.

Again, I would ask all 4 panelists, if ISIS did decide to officially designate or associate itself with one of the organizations in the region, what impact would that have? Also, is ISIS considered a competitor to al-Qaeda in that region or the two as being the same?

Yes, Ms. Zaidi Peery.

Ms. ZAIDI PEERY. A specific answer to your question, there is the possibility that if ISIS did become affiliated with a specific group in southeast Indonesia, there is a view that to now, these localized groups have questionable levels of training and sophistication, and capability, that that capability would increase with the influence and help of ISIS militants from the Middle East. I think that is a concern country to country, because as has been previously mentioned, there are hubs. There are already certain training camps present. If there is increased collaboration, there is a potential for greater sophistications. There is one example that I have, in early April a Moroccan bomb maker named Mohammad Khattab was killed in the Philippines. This was the incident in early April where reports had mentioned 18 law enforcement soldiers that were killed in a skirmish.

So again, right now, we are limited to specific incidences here and there, and—but increased collaboration is going to raise these questions in terms of scenario-building and trend-watching that what was before specific militant groups with specific issues in their region fighting with their local or federal governments that the expansion of targets would become more indiscriminate, because that is ISIS' preference. They wanted to create chaos.

So what was something that was happening in—excuse me. What was, let's say, serious skirmishes in Mindanao might be called on for or larger cities across the region, because that is what ISIS needs to make the next video.

Mr. KING. Mr. Skinner.

Mr. SKINNER. Yes, that is a really good point. We are having—it is not a debate, but in the United States we are sending additional Special Forces or Special Operation Forces to train and advise. As you know, these people are very skilled, and you only need a couple of them to act as a force multiplier. I think that if—and they are probably trying to do it now, ISIS, to send them to wherever their home countries are. But if they make it official, which they have been pretty hesitant to do. They have declared or relied

in Southeast Asia, yeah, they might try to send some of their best trainers. Just as we believe in train and advise, so do they. I mean, talent goes to talent.

So if they sent a couple of trainers, it will do two things. It will increase the legality of these groups. It will also—it might cause some kind of bandwagon thing where a lot of rival groups that aren't ideologically—you know, they are just more like rival small gangs kind-of join up, and that increases the manpower of that pretty existing group.

ISIS isn't replacing these groups. It is not like they are moving an army from Raqqa to Mindanao or something. You know, they are just plugging into these preexisting groups. So if they go all out and make a big media push and they put caliphate on the line and say, there is a new allied here, they might get more capability, maybe a little funding. It is hard to know in how much they can go, you know, we are trying to decide in Boko Haram too if that is happening. But it certainly would increase some kind of support for the young kids.

But there is no love lost between JI, which is still the major threat there. They are the mafia there. They have been there forever. The best ISIS could try to do is try to do what they doing in the Taliban and try to splinter some stuff off. But the most important part is, they are going to broaden. If ISIS goes there, they are going to go from attacking a police station for a real reason to attacking anybody anywhere. I mean, that is their motto. If they do that, you will see just an indiscriminate campaign.

Mr. KING. Mr. Watts.

Mr. WATTS. Just two points. It was mentioned earlier, I think, by Dr. Liow, there is debate within the groups within Indonesia, the jihadist community, within the conservative community, about whether or not they really appreciate or agree with ISIS' methods. There is a huge amount of jihadist groups who reject them for that very reason. So the question: Would there be competition? Absolutely there would.

The split between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS in Syria caused huge rifts within some of the key members within the jihadist community in Indonesia, as some back the al-Qaeda-backed groups and some went with ISIS, so there would be tensions and problems between them as to who would align with the other, and there would be problems with ISIS' methodology and ideology for some of those groups.

Having said that, to focus purely on Islamic groups or jihadist groups I think would be short-sighted. Again, ISIS has shown itself to be extremely pragmatic in the way that it creates alliances. The very alignment between the Baathists and ISIS in the early days of their expansion is a perfect example of that. If groups within Indonesia who may not have an ideological alignment with ISIS see that there is some benefit to jumping on board, getting funding, if there is something they are going to gain from it, they may band with them, even if they don't buy into the ideology, so I think there are two aspects of that that needs to be considered.

Mr. KING. Dr. Liow.

Mr. LIOW. Thank you.

I think that the threat, the concern, really, will be about the groups in the southern Philippines. Some Philippines you have a whole of, you know, proliferation of militant groups, and they are always looking for an ideology, and they will go with the flow. I mean, Abu Sayyaf is a prime example, you know, align themselves with al-Qaeda, and now they are aligning themselves with—align themselves with ISIS. You know, very conveniently disregarding the kind of differences that al-Qaeda has with ISIS. Right? So I think the manageability of the ideology of southern Philippines groups, I think, would be a cause of concern as far as ISIS looking to work with groups in the region is the issue.

In the case of Indonesia, again, there is rivalry between pro- and anti-ISIS groups. The danger there is that the Indonesian government is starting to give publicity and a platform for anti-ISIS elements who are from the jihadi community. So they are giving Jemaah Islamiyah leaders a platform from which they can discredit ISIS. But there is a problem there, quite obviously, because these people have a jihadi agenda as well. They will very quickly be able to use the visibility and publicity that they have been given to advance the agenda. So I think there is an issue there.

Last point I would raise is I think a big concern, which we didn't talk about, is the case of Malaysia. Because unlike Philippines and unlike Indonesia, Malaysia, you are looking at the individual radicalization. The nature of this sort of radicalization is that it is much more difficult to monitor and much more difficult to deal with as opposed to looking at groups.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Liow.

Any further questions? Ranking Member? Mr. Katko? Okay.

It is my job now to thank you for your testimony. I want to tell you how sincerely I mean it. This was as enlightening as any testimony we have had before this subcommittee, and quite frankly, before the entire committee. This has been extremely helpful. You put it in terms that all of us could understand, which is somewhat of an achievement. I want to thank you for that.

Now, the Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions of witnesses. We ask you to respond to those in writing. Pursuant to committee rules, the record will be held open for 10 days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned. Again, thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 11:23 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR JOHN T. WATTS

Question 1. In recent months, there have been a number of attacks targeting activists and bloggers, as well as violence toward non-Muslim individuals in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other countries in the region. The cruel murder of a locally-hired employee of USAID and the founding editor of Bangladesh's only LGBT magazine, Xulhaz Mannan, this past weekend only serves to further highlight the growing tolerance for violent discrimination. These attacks have understandably caused writers and journalists to become hesitant in publishing work that would attract attention from potential assailants.

How is the United States assisting in protecting freedoms of speech and assembly in Bangladesh and neighboring countries?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. As with so many other states, Bangladesh's current political climate and increasing human rights restrictions have pushed many in the public to seek violent solutions, including extremist ideologies.

How is the United States addressing the root causes of this violence and working with Bangladesh to bring warring political factions together to negotiate a peaceful settlement, allowing it to successfully counter external extremist organizations, such as ISIL, from gaining a foothold in the country?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3a. In many cases in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, the cruel and harsh treatment within prisons has essentially acted as an incubator for radicalization among inmates. Some countries, such as France, have sought to address this issue by isolating prisoners suspected of being radicalized; however, many experts believe this does not effectively address the issue of radicalization.

What methods should countries employ to reduce the possibility of radicalization inside prisons? Are countries in Southeast Asia making efforts to restructure their prisons or address the potential for radicalization within prisons?

Question 3b. Are there any case studies in which countries can use as a template for success to reduce radicalization through rehabilitation and educational activities?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR PATRICK M. SKINNER

Question 1. In recent months, there have been a number of attacks targeting activists and bloggers, as well as violence toward non-Muslim individuals in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and other countries in the region. The cruel murder of a locally-hired employee of USAID and the founding editor of Bangladesh's only LGBT magazine, Xulhaz Mannan, this past weekend only serves to further highlight the growing tolerance for violent discrimination. These attacks have understandably caused writers and journalists to become hesitant in publishing work that would attract attention from potential assailants.

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QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR SUPNA ZAIDI PEERY

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What methods should countries employ to reduce the possibility of radicalization inside prisons? Are countries in Southeast Asia making efforts to restructure their prisons or address the potential for radicalization within prisons?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3b. Are there any case studies in which countries can use as a template for success to reduce radicalization through rehabilitation and educational activities?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

QUESTIONS FROM RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON FOR JOSEPH CHINYONG LIOW

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How is the United States assisting in protecting freedoms of speech and assembly in Bangladesh and neighboring countries?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 2. As with so many other states, Bangladesh's current political climate and increasing human rights restrictions have pushed many in the public to seek violent solutions, including extremist ideologies.

How is the United States addressing the root causes of this violence and working with Bangladesh to bring warring political factions together to negotiate a peaceful settlement, allowing it to successfully counter external extremist organizations, such as ISIL, from gaining a foothold in the country?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

Question 3a. In many cases in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, the cruel and harsh treatment within prisons has essentially acted as an incubator for radicalization among inmates. Some countries, such as France, have sought to address this issue by isolating prisoners suspected of being radicalized; however, many experts believe this does not effectively address the issue of radicalization.

What methods should countries employ to reduce the possibility of radicalization inside prisons? Are countries in Southeast Asia making efforts to restructure their prisons or address the potential for radicalization within prisons?

Answer. In the case of Southeast Asia, the problem is not so much harsh treatment of prisoners as it is the ease with which radical clerics have been allowed to mix with "gen pop." Radicals are not separated from common criminals, and because of the availability of free time and the religious stature of some of these clerics, they are allowed not only to mingle but to preach to "gen pop." This creates conditions for recruitment. Another problem is the lack of training for wardens and prison officers. What we have is a situation where prison officers are not checking visitors carefully. This means that struggling radical material as well as cellphones (which allows prisoners access to internet and various sources of radical propaganda) into prisons is very easy. Finally, corruption is a perennial problem. The United States should consider playing a more active role in providing professional training for prison officers, and funding for the creation of more separate facilities for radicals (there already are some, but Indonesia in particular needs more).

Question 3b. Are there any case studies in which countries can use as a template for success to reduce radicalization through rehabilitation and educational activities?

Answer. Singapore is widely seen as one of the success stories of deradicalisation and religious rehabilitation, where the recidivism rate is low. However, we should be mindful of the special circumstances in Singapore, namely, a strong state apparatus and a smaller geographical space which makes it more difficult for radicals to sneak beneath the radar.

Question 4a. A major hindrance to U.S. assistance in Southeast Asia can be attributed to lack of anti-terrorist and anti-corruption legislation. Malaysia is enacting legislation for The Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Can you expand upon the logistics of this act, and its effectiveness?

Answer. The Prevention of Terrorism Act or POTA was proposed to eliminate potential threats of violence through any acts relating to terrorism. More specifically, due to the alarming threat of Malaysians joining ISIS. Any persons who fall under suspicion of terrorist activities can be detained, without warrant, up to a maximum time of 60 days by the police. Under the approval of Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King) appointed 5-to-8-member Prevention of Terrorism board this can be extended for up to 2 years at a time. Any person who is arrested shall be presented to the magistrate within 24 hours unless released earlier.

The previous Internal Security Act or ISA allowed initial detention of 60 days with unlimited renewals based solely on the will of the Home Minister. POTA has the same 60-day initial detention period as the ISA but with possible extensions of up to 2 years at a time relying on the executive power of the Prevention of Terrorism Board. There is also the inclusion of an electronic monitoring device that will be used to keep track of a suspect's location. The fact that under POTA executive powers of detention rest on the appointed board rather than police has led the Malaysian government to claim that POTA is different from the ISA. But it does herald a return of detention without trial in Malaysia, an issue of particular sensitivity given how such legislation can be, and has been, used against political opposition in the past. The major concern over POTA, like the ISA, is that it gives police and the appointed board the power to detain suspects without warrant or judicial review for an extended period of time. Though both POTA and SOSMA state "No person shall be arrested and detained solely for his political belief or political activity", this only refers to parties registered under the Societies Act. Some people therefore believe that POTA could be used more widely than at first anticipated.

Question 4b. Does this act give way to an increase in U.S. assistance?

Answer. Response was not received at the time of publication.

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