

# BLACK FLAGS OVER MINDANAO: TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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JULY 12, 2017  
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**Serial No. 115-52**  
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Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/> or  
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

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U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

26-224PDF

WASHINGTON : 2017

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## **BLACK FLAGS OVER MINDANAO: TERRORISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2017**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room 2200 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ted Yoho (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. YOHO. Welcome, everybody. The subcommittee will come to order. I welcome everybody here. This is a packed room. This is great. I love to see all this excitement.

Members present will be permitted to submit written statements to be included in the official hearing record without objection.

The hearing record will remain open for 5 calendar days to allow statements, questions, and extraneous material for the record subject to length limitations of the rules.

And with that, I love the name of this or the title for this hearing: "Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia." I think it is so important today to address this growing threat throughout the region.

I am going to put on my new glasses my wife got me.

Most of the debate in Washington about U.S. policy toward Asia focuses on state challenges such as the nuclear belligerence of the DPRK, the rise of China and related issues.

The threat of transnational terrorism in Asia has been at best a secondary consideration and, at worse, an afterthought.

The policy making community doesn't seem to consider terrorism in Asia with the same seriousness as it does in the Middle East.

But ISIS' increasingly aggressive moves in Southeast Asia, which have to a head in recent weeks have shown us that the issues are indivisibly related and that the laxity of our approach is no longer tenable.

The looming threat of ISIS has exploded into open conflicts in the city of Marawi on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines.

ISIS fighters have occupied areas of the city for 7 weeks, resisting efforts by the armed forces of the Philippines to drive them out.

Fighters from domestic terrorist organizations who previously operated under their own direction appear to have united under an emir appointed by ISIS.

Reportedly, this criminal named Isnilon Hapilon has been in contact with ISIS leaders in the Middle East and seeks to establish an ISIS caliphate on Mindanao.

The Islamist militant in Marawi are an elite alliance of Abu Sayyaf group and the Maute group, the Philippine organizations who have come together for this audacious and unprecedented attack.

To date, over 380 Islamist militants have been killed in the fight, far surpassing early estimates, and the number of militants—I mean, at first when this first started out we were looking at about 250 to 300 people and it is already 380 have been killed in fighting with more still keeping government forces at bay.

An unknown number of foreign fighters have supplemented militants from the Philippines. Deceased terrorists have been identified as Malaysian, Indonesian, Saudi, Yemeni, Chechen, and Indian nationals.

The destruction has been immense. Up to 400,000 civilians have been displaced. Ninety soldiers and police officers have been killed and hundreds—and hundreds wounded.

Large areas of Marawi have been flattened. The widespread destruction is the latest sign that the nature of terrorist activity in Southeast Asia may be changing.

Islamist militants in Southeast Asia were previously focused on domestic concerns such as gaining independence and establishing Sharia-style governance. Many were thought of as little more than former for-profit criminal organizations.

As organizations throughout Southeast Asia have pledged allegiance to ISIS, however, their priorities seem to be shifting.

The siege of Marawi has shown that forces under Hapilon are interested in seizing territory and contesting government control similar to ISIS strategies in Iraq and in Syria.

The Solicitor General of the Philippines has stated what's happening in Mindanao is no longer rebellion of Filipino citizens.

It has transmogrified into invasions by foreign terrorists who heeded the clarion call of ISIS to go to the Philippines if they find difficulty in going to Iraq or Syrian. They want to create Mindanao as part of the caliphate.

At the same time, Southeast Asia's youth, our Internet-connected population, is fertile ground for online radicalization of ISIS specialties.

A fragmented ISIS can inspire homegrown terrorists, send trained jihadists all over the world and the porous borders of the Southeast Asia region are especially vulnerable to both.

The dangers stand to grow as ISIS is driven from its captured territory in Iraq and Syria and turns its focus elsewhere. Meanwhile, Southeast Asia's historically tolerant and inclusive brand of Islam is facing fundamentalist challenges as well.

The recent electoral defeat and subsequent blasphemy convictions of Jakarta government official Ahok, a member of Indonesia's Christian minority, raised questions about the independence of Indonesia's secular institutions and showcased the rise of hardline Islamist politics.

The spread of fundamentalism throughout Southeast Asia, exasperated by outside influences such as Saudi Arabia's propagation of Wahhabist institutions risk contributing to radicalization.

The United States has a role to play and has been quietly supporting the armed forces of the Philippines outside of Marawi with intelligence and surveillance assistance.

To date we have avoided a public role of combat or combat operations. As the threat in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia intensifies, we must determine what more the United States, in cooperation with our ASEAN partners, can do better to counter Islamist militancy in the region.

The siege of Marawi underscores the Islamist terrorism by a generational challenge in Southeast Asia as it is throughout the world. Strategies to counter the rise of the militancy must be a central component of our Asia strategy rather than a secondary issue.

Today we are joined by an expert panel—and I appreciate you all coming—so that we can discuss the contours of the threat and suggest policy options for forming a strategy so that we can pass this on, hopefully, to the State Department and to the executive branch.

[The opening statement of Mr. Yoho follows:]

**Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia**

Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Wednesday, July 12, 2017, 2:30 p.m.

**Opening Statement of Chairman Ted Yoho**

Most of the debate in Washington about U.S. policy towards Asia focuses on State challenges, such as the nuclear belligerence of the DPRK, the rise of China, and related issues. The threat of transnational terrorism in Asia has been at best a secondary consideration, and at worst, an afterthought. The policymaking community doesn't seem to consider terrorism in Asia with the same seriousness as it does Middle Eastern terrorism. But ISIS' increasingly aggressive moves into Southeast Asia, which have come to head in recent weeks, have shown us that the issues are indivisibly related, and that the laxity of our approach is no longer tenable.

The looming threat of ISIS has exploded into open conflict in the city of Marawi on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines. ISIS fighters have occupied areas of the city for seven weeks, resisting efforts by the Armed Forces of the Philippines to drive them out. Fighters from domestic terrorist organizations, who previously operated under their own direction, appear to have united under an emir appointed by ISIS. Reportedly, this criminal named Isnilon Hapilon has been in contact with ISIS leaders in the Middle East and seeks to establish an ISIS caliphate on Mindanao.

The Islamist militants in Marawi are an alliance of the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Maute Group, Philippine organizations who have come together for this audacious and unprecedented attack. To date, over 380 Islamist militants have been killed in the fighting, far surpassing early estimates, with more still keeping government forces at bay. An unknown number of foreign fighters have supplemented militants from the Philippines. Deceased terrorists have been identified as Malaysian, Indonesian, Saudi, Yemeni, Chechen, and Indian nationals.

The destruction has been immense. Up to 400,000 civilians have been displaced, 90 soldiers and police officers have been killed and hundreds wounded. Large areas of Marawi have been flattened. The widespread destruction is the latest sign that the nature of terrorist activity in Southeast Asia may be changing.

Islamist militants in Southeast Asia were previously focused on domestic concerns, such as gaining independence and establishing Sharia-style government. Many were thought of as little more than for-profit criminal organizations. As organizations throughout Southeast Asia have pledged allegiance to ISIS however, their priorities seem to be shifting. The siege of Marawi has shown that the forces under Hapilon are interested in seizing territory and contesting government control, similar to ISIS strategy in Iraq and Syria.

The Solicitor General of the Philippines has stated, "[w]hat's happening in Mindanao is no longer a rebellion of Filipino citizens. It has transmogrified into invasion by foreign terrorists who heeded the

clarion call of the ISIS to go to the Philippines if they find difficulty in going to Iraq or Syria... They want to create Mindanao as part of the caliphate."

At the same time, Southeast Asia's young, internet-connected population is fertile ground for online radicalization, one of ISIS' specialties. A fragmented ISIS can still inspire home-grown terrorists send trained jihadists all over the world, and the porous borders of Southeast Asia are especially vulnerable to both. These dangers stand to grow as ISIS is driven from its captured territory in Iraq and Syria and turns its focus elsewhere.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asia's historically tolerant and inclusive brand of Islam is facing fundamentalist challenges as well. The recent electoral defeat and subsequent blasphemy conviction of Jakarta governor Ahok, a member of Indonesia's Christian minority, raised questions about the independence of Indonesia's secular institutions and showcased the rise of hardline Islamist politics. The spread of fundamentalism through Southeast Asia, exacerbated by outside influences such as Saudi Arabia's propagation of Wahhabist institutions, risks contributing to radicalization.

The United States has a role to play, and has been quietly supporting the Armed Forces of the Philippines outside Marawi with intelligence and surveillance assistance. To date, we have avoided a public role or combat operations. As the threat in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia intensifies, we must determine what more the United States, in cooperation with our ASEAN partners, can do to better counter Islamist militancy in the region.

The siege of Marawi underscores that Islamist terrorism will be a generational challenge in Southeast Asia, as it is throughout the world. Strategies to counter the rise of Islamist militancy must be a central component of our Asia strategy, rather than a secondary issue. Today, we are joined by an expert panel that will discuss the contours of the threat and suggest policy options for forming this strategy.

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Mr. YOHO. Without objections, the witness written statements will be entered into the hearing record and I now turn to my ranking member for any remarks he may have.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding these hearings. Thank you for the clever title. Thank you for the comments about Saudi support not for—so much for terrorist organizations but for extremist Islamic clerics who lay the groundwork and advocate if they don't plan and conduct terrorist operations.

I have had significant discussions with the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia who tells me they are certainly not doing it anymore—that at most they funded the construction of mosques decades ago, which now may have been taken over by clerics they don't support.

So I am hoping that one thing comes out of these hearings and that is a letter to the Saudi foreign minister identifying very particular mosques and clerics and that we think are being funded by Saudi Arabia or individuals therein and let's run to ground whether or not Saudi Arabia is at this time funding an extremist version of Islam.

On Monday, the Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi declared victory over ISIS in Mosul. That's a welcome development, but the battle with ISIS-affiliated groups in Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippine terrorist groups continues, including Abu Sayyaf and Maute, and continues in the Marawi area of the island of Mindanao.

A few dozen foreign fighters have traveled from abroad, perhaps more than a few dozen. They include nationals not only from nearby Indonesia and Malaysia but also Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, Yemen, Morocco, Turkey.

The ongoing fighting in Marawi has reportedly left over 500 dead including 90 Philippine soldiers, 39 civilians and 381 ISIS-related fighters.

The Marawi battle illustrates that despite the counterterrorism successes that considerably downgraded Southeast Asian terrorist groups in the late 2000s and the early 2010s, the terrorist threat in the region may be getting a new lease on life and this new generation of terrorists could gain strength by drawing on support from ISIS.

Southeast Asian countries continue to face threats of local and international terrorism. There are over a dozen armed Islamic groups in the region.

ISIS has already successfully recruited about 1,000 nationals from Southeast Asian countries to come support their efforts in Syria and Iraq, their so-called caliphate—we hope dying caliphate.

As to counterterrorism, in the past we have seen al-Qaeda's influence appear through Jemaah Islamiyah, a terrorist organization and its affiliates, which claimed responsibility for the 2002 Bali attacks.

Today, the battle for Marawi we see ISIS influence elsewhere, not only there but also in other parts of Southeast Asia.

In Indonesia, the mujahideen Indonesia Timor MIT pledged allegiance to ISIS. ISIS even has a dedicated Southeast Asian unit, Katibah Nusantara, that is fighting in Syria.

As smaller splinter terrorist groups create their own space in Southeast Asia, breaking from larger groups that may have been

very relevant a decade ago. We need to continue to monitor, prioritize, and designate.

We should continue to work with our regional partners to combat and eliminate terrorist organizations as well as prevent ISIS terrorists from returning from the countries of origin in Southeast Asia.

As to our budget, we must ensure that American leadership is maintained particularly in Southeast Asia. The President's budget seems to do the opposite.

Southeast Asia is the home of 625 million people and about 15 percent of the world's Muslim population. American foreign affairs programming in this region should not be reduced but the 2018 budget proposal would reduce VOA broadcasting to Indonesia in the Bahasa language of Indonesia. That is not a reduction that I support.

We should not neglect the tools that strengthen long-term fight against terrorism. Those are, among others, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, education, and development.

Without robust State and USAID programs, Southeast Asia would likely be a less stable area and provide for increased space for terror recruitment.

That is why more than 120, three- and four-star retired generals and admirals wrote to House leadership in February this year urging that the U.S. maintain a robust foreign affairs budget. Never have we heard clearer words from our retired military.

I yield back.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Ranking Member.

For you guys that are here—are going to testify, we run our meeting a little bit different—our hearing. It is a little bit more informal.

I want you to be engaged, because what we are looking for is solutions—solutions to bring this threat that is affecting all of humanity—it is a scourge on humanity—to an end.

It is isolated right now in that one area in Mindanao. I mean, it is all over that whole area. But if we can bring it to an end, I want you to think of solutions that you can give us, and I have read every one of your testimonies and I am going to switch now to my colleague, Ms. Ann Wagner, to introduce a person from her state and I will take it over. Go ahead.

Ms. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for hosting this important hearing.

I would like to take my time to welcome Dr. Sheena Greitens, who, among her many accomplishments, happens to be the first lady of my home state of Missouri.

Dr. Greitens holds a Ph.D. from Harvard University and a Master's from Oxford University where she studied as a Marshall Scholar. She has previously served with the U.S. Department of State's Policy Planning staff and is a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Dr. Greitens has distinguished herself as a professor at the University of Missouri where she has played a leading role in establishing the Institute for Korean Studies. Your books, "Dictators and Their Secret Police: Coercive Institutions and State Violence," hit

the shelves last summer and it is a fascinating take on the foundations of authoritarian power in Asia.

It is, I think, exceptional and all too rare that a busy mother and professional, much less one who is so involved in Missouri's public service—and I speak knowing something about all of these things—makes time to produce world class research on Asia's internal security forces.

We are delighted to have you and such a notable scholar in the governor's mansion and I particularly appreciate your work on Korea and the Philippines and I look forward to our continued collaboration and to your testimony today. So welcome, Dr. Greitens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, and I appreciate—again, I can't tell you how much I appreciate you guys taking your time out. The way this works—I am sure you have been here before—you got the timer in front of you.

You get 5 minutes. Try to get as close to that as you can and I look forward to getting into the question area.

With that, we have Mr. Thomas Sanderson, senior fellow and director for the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, welcome here.

Ms. Supna Peery, research analyst for the Counter Extremism Project. Welcome. And then we have Mr. Michael Fuchs, senior fellow at the Center for American Progress.

Look forward to hearing your testimony. Mr. Sanderson, we will just go down the line. Press your mic button and make sure it is on.

**STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS M. SANDERSON, SENIOR FELLOW AND DIRECTOR, TRANSNATIONAL THREATS PROJECT , CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Mr. SANDERSON. It is on. Excellent. Thank you.

Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you very much for the honor and opportunity to testify before you today on the threat that ISIS poses to Southeast Asia, an issue that has gained greater attention since the battle in Marawi, Philippines began on May 23rd of this year.

This now 7-week-old conflict involves U.S.-advised Philippine armed forces and police and ISIS-affiliated terrorists groups including the Abu Sayyaf group and the Maute group.

My written submission for the record covers the history of terrorism in Southeast Asia, touches briefly on the activities of Arabian Gulf states in the region and then goes into detail on the global threat of foreign terrorist fighters, or foreign fighters, in the battle at Marawi and well beyond, and the implications for that region and for the United States.

My oral comments now will focus on what I see as the most significant issue at hand, ISIS foreign fighters and their presence in Southeast Asia.

Reports from Southeast Asia find that several foreign fighters are among the militants that have died with reports stating that the casualty count shows fighters from Indonesia and Malaysia,

nearby states, Yemen, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, and now one from Singapore, and the chairman also noted one from India.

Furthermore, there are indications that between 40 and 80 foreign fighters are in the immediate vicinity of the battle.

For the past 2 years, my colleagues and I at CSIS have been investigating various dimensions of the foreign fighter threat and, as you all know, since 2012 more than 40,000 fighters from 120 countries joined the battle in Syria and Iraq primarily on the side of ISIS.

I would discourage anyone from thinking about killing down that number because more can join. That 40,000 number is not finite.

An unknown number have been killed in battle. Some are in prison in the region or back home. But an unknown number still engage in battle planning and onward movements. To where, we do not know.

Let me also note, as the chairman noted, there are between 800 and 1,000 Southeast Asians that have made the visit to Syria and Iraq. That, again, number is not certain but it is, roughly, in that range.

What we see in Marawi tells us that the grim reality is something else. Many who went to Syria and Iraq had no prior military training.

What they did go with was a sense of purpose, a desire for adventure, revenge, income, and respect. Some were politically and religiously radicalized. Some went for the good compensation package.

For those that did survive and seek to return home, they realized that they have few options. Most nations do not have a program to demobilize and reintegrate those fighters who played more of a support role.

Indonesia and Malaysia do have a demobilization deradicalization program. The Philippines does not.

This off-ramp to membership in a militant group is an important way to divide those who can rejoin society from those who pose a grave danger and should be prosecuted.

The actors that we are most concerned about are those that receive combat training and experienced high-intensity combat in Syria and Iraq.

These are terrorists who are accustomed to the rigors of urban warfare, who know how to build and disguise bombs, operate small and light arms, launch mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, conduct secure communications with encrypted devices, raise and move money, manage logistics, and funnel images and propaganda into the social media stream.

These conflict-hardened terrorists, if they do make it back to their home countries or end up in third countries, in many cases would face police and military with little or no fighting experience. It would not be a fair match.

These violent extremists have experienced what they see as legitimate divinely-sanctioned fighting. They are heroes to their friends and many others and are unlikely to want to return to a lifestyle less meaningful, in their eyes, and they know that returning to their families and communities is not likely an option.

Governments know that these terrorists have long unexplained absences or have even been bragging about their exploits in the Middle East. Back home, torture, prison, and execution awaits them. Again, the options are few.

Meanwhile, U.S. and coalition-backed Iraqi forces, Kurdish forces, and others have made strong gains against ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq.

What was once an area as large as Jordan under their control is much smaller. At least 60,000 enemy combatants have been confirmed killed and ISIS revenue is falling fast, and it is vital for attracting, equipping, and retaining ISIS members.

In Moscow a few months ago, a colleague and I were able to interview the family of Dagestani fighter who joined the battle in Syria before ISIS emerged and then came under their control.

Heading back to Dagestan is not an option for this individual. We heard for 3 hours the contortions that he and his family have gone through to find a third country in which to find themselves and secure themselves. That means these guys are moving on often not back to their own home.

Three years ago when my team began looking at foreign fighters, energy and attention was focused on stopping them from going to Iraq and Syria, on discovering and disrupting their facilitators at home and en route and trying to get an understanding of what foreign fighters were doing inside the so-called Islamic State.

Their influence back home via social media was also of great concern. But as ISIS' fortunes changed, attention shifted to what foreign fighters might do next.

The battle in Marawi, Philippines provides a sobering example of one of those options. Bringing the fighters' expertise, networks, funding, and fighting credibility to bear on insurgencies in other countries is appealing to some of them.

Returning to their home countries or to third countries to stimulate moribund terrorist groups, recruit new members, and take revenge on governments they see as repressive extends their lives as heroic fighters and gives them purpose and status.

Marawi is a powerful reminder of what they are likely to face in other parts of Southeast Asia and a wider globe when foreign fighters move on from Syria and the Iraqi battlefield.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sanderson follows:]



**Statement Before the  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

***“Black Flags over Mindanao:  
ISIS in the Philippines”***

A Testimony by:

**Thomas M. Sanderson**

Director and Senior Fellow, Transnational Threats Project  
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

**July 12, 2017**

**2200 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Background***The History of Terrorism in Southeast Asia*

Counterterrorism officials and security experts worldwide are paying close attention to high-intensity conflict occurring in the city of Marawi, located on the Philippines' island of Mindanao. Much like the building violence of the late 1990s and early, post-9/11 era, Southeast Asia is once again a gathering front for jihadi-salafi groups and their local, associated movements. During that earlier time, al Qaeda's influence and brand—sharpened by successful strikes on American embassies in East Africa (1998) and in New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (2001), worked its way into Southeast Asia, offering funding, expertise, and the power of partnership. Today, the threat is from a formerly Iraq-based al Qaeda affiliate now known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, or the Islamic State.

A region commonly referred to as “The Second Front” never erupted into the consistent, full-blown terrorist battlefield that many feared following September 11—despite several high-profile attacks in Southeast Asia. Al Qaeda's associated movements -- Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines -- did continue bombings and assassinations. But these occurred sporadically, and over time the groups splintered (e.g., Noordin Top Mohammed left JI in 2006 to launch Tanzim Qaedat al Jihad) and were partially degraded by steadily improving government counterterrorism and law enforcement operations, often supported by Australia and the United States.

Jemaah Islamiyah conducted a brutal bombing in Bali, Indonesia on October 12, 2002—the attack that most often resonates in the minds of Americans when considering violence in Southeast Asia. That assault, widely condemned by the citizens of the world's largest Muslim nation, killed 88 Australians, 38 Indonesians, and 76 additional people from 20 other nations. The Bali attack was carried out by JI operatives trained along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and was funded by al Qaeda. JI was also responsible for attacks in Jakarta on the Marriott Hotel in 2003 and again at the Marriott and Ritz-Carlton in 2009.

Attacks by Indonesian Muslim extremists against Christians, Buddhists and Sufi Muslims has also occurred for many years. And decades before the Bali and Jakarta attacks, separatist movements in Aceh and Papua clashed with Indonesian Government armed forces and police. Indeed, political, separatist, ethnic and religious violence involving a wide spectrum of motivations and targets have been a familiar feature in Indonesia, a sprawling nation of 260 million people and more than 16,000 islands.

Malaysia also figures prominently in any discussion of terrorism and militant activity in Southeast Asia. Two September 11 hijackers used the Kuala Lumpur airport to test flight security measures and to surveil U.S.-flagged airlines. The soon-to-be hijackers, Nawaf Al-Hazmi and Khalid Al-Mihdhar -- along with two compatriots -- were hosted by members of Jemaah Islamiyah.

Today, Malaysia continues to be a popular route for terrorist financial flows, despite the nation's concerted counterterrorism efforts and partnerships with its neighbors and the United States.

Malaysian fighters – along with their Indonesian brethren – are also part of a stand-alone, Southeast Asian brigade or *Katibah* in the ISIS organization.

Returning to the September 11 attacks, the plot had its origins in Khaled Sheik Mohammed’s “planes operation” -- targeting a dozen aircraft departing Asia for the United States. This included attack planning and bomb-making operations at a Manila, Philippines apartment occupied by Mohammed’s nephew, Kuwaiti terrorist Ramzi Yousef -- mastermind of the 1993 bombing of New York City’s World Trade Center.

In the Philippines, the history of resistance by Moros in Mindanao goes back centuries--to rebellions against the Japanese, Spanish, and with America’s own forces at the turn of the 19th century when the U.S. military fought a 14-year battle with the Moro people. But more recently, the Philippines -- a Catholic-majority nation of 100 million citizens and 7,000 islands -- with a large Muslim minority in the south -- has endured years of both communist and ethno-nationalist insurgency—often met with vicious Philippine government reprisals that have worsened the situation.

Groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have fought separatist battles centered on long-running complaints of economic, political, and cultural marginalization. A colleague and I traveled to Mindanao in 2008 where we interviewed, among others, a senior MILF commander at one of the group’s camps. Some members of MILF left to join ASG, while the core of MILF and the Philippine Government have engaged in on-again off-again talks on local rule.

The greatest threats in the Philippines today comes from the gratuitously violent Abu Sayyaf Group and its Mindanao partners, the Maute Group. Previously linked to al Qaeda, ASG and associated groups (including the Rajah Solaiman Movement) bombed ferries, murdered civilians, attacked the Philippine Armed Forces and police—and have also kidnapped and beheaded foreign tourists and Christian missionaries since the group was founded in 1991.

Sidney Jones, the world’s foremost expert on Southeast Asian militant groups, calls the Maute Group “the smartest, best educated, most sophisticated members” across the Philippines’ many pro-ISIS groups.<sup>1</sup> These two prominent, ISIS-affiliated groups joined forces to punish the Philippine military over the past several weeks, fielding foreign fighters and prompting today’s hearing.

Though not in the same category as JI, ASG, or the Maute brothers, it is important to note other actors in conflict elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Separatists among southern Thailand’s Muslim, Malay communities have clashed with the police and armed forces of that Buddhist-majority nation. Though ethno-nationalist in character, the conflict is also seen as religious in nature on the part of some local and foreign actors. During field work on the violence in southern Thailand in 2008, my colleague and I passed through one dilapidated city referred to as “Little Mogadishu” on account of the poverty, violence and radicalization prevalent in the community. It was a tense and volatile area.

<sup>1</sup> (Reuters, “The Maute Brothers: Southeast Asia’s Islamist “time bomb.” Neil Jerome Morales, June 11, 2017. <http://in.reuters.com/article/philippines-militants-maute-idINKBN19306Y>).

Separately and more recently, Thailand has experienced high levels of political instability. As this internal political chaos and violence played out, several Uighur militants from China's restive Xinjiang Province transited Thailand on their way to other parts of Southeast Asia, as well as to the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. Uighur militants have very recently fought and died alongside the East Indonesian Mujahedeen, a militant group active in Sulawesi region and part of the ISIS-linked Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD). JAD is the umbrella organization for several Southeast Asian violent extremist groups linked to ISIS.

In June, 2014, several Uighur militants were also arrested in Manila, Philippines. They traveled on fake Turkish passports and met with Abu Sayyaf Group members. The Uighurs made their way to Indonesia and the Philippines via Thailand and Malaysia--highlighting concerns with militant networks throughout Southeast Asia.

Many conditions and features in Southeast Asia enable terrorism and insurgency: socio-economic strain, sectarian friction, small groups of influential religious conservatives, radical ideologies, large archipelagoes and porous borders, preexisting insurgencies, jihadi veterans, permissive immigration rules, and flexible and informal funding networks. And unlike the 1990s and the early 2000s, social media is now everywhere, allowing for easy communications, recruitment, and financial transactions.

Certain mitigating factors and developments account for the lull in terrorist activity from 2009 to 2016. This included steadily improving law enforcement and counterterrorism (CT) capacities across the region (Indonesia in particular), U.S. military advisory operations with the Philippines; judicial and forensic training through Australia; and, importantly, a large, widely tolerant Muslim community that rejected the Bali attacks and many other terrorist operations.

Sunni states of the Arabian Gulf have long made their presence felt in Southeast Asia. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia supports very conservative preachers and madrassas with both funding and materials. Saudi Arabia has constructed more than 150 mosques in Indonesia, a university in Jakarta, and sponsored teachers at scores of schools in the country. A branch of the Saudi Arabia-based al-Haramain Foundation was shuttered in Indonesia in 2004 for having links with JI.

Saudi Arabia directs funding to two institutions in Indonesia. The first is the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab (Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies or LIPIA). Established by the Saudis and associated with Riyadh's Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, LIPIA is staffed by instructors from the Kingdom. The Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (the Indonesian Society for the Propagation of Islam) was created in 1967, helping to erect hospitals, distribute Korans, and provide scholarships to students in Indonesia. These organizations position Saudi Arabia to exert influence on religious, social, and cultural matters.

This foregoing history of recent terrorist activity, local conditions, and outside or regional influences in Southeast Asia is limited—there are many more attacks, foiled plots, actors, and contextual issues that could be covered. Though the region has not experienced the constant, high-level terrorism and insurgency of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia--

Southeast Asia has seen sharp spikes in terrorist activity along with slightly lower level violence involving a wide variety of militant groups, civilians, and local security services.

**The Threat at Hand: Black Flags over Mindanao**

*The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon*

In the 1990s and through the early 2000s, some of Southeast Asia's top fighters and leaders trained and fought overseas. They returned with battlefield skills, funding, friendships with fighters across the globe, and the credibility to recruit new members, raise funds, and lead violent extremist organizations.

This list includes JI's Dulmatin, a key figure in the 2002 Bali bombing who was trained by al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Also active in Afghanistan during the "anti-Soviet Jihad" was future JI commander, the Singaporean-born and Malaysia-raised Nasir Abbas (whom I interviewed in 2008). Abbas operated across Indonesia and managed a camp in the Philippines until his eventual arrest by Indonesian authorities in 2003.

But it was not until the emergence of ISIS in 2013 and the group's dramatic string of victories and Caliphate declaration in June, 2014, that vast numbers of aspiring jihadists begin traveling to Syria and Iraq to take up arms against the Assad regime and its allies, along with innocent civilians and other rebels designated as enemies by ISIS leadership. Since 2012, the U.S National Counterterrorism Center estimates that more than 40,000 fighters from 120 countries joined (primarily) ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

With a skyrocketing profile and multifaceted appeal, other terrorist groups around the world either changed their allegiance from al Qaeda to ISIS or split off from groups that refused to drop their commitment to AQ's Ayman al-Zawahiri. ISIS was ascendant while AQ had a lackluster leader -- and the ISIS caliphate was rising in a region where several states had collapsed. It was a sea change across the global, jihadi-salafi movement. People young and old, male and female, signed up in droves.

*Foreign Fighters to and from Southeast Asia*

Various government and non-government sources estimate that between 800 and 1,000 Southeast Asians have journeyed to fight in Syria and Iraq. This number represents only a small part of the estimated 40,000 total foreign fighters, but it is more than sufficient to wreak havoc on the region as some of them return—equipped, trained, and empowered.

There is an all-Southeast Asian (primarily Indonesian and Malaysian) brigade called the **Katibah Nusantara** -- led by an Indonesian, Bahrun Naim. Naim is credited with conceiving and directing a January, 2016 terrorist attack in Jakarta while still in Syria, killing eight.

Katibah Nusantara's battlefield exploits and remotely directed operation in Jakarta demonstrate the strength and reach of ISIS and its Southeast Asian members, likely inspiring others to join or

support the group. Katibah leader Naim has even encouraged local residents in Indonesia to use the 2015 Paris attacks as a guide for operations in their own country<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, the success and higher profile of Katibah Nusantara could potentially influence ISIS perspectives on Southeast Asia. As ISIS continues to lose territory and revenue in Syria and Iraq, it may look about for areas where it can shift its leadership and activities.

Another issue to consider is that of regional fighters who are unable to make their way to the Middle East, and instead look for local battles to join. Among the fighters that have participated in the Marawi attack are Indonesians and Malaysians—which still count as foreign fighters while engaged in operations in the Philippines. There is no reason such fighters should be overlooked or discounted because they traveled a shorter distance to the battlefield.

#### *Abu Sayyaf Group and the Maute Group*

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) is a Philippine jihadist organization founded in 1991 by Abdurajak Janjalani as a splinter from the larger Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). ASG's primary goal is to create an Islamic State in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. Janjalani's strong personal ties to Osama Bin Laden led it to declare allegiance to al Qaeda. But that ended in 2014 when the Abu Sayyaf Group officially pledged allegiance to ISIS.

Isnilon Hapilon, one of the leaders of ASG, was confirmed by ISIS as the Emir of all of Southeast Asia in 2016 (though without receiving an official ISIS wilayat or province, designation). ASG now solely operates under Hapilon as a wing of ISIS in the region. The remainder of fighters in ASG who did not switch alliance to the Islamic State no longer operate as the ASG.

The Maute Group (self-identified as *Daulah Islamiyah*, or Islamic State) includes several members of a large family in Mindanao, and is led by brothers Abdullah and Omarkhayam Maute. Their parents are currently in the custody of the Philippine Government. Abdullah was educated in Jordan while Omarkhayam attended Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. By marriage, the Maute Group is linked to conservative clerics in Indonesia. The group is fighting for an independent Muslim state in Mindanao, and have pledged allegiance to ISIS leader al-Baghdadi, adopting the group's black flag.

Though Hapilon does hold the title of Emir, his ASG faction was forced out of Basilan Island and into the Maute brothers' territory. Major friction between the two groups is not yet evident—and could remain that way as long as there is a pitched battle against the Philippine Armed Forces.

#### *The Marawi Battle*

Now in its 7<sup>th</sup> week, the battle in Marawi has become the focal point of ISIS activity in Southeast Asia as two of its most prominent affiliates hold out against the Philippine Armed Forces. The fighting was sparked on May 23 when Philippine Government forces attempted to capture ASG

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Jones, Director of the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict

leader, Isnlon Hapilon. More than 500 militant fighters joined the battle, suffering high numbers of casualties while also inflicting considerable losses on Philippine Government forces and police. As of early July, more than 300 militants and nearly 100 military and police were killed in house to house, street by street warfare.

But it is the list of nationalities among the militants' body count that is raising alarms in counterterrorism/counter-insurgency communities: among the roughly 80 foreign fighters thought to have been in the battle, the dead included fighters from Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Chechnya, Yemen, Indonesia, Malaysia. For years, experts and government officials have feared and warned of the return of highly motivated, experienced salafi jihadi fighters. Marawi is the starkest example to date of their potential impact.

CSIS Southeast Asia expert Geoff Hartman sees the siege in Marawi as “a major step forward in coordination between this nascent coalition of ISIS-linked fighters in the southern Philippines.”<sup>3</sup> Hartman goes on to point out that what we are witnessing in Marawi are the consequences of a failure of the Philippine Government negotiations with Moro insurgents and the growing ISIS presence on across the region. Those two phenomena have converged in Marawi with devastating results—and ones that may be repeated across this large and restive region.

#### *Implications*

With no short-term solution to the battle nor the larger, underlying conditions in Mindanao in sight, where might this crisis be in the coming weeks and months? As the ASG-Maute coalition holds on in Marawi, it will inevitably attract more foreign and local fighters, financial support, and media attention. ISIS could come to see this as its primary, extra-regional destination as its fortunes continue to tumble in the Middle East and North Africa.

None of that is good for the security of the Philippine nation, especially local civilians (Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and others) in desperate need of economic development and responsive government.

Southeast Asian nations stand as good partners of the United States. America has an abiding interest in seeing their citizens thrive and in reducing distracting and dangerous developments. Singapore, a prize for any militant group given the city-state's fierce, anti-terrorism posture and its close relationship with the United States, has already been the subject of numerous plots, one planning a rocket attack on the massive Marina Bay Sands Hotel.

Some of the other concerns regarding the ISIS-affiliated, ASG-Maute Group alliance and the use of experienced foreign fighters in battle include:

- A new battlefield that is more accessible to regional extremists
- A foothold for ISIS where it can recruit across a large Muslim region

<sup>3</sup> Geoff Hartman, “Marawi Battle Highlights the Perils of a Stalled Peace Process in the Philippines.” CSIS Commentary, June 29, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/marawi-battle-highlights-perils-stalled-peace-process-philippines>

- Battlefield expertise, networks, funding, and street credibility being brought to bear on an already unstable region and poorly governed territory
- The potential to establish a new caliphate resulting in violent extremist groups contesting government control of territory
- Violent overreaction from a rash Duterte Administration in the Philippines
- An uncertain and still volatile U.S. / Philippines relationship

#### **Conclusion**

The violence in Marawi is a stark warning of a convergence of several troublesome factors, including an expanding, insurgent-minded ISIS, radical ideologies, poor (and violent) governance, highly stressed communities, returning and regional foreign fighters, accessible funding, criminal activity, and adept use of social media.

The next few weeks and months will be a severe test for the Philippines, other Southeast Asian nations, and partners such as Australia and the United States. As ISIS' hold on territory erodes further, it will look to surprise successes like the battle in Marawi as part of a combined exit/expansion strategy. There is little time to waste in degrading those efforts.

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#### **Sources**

*CSIS project field visits and interviews in Southeast Asia; Congressional Research Service, Rappler, Reuters, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (Sidney Jones), NBC News, BBC, Brookings Institution, Time, West Point Combating Terrorism Center, Geoff Hartman (CSIS), Rajaratnam School of International Studies (Singapore), Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore Straits Times, East Asia Forum, South China Morning Post, CSIS Transnational Threats team, Center for Security Studies (Zurich).*

Mr. YOHO. Thank you.  
Ms. Peery.

**STATEMENT OF MS. SUPNA ZAIDI PEERY, RESEARCH  
ANALYST, COUNTER EXTREMISM PROJECT**

Ms. PEERY. Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the threat from extremism in the Philippines.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Chairman, could she pull the mic a little closer maybe?

Ms. PEERY. 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 works to combat the growing threat from extremist ideology.

Fears of growing ISIS activity in Southeast Asia became all too clear over the siege on the city of Marawi that began on May 23rd.

Despite President Duterte's statements yesterday that the siege is likely to end within 10 to 15 days, he conceded that ISIS remains a long-term threat to the Philippines and the region.

In addition to the domestically radicalized Muslim youth by Abu Sayyaf and the Maute group, Philippine intelligence believes that some of the ISIS-linked fighters in Marawi were foreign fighters from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East, as mentioned already.

The presence of foreign fighters reinforces the argument that pro-ISIS propaganda has the power to unify militants across borders in Southeast Asia, raising the possibility that the Philippines could become an ISIS hub if extremism in Mindanao is not addressed immediately.

ISIS is the most successful brand of Islamist extremism globally because it has identified a formula to connect its fundamentalist principles to proactive action but its adherents.

It has been effective and consistent in spreading its propaganda over the Internet and via social media platforms in numerous languages without much interference from tech companies or effective challenges from progressive Islamic organizations online, which we often call counter narrative.

In the Philippines, ISIS ideology filled the void left by the death of Abu Sayyaf group founder and charismatic cleric Abdurajak Janjalani.

There is unfortunate continuity in this statement since the ASG under Janjalani and ISIS are both al-Qaeda offshoots ideologically.

Janjalani fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s under an al-Qaeda Mujahideen Abdul Rasul Abu Sayyaf for whom Janjalani named his terrorist organization once he returned home to the Philippines in 1989.

ISIS rhetoric now replaces Janjalani's voice to radicalize youth in Mindanao along with other extremists like the Maute group, whose leader studied in Egypt and Jordan before successfully recruiting via social media and through the Islamic schools in Mindanao itself.

ISIS ideology targets Muslims in person online by preying on existing grievances and co-opting them, offering a singular solution

based on the distinctive identity marker of faith without requiring an adherent to understand the faith itself.

Examples include the oft-cited identity issues of lone wolves in the West and secular separatist movement turned Islamist, like Chechnya in the 1990s and '80s, or even economic marginalization as in the Philippines today on the island of Mindanao.

A critical bridge connecting root causes to violence in the name of faith is the proliferation of proselytizing within Muslim communities by individuals or organizations often labelled orthodox, fundamentalist, or puritanical.

Professor Mohammed Osman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore argues that this indoctrination toward fundamentalism needs to be addressed by governments wanting to combat extremism.

For example, in Malaysia he notes that the increased fundamentalism of the community has damaged the coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims present for centuries in the region.

That attitude is problematic, he states, because once one starts dehumanizing one group by saying they are deviant, infidels, or hypocrites, it makes it easier for people to be influenced by the ideas of ISIS, which advocates the murder of Muslim religious minorities, non-Muslims, and homosexuals, as examples.

Consequently, the U.S. must expand its counter extremism strategy to push allies like the Philippines to embrace a two-prong strategy beyond military policies, which are important.

First, we must work to remove extremist propaganda online and on the ground, especially among student organizations and schools.

Second, we need to replace the extremist propaganda with counter narrative ideology and messaging formulated by moderate and progressive Muslim organizations. To succeed, these ideas must be implemented domestically and regionally as well as online.

The U.S. can assist the Philippine Government in their effort to remove extremist propaganda from the Internet and social media platforms by working with them to develop policy and by helping them discuss the issues within the private sector and within the tech industry specifically.

Indonesia is of particular importance, given that it hosts about 70 percent of pro-ISIS Web sites in the region and that information—the visuals, the YouTube videos—it reaches the Philippine population as well as the rest of the region.

Second, the U.S. can advocate for the Philippine Government to support community efforts to prevent radicalization because community leaders rather than government are possessed with the credibility to build grassroots counter extremism programming that focuses on educating the public on the values underlying pluralism, tolerance, and community building across race, ethnicity, sect, and gender.

The Philippine Center for Islamic Democracy is one such organization that deserves government and international support. The center has been working with the Muslim religious sector, particularly female religious scholars and madrasa teachers to develop capacities and competencies and strengthening their role as advocates for peace and human rights.

For this purpose, the center has developed human rights training within a Sharia framework and the peace education manual.

Regionally, we can also support cross collaborations with organizations like the center to build counter narrative information books and content that can go online as well.

Regionally, like-minded organizations include Nahdlatul Ulama and the Wahid Institute in Indonesia, Sisters in Islam in Malaysia, which specifically Sisters in Islam focuses on promoting universal human rights including advocacy for women through an Islamic lens. Sisters in Islam has challenged in the past the legality of child marriage and polygamy, for example.

It is critical to legitimize peaceful debate within Muslim communities and protect balance and progressive grassroots voices.

The U.S. can encourage allied governments in Southeast Asia to recognize grassroots organizations as a source of strength to counter extremism and protect their right to speak and engage with the public.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Peery follows:]

**Supna Zaidi Peery**  
**Strategic Policy Analyst**  
**Counter Extremism Project**  
**Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**  
**“Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia”**  
**July 12, 2017**

Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the threat of extremism in the Philippines. 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.

Fears of growing ISIS activity in Southeast Asia continues to increase with the siege on the city of Marawi starting on May 23 of this year. This is the latest in a series of purported ISIS-related extremist measures, connecting the Philippines to pro-ISIS activity in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Maldives since 2014.

The separatist movement in Mindanao precedes ISIS and even al-Qaeda, with the formation of the Moro Liberation Front on the island of Mindanao in 1971. The Philippines has also endured anti-government violence from Communist nationalist rebels over decades. Consequently, several thousand Filipinos have been murdered in bombings, assassinations, kidnapping attempts, and executions. Some high-profile attacks in the Philippines involved the kidnapping and execution of foreigners, including Western missionaries and tourists. Official government figures report that 290 militants, 70 soldiers, and 27 civilians were killed, with an additional 246,000 displaced, between May 23 and June 27, 2017. That said, while Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has negotiated with the Communists to somewhat defang them, he has stated he will not make the same effort with Islamists in Mindanao, from where he originates.

Moreover, the ISIS brand and its propaganda has the power to unify militants across borders in Southeast Asia, further destabilizing the region. This is especially true given the regional growth of pro-ISIS support and the concurrent return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq to multiple states in the area.

Philippine intelligence reported that some of the ISIS-linked fighters in Marawi traveled from abroad, including from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East. The presence of foreign fighters raises concerns that the Philippines is becoming an ISIS hub.

This is what makes the insurgency in Mindanao dire, and a plausible anchor for greater violence throughout the region and beyond if the influence of extremist ideology is not effectively countered today.

What the U.S. can do is limited but key for long-term resistance to ISIS-style extremism—not only in the Philippines but globally. First, we must acknowledge that we are not in a position to defend a “right” versus “wrong” Islam. Rather, we can develop consistent policies, talking points, and programming support grounded in principles of universal human rights, focusing on community behavior that violates these norms, irrespective of the motivation.

ISIS preys upon Muslims and reinterprets socio-political problems and/or individual identity issues as inherently Muslim problems, and thus provides a confident and aggressive solution grounded in its interpretation of Islam. Accordingly, a counter-extremism strategy must include supporting grassroots progressive Muslim organizations. This will only work with buy-in from our allies, like the Philippine government, itself a target of such extremism.

Consequently, the US must expand its counter-extremism strategy to push allies, like the Philippines, to embrace a two-pronged strategy: (1) Remove extremist propaganda online and on the ground, especially among student organizations and schools, and 2) replace extremist propaganda online and within the community with ideology formulated by progressive Muslim organizations. To succeed, these ideas must be implemented domestically and regionally, as well as online.

### **Background**

The Muslims of Mindanao have for centuries sought independence—first from Spain, then from the United States, and now from secular Philippine rule. One of the earliest secessionist groups is the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The group was established in 1971 to fight for an independent Moro (Islamic) state in Mindanao. Filipino Muslims refer to themselves as Moro, a derivation of the word ‘Moor,’ a derogatory term used by Spanish colonialists to refer to North African Muslims. The term was then adopted by the Christian majority of the Philippines to describe their Muslim neighbors in the southern islands of the country.

After years of conflict, the MNLF signed a peace agreement with the Philippine government in 1996. The agreement granted autonomy to the people living in areas under the MNLF’s control, known as the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The most recent manifestation of the pursuit of independence is the militancy of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), an Islamist terrorist organization seeking 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, drawing the focus back to ASG's presence in the southern Philippines and its potential threat to other areas of Southeast Asia.

ASG and the closely aligned Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) pledged allegiance to ISIS, according to videos uploaded to YouTube on July 23, 2014. A January 2016 video released by ISIS suggested that the group's leadership in Syria had confirmed ASG factional head Isnilon Hapilon as the leader of ISIS in Southeast Asia. Several other Filipino extremist groups throughout Mindanao have also pledged allegiance to ISIS, including the Maute Group and Ansar Khalifah Philippines (AKP).

President Duterte stated on November 28, 2016 that Philippine intelligence services had confirmed that ISIS had connected with the Maute Group. The group, also known as the Islamic State in Lanao, was responsible for several terrorist incidents in Mindanao in 2016.

On the same day, Philippine police discovered a bomb near the U.S. embassy in a trash bin, believed to be planted by Maute militants. Four members were arrested the same day and found to be carrying video clips of themselves pledging allegiance to ISIS. According to media reports, the Maute group is also responsible for December 28, 2016 explosions on a town celebration in Leyte, an island in the middle of the country. Two bombs were reportedly detonated using a mobile phone, injuring 23 revelers.

Generally, Philippine military and police forces have struggled in dealing with extremist groups. The struggles stem from a lack of capacity, poor coordination, and geographical obstacles. However, the government has made efforts to restructure and strengthen its counterterrorism measures in cooperation with the United States and its regional neighbors. Through military and economic initiatives, the Philippines has increased its capability to constrain violent activity and reduce financial and material resources available to extremist groups like the NPA (New People's Army), ASG, and Jemaah Islamiyah.

During President Duterte's first month in office, in July 2016, he took action to establish peaceful relations with the Communists. President Duterte made promises to release political prisoners and issued offers for positions in his administration to those willing to join peace talks. On August 25, 2016, Duterte declared a ceasefire with the Communist Party of the Philippines and NPA, and ordered the Philippine military and police forces to abide by the declaration. The first round of formal peace talks between the Communists and the Duterte administration were held in Oslo, Norway on August 22-28, 2016.

On May 23, 2017, Philippine soldiers launched an operation in Marawi in search of pro-ISIS ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon. According to the Philippine army, government troops

acted following reports that Hapilon was in Marawi to potentially unite with the Maute Group, which is based in the city. Soldiers and Maute militants continued to clash two weeks later as rebels seized control over large parts of Marawi. Local media reported that the Maute militants burned the Marawi jail and Dansalan College and attacked the Amai Pakpak Hospital. President Duterte subsequently declared martial law on the entire island of Mindanao, where Marawi is located.

In response, the Philippine military launched an offensive on May 25 against the ISIS-linked militants in Marawi. Maute and Hapilon's ASG fighters reportedly kidnapped at least 200 people, including children. According to Philippine intelligence, as many as 40 of the 400-500 ISIS-linked fighters in Marawi traveled from abroad. The foreign fighters reportedly included Indonesians and Malaysians as well as at least one national each of Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, Yemen, India, Morocco, and Turkey. The siege is ongoing and the government has ruled out negotiations with the militants. Hapilon has reportedly fled the city.

The escalation of violence on Mindanao since June has raised concerns internationally about the stability of not only the Philippines but Southeast Asia, where ISIS sympathizers from the Maldives to Singapore to Indonesia have been arrested, successfully traveled to Syria, or committed terrorist acts at home for years now. Some experts note ISIS's extreme rhetoric is being normalized by the proliferation of foreign-funded, puritanical interpretations of Islam spreading throughout the region, including to the Philippines' neighbor Malaysia. Prior to the current siege, President Duterte had promised to crack down on extremist groups operating in the country, but stated that he would honor existing peace processes with the MNLF and MILF. Duterte has explicitly refused to negotiate with the more violent ASG, and on August 1, 2016 effectively shut the door on peace talks with the terror group, stating, "I will not deal with persons with extreme brutality. There is no... reason for me to sit down and talk with criminals."

#### **ISIS's Ability to Co-opt Grievances and Unite Extremists Under Its Brand**

ISIS is the most successful brand of Islamist extremism globally because it has identified a formula to connect its fundamentalist principles to proactive action by its adherents, and has consistently spread its propaganda over the Internet and via social media platforms numerous languages—without much interference from tech companies or challenges from the online presence of counter-arguments from progressive Islamic organizations.

ISIS ideology targets Muslims in person or online as individuals or as a society. It does not matter if they are practicing or not practicing—the individual must simply identify on some level as Muslim, even if only by birth.

Second, ISIS preys on existing grievances and co-opts them, offering a singular solution in the rhetoric of faith, requiring the individual or community to embrace its extremist interpretation of Islam. Examples include the oft-cited "identity issues" of lone wolves in

the West; separatist movements like that in Chechnya in the 1990s; general societal grievances like endemic corruption; and economic marginalization in other nations, including in the Philippines.

French terrorism analyst Olivier Roy calls this process of reinterpreting “root causes” as the “Islamisation of radicalism.” According to Roy, “[T]hose influenced by generational revolt or opposition to dominant societal paradigms are now more likely to generate narratives from their understanding of Islam,” rather than doctrines like Marxist ideology or ethno-nationalism, which previously attracted Filipinos with grievances against their government. Consequently, ISIS offers a grand solution based on the singular identity marker of faith, without requiring an adherent to understand the faith itself.

ISIS’s ideology empowers the individual or society to act on its own behalf to implement the solution—a future state of validation, stability and certainty that the purported root causes have denied the individual or community.

One should not conclude that by conceding the presence of root causes, Islamist ideology does not need to be addressed. This is because the rhetoric of ISIS remains one of the primary drivers designed to transform grievances into violence committed by Muslims.

Professor Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore notes that in some of the wealthiest countries in the world, Muslim minorities, like the Malay, are economically disadvantaged. “But, the number of those who actually turn to violence within this group is low.” Thus, “economics alone cannot explain the strong support of ISIS” in the region.

Moreover, there is no singular profile of extremists. While some come from poor backgrounds, the majority come from the middle and upper classes. Dr. Osman adds that while,

“issues of ethnic conflict and corruption are certainly contributing factors, they cannot be identified as the main sources of discontent. There are larger issues affecting Muslims around the world that can better explain ISIS support in Southeast Asia. There is a need for Muslims to reassess the position of Islam on certain issues in order to deal with the fringe minorities who have interpreted the religion in a certain way. In this regard, the Salafi jihadist-type is one that we need to understand.”

By “Salafi,” Dr. Osman does not necessarily mean individuals who self-identify as such. Rather, they are those Muslims that accept the “norms that are defined by Salafi thinking.” This includes finding non-fundamentalist practices of Islam, including that of Islam’s minority sects, as deviant; advocating for anti-blasphemy laws; limiting the role of religious minorities and women in the public sphere; and self-segregating in order to maintain the purity of their community standards.

Dr. Osman warns that the “salafization” of Muslims in Malaysia, for example, has damaged the coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims present for centuries in the region “That attitude is problematic,” Dr. Osman says, “because once one starts dehumanizing Shiite Muslims by saying they are deviant, infidels, or hypocrites, it makes it easier for people to be influenced by the ideas of ISIS,” which advocates the murder of Muslim religious minorities, non-Muslims, and homosexuals.

### **Pro-ISIS Support in SE Asia**

The issue of extremism in the Philippines must be viewed as part of the problem of increased radicalization of Muslims throughout Southeast Asia. ISIS’s propaganda in the region increases the risk of 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.

There are indications in recent years of increasing support for implementing fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic law— as well as growing support for ISIS— among some Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. For example, the monarchy of Brunei instituted sharia law in 2013. Brunei is nestled on a small corner of a much larger Malaysian island. Cross-border influence is very possible.

Likewise, only in 2015 was a retailer in Malaysia selling pro-ISIS merchandise finally shuttered, despite local law enforcement knowing that the store sold ISIS flags, as well as 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 Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) members protesting in front of American Mining Company Freeport in central Jakarta, Indonesia. HT has chapters in more than 40 countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia. The group advocates an end state similar to ISIS—regime change in favor of a caliphate. Rather than supporting indiscriminate violence to realize its vision, HT hopes to convert key figures in society—like the military—so that a coup can bring about a peaceful change in government. HT events in Indonesia regularly attract more than 5,000 men, women and children. Consistent with Roy’s argument articulating the Islamization of radicalism, HT’s propaganda protesting the American mining company argues that allowing Western firms to extract Indonesian minerals is un-Islamic.

ISIS propaganda and networking between Southeast Asian militants serving in Syria and those still in the region have created a nascent but powerful network supporting extremism from the Middle East to Southeast Asia.

This was best illustrated on January 14, 2016 when pro-ISIS militants attacked a Starbucks café in Jakarta, killing 4. The pro-ISIS militant responsible for the attack, Bahrun Naim, is believed to be connected to ISIS propagandist Abu Jandal in Syria and

pro-ISIS ideologue Aman Abdulrahman, currently behind bars in a maximum-security prison in Java, Indonesia.

Abu Jandal is one of many Twitter propagandists monitored by the Counter Extremism Project. We have repeatedly urged Twitter to take down his account. Abu Jandal uses Twitter to advocate for ISIS and promote other extremist accounts. Via Twitter, he 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 nine other local Islamist groups.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Remove Extremist Propaganda Online**

The first step is to assist regional governments in their effort to remove extremist propaganda from the Internet and social media platforms. First, Southeast Asian governments must formulate policies and work with the private sector to take down extremist propaganda online. Indonesia is of particular importance, given it hosts about 70 percent of the pro-ISIS websites in the region.

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. On June 23, 2016, ISIS released its first video in the Philippines.

The aforementioned Dr. Osman has also stated that Internet and social media propaganda remain the primary means to ISIS recruitment. One key factor for this reason is that ISIS propaganda is in multiple languages, including Bahasa Indonesia, which Dr. Osman notes "is similar to the Malay language. Anyone who speaks Malay would also understand Bahasa, while the Bahasa majority—more than 90 percent of Muslims in Southeast Asia—would also know Bahasa."

Separately, so-called peaceful Islamist events host religious televangelists like Zakir Naik, who teaches a supremacist interpretation of Islam historically alien to Southeast Asia. His YouTube channels span multiple languages and have millions of subscribers. There are numerous videos on YouTube of Naik preaching to Filipino congregants. His extremist rhetoric resulted in an arrest warrant in his home country of India in 2016. In May 2017 Naik became a citizen of Saudi Arabia and continues to preach globally.

ISIS propaganda is further strengthened by grassroots activism of ideologically like-minded groups that claim to be non-violent, which spread a mindset that jihadi recruiters

can exploit to encourage militancy. Analysts, Houriya Ahmed and Hannah Stuart from the Centre for Social Cohesion stated in a detailed [report](#) about Hizb ut-Tahrir that while it purported to be a non-violent political organization, numerous members became “radicalised by HT’s sectarian ideology, and former members have since participated in terrorism.”

## **2. Identify and Support Community Efforts to Prevent Radicalization and Counter the Hateful and Violent Ideology of Extremism**

It is commonly understood that local community leaders, rather than government, are possessed with the credibility necessary to persuade young people not to fall victim to radicalization.

This requires supporting grass-roots counter-extremism programming that focuses on educating the public on the values underlining pluralism, tolerance, and community-building across race, ethnicity, sect, and gender.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy (“the Center”) is one such organization that deserves government and international support. The Center is working with civil society organizations (CSOs) to organize a CSO-led ASEAN Conference on Peace and the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE), set for September 22-23, 2017. Through the conference, a network of CSOs and NGOs will collaborate on PVE initiatives to develop national action plans for their respective jurisdictions, as well as finalize a template for a regional action plan on PVE.

The Center has also been working with the Muslim religious sector, particularly female religious scholars and madrasa teachers, developing their capacities and competencies and strengthening their roles as advocates for peace and human rights. For this purpose, the Center has developed an Aleemat module on human rights within a sharia framework, and a Peace Education manual (which reflects the culture and traditions of Muslim Filipinos).

“We feel that working with women and youth is key to building the community’s resiliency against the influence of extremist groups”, Salma Rasul, a program manager at the Center, stated in an email to me last week.

Regionally, recognition of grass-roots activity is also growing. The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore formed a network called the Young Southeast Asian Muslim Forum to engage Muslims at the grass-roots level. The forum brings Muslim youth from seven countries together to engage in workshops. It is important to note, as Dr. Osman [explains](#), that “[T]he workshops weren’t called counter-radicalization workshops”, but workshops focusing on the “positive portrayal of Islam because, obviously, much of the negative portrayal is related to terrorism. We need more of this type of small-scale work and to think about more operating at the grassroots level.”

It is critical to legitimize discourse within Muslim communities and protect liberal grass-roots voices. The U.S. can encourage ally governments in Southeast Asia to recognize liberal grass-roots organizations as sources of strength to counter extremism, and protect their right to speak and engage with the public.

In Indonesia and Malaysia, Salafi-inspired organizations have larger grassroots networks that provide services, unlike the more mainstream organizations that are limited in size and reach. Despite this gap in resources, more moderate groups are trying to establish themselves and engage with the public. Unfortunately, criticism from the more orthodox organizations results in pushback from the government directly or by other organizations with the tacit consent of the government at times.

Yet, counter-narrative programming still grows. In Indonesia, 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 organization's motto is "Seeding Plural and Peaceful Islam." "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," said Ms. Wahid. "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) 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**

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

Unchallenged, extremism will continue to spread and be a destabilizing and stigmatizing force for every country where extremist propaganda is allowed to proliferate. The first victims are always peaceful Muslim citizens. The Philippine government and other regional governments have an opportunity to respond properly to the growing extremist threat by addressing important identity issues and providing alternatives to the extremist messages churned out daily by ISIS and other Islamist groups. Otherwise, the threat to other countries, including the United States, will only grow over time.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you.  
Dr. Greitens.

**STATEMENT OF SHEENA GREITENS, PH.D., ASSISTANT  
PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI**

Ms. GREITENS. Thank you very much.

Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to appear today to discuss the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia.

My remarks will focus on American security cooperation with the Philippines, the U.S. ally most affected by this threat. For time's sake, I will focus today on the policy recommendations that are contained in my longer written testimony.

Before that, there are two brief points that may be useful: First is that the Philippines has a more complex security environment than most other U.S. allies in Asia because of its internal challenges. Manila has always had to balance between external defense and internal needs, which include both disaster relief and counter insurgency or counter terrorism. Under the previous President, the Philippines had begun to shift toward a more external maritime focus, but Duterte's presidency, combined with recent developments, are returning them toward a more traditional inward focus.

Second is that the Philippines is an incredibly pro-American place. There is, however, a long-running concern, particularly on the Philippine left, about potential encroachment by the United States on Philippine sovereignty, and that has directly affected our security cooperation and basing agreements in the past. Our alliance generally fares best when we acknowledge this domestic political reality.

In the past two decades, U.S.-Philippine security cooperation has focused on counter terrorism and, most recently, on maritime security.

As we all know, we are here today because in the past year or so concerns about terrorism have increased. Those concerns center on the so-called black flag militant groups in the southern Philippines who have sworn loyalty to the Islamic State and achieved recognition from them, as well as on the ISIS-affiliated fighters who are returning to the region. Today, these ISIS-linked groups in Marawi have held territory in an urban siege that has lasted almost 2 months and claimed an estimated 500 lives.

Abu Sayyaf has also increased its kidnapping for ransom operations, which have raised substantial revenue for the organization and jeopardized the safety of trade in waters around the southern Philippines.

Today, I would like to offer seven primary recommendations.

First, Congress can play a real positive role in strengthening America's security cooperation with the Philippines. Despite Duterte's rhetoric, the Philippines remains strongly pro-American, and congressional engagement could productively focus on places like the legislature, the departments, the military, local governments, and civil society, all places where the value of the alliance with the U.S. is broadly recognized.

Second, Congress can build on broader outreach to ASEAN to show that U.S. support for the region is strong and bipartisan. I

commend the subcommittee's activities on that front thus far and hope that Congress continues its engagement in this economically and strategically vital region.

Third, the United States can continue or consider expanding maritime security assistance. Congress played an important role in establishing the Maritime Security Initiative in Southeast Asia, and it is important that, even as the Philippines confronts intensifying internal threats, it does not ignore external defense needs.

Maritime security assistance can improve Manila's ability to address multiple challenges at once—disaster relief, counter terrorism, and places like the South China Sea. It also allows Congress to support our two countries' shared security goals while remaining a strong voice for human rights and the shared values that underpin the alliance between our two democracies.

Fourth, if the Philippines requests, the United States should examine its options for reactivating formal counter terrorism cooperation initiatives such as the previous Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines based in Zamboanga. Our military is already providing technical assistance in Mindanao, so clearly defining the parameters of that engagement and its compatibility with the Philippine constitution can help avoid domestic blowback, and keep the focus where it fundamentally needs to be—preventing ISIS from establishing a foothold inside the territory of a U.S. Asian ally.

Fifth, we can support Manila's cooperation with other U.S. security partners. Trilateral patrols, which have recently begun with Indonesia and Malaysia, are an important step and will be more meaningful as the Philippines continues to improve its maritime capacity. That is a place where partners like Japan, Australia, and South Korea can all play an important role.

Sixth, the United States can identify productive forms of economic engagement, including regional tools for counter terrorism finance. Like maritime capacity building, financial tools can address multiple priorities at once, such as counteracting North Korea's money laundering and revenue-generating activities in the region. It will be important to limit the flow of funds, especially now, from ISIS agents in the Middle East to groups in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

Seventh, the United States should monitor two issues that are likely to affect recruiting and support for ISIS-linked groups throughout Southeast Asia. First is the peace process in Mindanao, where the collapse of the 2014 agreement has contributed to individuals and factions splintering away from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front toward these more radical groups. Second, the treatment of the Muslim population in Burma could well become a recruitment tool and a rallying cry for Islamic militants region wide. The U.S. needs to be carefully monitoring these issues and supporting effective, inclusive, long-term solutions.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Greitens follows:]

**Statement before the  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

**“Black Flags over Mindanao:  
Terrorism in Southeast Asia”**

Testimony

Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science  
University of Missouri

12 July 2017

Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2200

Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, it is an honor to appear before you today to discuss the threat of terrorism in Southeast Asia and American foreign policy in the region to address this threat.

My remarks today will focus primarily on the security threats facing the Republic of the Philippines, the U.S. treaty ally in Asia that is most affected by the growing terrorist threat throughout Southeast Asia, and on how the United States can strengthen its security cooperation with the Philippines to address this threat.

### **The Importance of Southeast Asia & The U.S.-Philippines Alliance**

Mr. Chairman, I know that in previous hearings the Subcommittee has discussed the importance of Southeast Asia to the United States in both economic and security terms. The strategic importance of Southeast Asia to the United States is longstanding, and the U.S. continues to strengthen its defense cooperation with countries across the region in recognition of its continued and growing importance. We have treaty alliances with both Thailand and the Philippines, and robust and growing security relationships – including training, military exchanges, and defense-related trade – with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and increasingly Vietnam.

The Philippines is particularly important to American national security and foreign policy in Asia. The country is a former U.S. colony with deep historical and cultural ties to the United States, the world's twelfth-largest country by population, a lively democracy, and the region's fastest-growing economy with a robust trade and investment relationship with the United States. Since the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951, the Philippines has been one of the United States' two treaty allies in Southeast Asia, and one of our most important security-partners in the Asia-Pacific.

In thinking about how to craft today's security cooperation with the Philippines to best address the changing counter-terrorism needs that we observe in the region, I wish to emphasize two main points.

First, the Philippines has a complicated and challenging security environment with which to contend, much of which is internal. The country is a 7,000-island archipelago, much of it low-lying, which renders it especially vulnerable to natural disasters such as typhoons and which places significant demand on the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to conduct Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations. Throughout the Philippines' history, it has also dealt with internal challenges related to crime, militancy, piracy, and terrorism – including the world's longest-running communist insurgency by the New People's Army (NPA) as well as a decades-long Muslim separatist movement in Mindanao. The high salience of internal security challenges makes the Philippines unusual among American treaty allies and partners in Asia.

As a result of this security environment, the Philippine government and armed forces place a relatively heavy emphasis on internal security issues and capabilities. This has been true throughout the Philippines' history; during the Cold War, the United States guaranteed the

Philippines' external security via the Mutual Defense Treaty, and the AFP focused primarily on internal security tasks. Under the previous President, Benigno Aquino III, the Philippines had begun to shift its focus more toward external defense, embarking on a defense modernization program that, among other things, started the process of moving the land-heavy AFP toward a force structure that emphasized air and maritime capabilities. Aquino also pursued international arbitration to challenge Chinese actions in the South China Sea and increased cooperation with the United States and other security partners, such as Japan and Australia, in pursuit of stronger external and maritime capabilities. Duterte has, to varying degrees, pulled back (or threatened to do so) from all of these initiatives – questioning the value of the US alliance and the more recent EDCA agreement, courting Chinese investment and infrastructure assistance, and declining to press Beijing on its actions in the South China Sea after the arbitration court ruled primarily in Manila's favor last year. Duterte's focus on internal security, therefore, is a return to the more internal focus that the AFP and Philippine government have traditionally held since 1945. I'll return to that issue in the section below.

The second point to emphasize relates to domestic politics in the Philippines, and their effect on specific forms of security cooperation. The Philippines is, consistently, by any survey you look at, one of the most pro-American places on earth. There are strong people-to-people ties between the U.S. and the Philippines and there is broad and stable goodwill toward the United States. At the same time, it is useful to remember that some of Duterte's statements echo – albeit using more colorful and inflammatory language – a long tradition of concern on the part of the Philippine left regarding potential U.S. encroachment on Philippine sovereignty. These concerns contributed to the withdrawal of U.S. forces from bases in the Philippines in the early 1990s, and the subsequent Philippine constitution explicitly forbade the establishment of permanent foreign military bases on the country's territory. American forces have, as a result, rotated through the Philippines under a Visiting Forces Agreement signed in 1999 and expanded (in terms of the number of bases hosting US troops) by the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), now including Lumbia Airfield in Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao. U.S. security cooperation has generally been most successful when it acknowledges this reality in Philippine domestic politics.

### **The Changing Security Landscape**

During the past two decades, US security cooperation with the Philippines has focused primarily on either maritime security or counter-terrorism. From 2002 to 2015, the United States deployed several hundred special operations personnel to the southern Philippines for counter-terrorism purposes. The primary focal point of that cooperation, the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTFP), was discontinued in early 2015 after US involvement in a controversial operation, though the U.S. has, at the request of the Philippine government and military, provided intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and other technical assistance during the recent operations in Marawi.

As tensions have risen in the South China Sea, much of U.S. security cooperation in recent years has focused on maritime security, in keeping with the growing emphasis of the AFP on these missions. As part of this, the U.S. has refocused or added programs aimed at building the Philippines' naval and coast guard capabilities, as well as strengthening the country's maritime domain awareness. The United States has also regularly sent ships and personnel to the region

for humanitarian missions, such its assistance after Typhoon Yolanda struck the Philippines in November 2013, and the U.S. military's ongoing participation in Pacific Angel to deliver humanitarian assistance and training.

Over the course of the past year or so, however, concerns about terrorist activity in Mindanao have increased. These concerns have focused on a number of "black flag" militant groups based in the southern Philippines who both have sworn loyalty to Islamic State (IS or ISIS) and received recognition from them, and on the potential threat posed by IS-affiliated fighters returning to the region from fighting in the Middle East. In late November 2016, one of these IS-linked groups, the Maute group, occupied Butig in Lanao del Sur for five days. Fighting continues in Marawi, where IS-aligned fighters – principally from the Maute group, Abu Sayyaf, and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters – appear to have coordinated to hold parts of the city in an urban siege that has now lasted almost two months. At the time of writing this testimony, Mindanao has been under martial law for around 50 days, an estimated 90 military and law enforcement personnel, around 40 civilians, and 380 militants have been killed in the fighting, around a quarter-million civilians have been displaced, and significant parts of the city have been destroyed. The Maute group was suspected of having placed a bomb near the U.S. embassy in Manila last November and of having bombed President Duterte's hometown of Davao as well. The appearance of foreign fighters in Marawi – not just Malaysians and Indonesians, but reportedly also Saudi, Yemeni, and Chechen fighters – raise the real possibility that Mindanao will become a central attraction for jihadists unable to travel to the Middle East or attracted to the operational, physical foothold being established in Mindanao. The collapse of a 2014 peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) has exacerbated this territorial and political challenge, as militants disillusioned with the peace process turn to more radical IS-linked organizations instead.

At the same time, concerns about the number of abductions – kidnapping-for-ransom operations – carried out by militant groups in the waters around the southern Philippines have also heightened. Western hostages whose family or home governments did not meet ransom demands by the deadline have been executed, while the payments made for other hostages raise concern that these operations have been effective at raising funds for IS-linked militants. The Philippine press reported last fall that Abu Sayyaf, which has pledged allegiance to ISIS, had raised at least \$7 million in 2016 from its kidnapping operations. As a result of these maritime security concerns, and concerns about the safety of trade between the two countries, Indonesia temporarily suspended shipping and banned coal exports to the Philippines (70% of the country's supply). These kidnap-for-ransom operations therefore, are not only a maritime security and a law enforcement issue, but carry importance for counter-terrorism and trade throughout the region as well.

In short, the resurgence of Abu Sayyaf and the emergence of links – rhetorical and otherwise – between militant groups in Mindanao and Islamic State, especially in the context of the collapse of the peace agreement, lead to a significant increase in the counter-terrorism threat in the southern Philippines, and pose risks to the trade that passes through the Sulu Sea. The sub-committee's examination of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and especially toward the Philippines, therefore, is timely.

### **Recommendations for Successful Security Cooperation**

There are compelling national security reasons for the United States to remain active and engaged in Southeast Asia, including in the Philippines. I'll focus here on seven recommendations where I believe Congress can play a significant role in advancing that cooperation, particularly as it relates to the region's shifting security landscape and growing counter-terrorism challenges.

First, Congress can play a real, strong, and positive role in addressing the terrorist threat and strengthening American national security partnerships in Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines. Concern in Washington about Duterte is understandable, but the Philippines remains a strongly pro-American place, and the Philippine government – both civilian and military – continue to consistently recognize the productive partnership that exists between our two countries. Additional Congressional engagement, including but not limited to visits to the region, could send an important signal. It is also important that this engagement extend beyond Malacanang to the various departments, the military, the legislature, local governments and leaders, and especially Philippine society. Strong leadership by Congress to signal U.S. presence, participation in, and commitment to the region can have a significant impact at the present time.

Second, Congress can build on the administration's engagement with ASEAN more broadly to show that U.S. support for the alliance with the Philippines is strong and bipartisan. President Trump's phonecalls to regional leaders and scheduled travel to the region, Vice President Pence's visit to Indonesia, Secretary Tillerson's meeting with ASEAN foreign ministers, and Secretary Mattis' participation in the Shangri-La dialogue have all signaled the importance of the region and begun to lay out an initial security vision of the U.S. role in a peaceful, prosperous, and free Asia. I commend this sub-committee's attention to ASEAN and to American policy in Asia thus far, and hope that Congress will continue to deepen and intensify its engagement in this strategically and economically vital region.

Third, the United States can continue, and consider expanding, its current maritime assistance to the Philippines. Executed well, maritime security assistance has the potential to simultaneously improve the Philippine government and military's ability to deal with multiple priorities: conducting ITADR operations, improving law enforcement and counterterrorism capabilities, and boosting external defense toward to AFP's previously-stated goal of a "minimum credible deterrent." It is important that, even as the Philippines deals with an intensifying internal security and terrorist threat, it does not completely abandon efforts to strengthen its maritime capacities and defenses on the South China Sea.

Congress played an important role in establishing the Maritime Security Initiative for Southeast Asia, which aims at strengthening maritime domain awareness (MDA) and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and establishing a common operating picture among the United States and the countries of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines. The Philippines was set to receive \$40 million in 2016 as part of a total of \$425 million spent on the Initiative between 2016 and 2020; it may make sense given changing conditions to re-allocate increased funding toward the Philippines in order to focus capacity-building where it is most urgently needed.

Maritime capacity-building also has the advantage of focusing on cooperation that doesn't raise concerns under the Leahy Amendment, and allows Congress to continue having a strong voice

on shared values such as human rights. This will help strike the right balance between recognizing the popular support that Duterte has had thus far, and strongly affirming the shared values upon which today's alliance is based. Continuing to regularly send humanitarian missions, as the U.S. has been doing, will be helpful for reinforcing these shared values domestically in the Philippines as well, as part of the broader engagement recommended above.

Fourth, if the Philippines requests it, the U.S. should be willing to examine its options for re-activating formal counter-terrorism cooperation initiatives with the Philippines, such as the previous Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines based in Camp Navarro in Zamboanga. The advantage of doing so is that, with the U.S. military currently providing technical assistance to the AFP, clearly defining the parameters of U.S. military involvement in the southern Philippines – insofar as this is possible given security considerations, of course – and proactively affirming that this presence will be consistent with the Philippine constitution may help to avoid domestic sensitivities. It is not necessary or desirable for U.S. counter-terrorism assistance to become a political football in Philippine domestic politics. Careful communication will help keep the focus on the important shared interest that our two countries have: preventing IS from establishing a physical foothold inside the territory of a U.S. treaty ally in Asia.

Fifth, the United States can support the Philippines' efforts to cooperate with other U.S. security partners throughout East Asia, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The launch of trilateral patrols and information-sharing among Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in late June were an important step forward in boosting regional cooperation on counterterrorism and counter-piracy efforts. A common or shared "watch list" used by immigration and border control authorities across the three countries could additionally facilitate this cooperation. Strengthening the Philippines' naval, coast guard, and maritime law enforcement capability in the ways described above is also important to making this cooperation have teeth, and partners such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea have an important role to play in that capacity-building, augmenting and heightening the impact of American efforts.

Sixth, the U.S. can identify productive forms of economic engagement with the Philippines and Southeast Asia. This includes not just focused trade agreements on travel goods, but efforts to strengthen financial tools for combatting terrorism in the region. Like maritime capacity-building, these efforts can be geared to achieve multiple priorities at once – such as strengthening regional financial architecture to counteract North Korea's money laundering and revenue-generating activities in the region. It will be especially important to proactively limit the flow of funds from IS agents in the Middle East into Southeast Asia, in order to limit the growth and operational capabilities of IS-affiliated groups in the Philippines and elsewhere.

Seventh, the U.S. must be thoughtful about, and should monitor closely, the political context in which IS-linked terrorism might unnecessarily be able to gain greater traction. There is little question that the collapse of the 2014 peace agreement between the government and the MILF, and the resultant failure to create the Bangsamoro region in Mindanao, have contributed to the splintering of individuals and factions away from the MILF and toward more radical groups. Regionally, the treatment of the Rohingya Muslim population in Burma has also been identified as a grievance that could become a unifying cause, recruitment tool, and rallying cry for Islamic militants across Southeast Asia. The U.S. should therefore closely monitor the progress of these two issues, and express support for the development of effective, inclusive long-term solutions to two of the region's longest-standing points of tension.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, and I appreciate the passion in that. That was good.

And now we will go to Mr. Fuchs, if you would.

**STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL FUCHS, SENIOR FELLOW,  
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

Mr. FUCHS. Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear at today's important and timely hearing.

Terrorism in Southeast Asia is a serious challenge and a direct threat to the lives of innocent civilians in the region and to U.S. national security interests.

The United States has a direct interest in working with the countries of Southeast Asia to counter terrorist threats and can do so most effectively through building capacity, supporting democracy and human rights, and investing in the necessary diplomatic and development tools.

Terrorism has long been a threat in Southeast Asia and the potential return home of Southeast Asian fighters who have fought in Iraq and Syria are raising fears that they might exacerbate an already dangerous network of terrorist groups in the region.

The Governments of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and others, including the United States, are focused on countering these threats.

There is much work to be done and we must be vigilant. This threat, while dangerous, is a threat that we can tackle.

With focus and practical efforts, the United States can help these countries make real progress. There are many challenges that the United States and the countries of the region face in combatting this threat.

Governments in the region are often hamstrung by lack of development in governmental capacity, few economic opportunities, weak government institutions and rule of law, and porous borders are just some of the many obstacles the countries of the region are up against.

The United States too faces difficulties. An over militarized CT approach can be counterproductive where rhetoric and actions that feed a "us versus them" dynamic hurts U.S. counterterrorism efforts and, likewise, a lack of investment in resources can hamstring U.S. policies.

There are a series of steps that the United States can take to make more progress and I, too, have seven recommendations.

First, the United States must strengthen its diplomatic and development capacities in Southeast Asia including through more personnel and resources. U.S. diplomats are best equipped to lead the charge.

They often know best what is happening in these countries, have the best relationships with foreign governments and are best positioned to develop locally-tailored strategies to prevent terrorism.

Gutting the budgets and State and USAID, as has been proposed by the Trump administration, will unilaterally disarm U.S. counterterrorism policy.

Second, the United States must prioritize support for democratic rights-respecting governments and societies in Southeast Asia.

The stronger the democratic institutions, rule of law, and tolerance in these countries, the more effective they will be at preventing terrorism and the more resilient they will be in weathering any threats.

Third, the United States needs to support the institutional capacity of partner governments. We should look carefully at how best to support countries developing legal frameworks for combatting terrorism and training law enforcement and intelligence officials, to name just a couple of examples.

Fourth, the United States should invest in economic growth and development. While the region overall has grown economically, millions of people remain impoverished and living in communities cut off from economic opportunities, creating environments where people are too often susceptible to terrorist propaganda.

Education and cultural exchanges are crucial here. We should be inviting young leaders from around the world to learn in the United States, not making it harder for them to come to this country.

Fifth, the United States should use the military sparingly and judiciously. The U.S. military can help prevent terrorist acts when used carefully in conjunction with other tools, as has been proven in the southern Philippines.

But at the same time, we must be aware of the sensitivities of heavy-handed U.S. presence in the region.

Sixth, the United States should support regional international efforts that can strengthen cooperation amongst the countries of Southeast Asia.

From ASEAN to the Global Counterterrorism Forum to working with other partners like Japan and Australia, there are numerous opportunities for the United States to support regional counterterrorism efforts in Southeast Asia.

And seventh, the United States should engage with the countries and peoples of the region as partners instead of lecturing and criticizing.

People around the world look to the United States for leadership and to uphold the universal values. And so the United States must act in both word and deed to strengthen those universal values, not to foster perceptions of an “us versus them” mentality.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fuchs follows:]

**House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

**Hearing on "Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia"**

**Testimony by**

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**July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sherman, and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear at today's important and timely hearing.

Terrorism in Southeast Asia is a serious challenge and a direct threat to the lives of innocent civilians in the region and to U.S. national security interests. The threat has existed in different forms for years, and the growth of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its attempts to expand into Southeast Asia has once again raised the profile of the danger in the region.

The United States has a direct interest in working with the countries of Southeast Asia to counter these threats. The most effective ways to do so include forging strong diplomatic partnerships, supporting economic growth and development, bolstering law enforcement and intelligence coordination, and spurring regional cooperation. At the heart of any strategy must be support for democratic, rights-respecting, tolerant societies. And the only way for the United States to be effective in countering terrorism in Southeast Asia is to invest in the diplomatic and development tools – personnel, programming, and platforms – necessary to implement these strategies.

### **The Threat**

Terrorism has long been a threat in Southeast Asia, but that threat gained new prominence for U.S. policymakers in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Today, the battle between Philippines forces and fighters aligned with ISIS in the southern Philippines city of Marawi is the most recent example of the potential potency of the threat. These insurgencies are not new: the southern Philippine islands have experienced these threats since colonial times, making the region a periodic home for terrorist organizations. Other attacks in recent years have primarily occurred in Indonesia, including the bombing of a nightclub in Bali in 2002, the attack on the JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta in 2003, the bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004, and most recently a set of attacks in central Jakarta in 2016.

Today, the potential return home of Southeast Asian fighters who have fought in Iraq and Syria are raising fears that they might exacerbate an already dangerous network of terrorist groups in the region.

The governments of Indonesia, the Philippines, and others – including the United States – are focused on countering these threats. At last month's Shangri-La Dialogue it was clear that defense ministers from across Southeast Asia agreed that the "unprecedented" terrorism threat – in the words of Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu – requires a more intense focus and increased regional cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time that countries grapple with the threat, it is important to place the dangers in context: terrorism is not existential for the governments in the region and it does not likely pose significant threats to the U.S. homeland at this time. In the

long run, managing this security challenge – and preventing it from growing into a more direct threat to U.S. interests – above all else requires capable governments that follow the rule of law, prioritize sustainable and equitable economic growth strategies, and which protect the values of human rights and tolerance and work to strengthen democratic institutions. Regional cooperation and support from the United States and other international actors can play key roles in these domestic efforts. This is a threat that – with focused and practical efforts – the United States can help these countries make real progress against.

### **Challenges**

The countries of Southeast Asia face many challenges in addressing the terrorist threat, and the United States likewise faces real obstacles in supporting those countries in their counterterrorism efforts.

In Southeast Asia, governments are often hamstrung by a lack of development and governmental capacity. Poverty and a dearth of economic opportunities for certain communities can often provide ripe environments for terrorist organizations to find refuge and recruits. Government institutions are often lacking – from poor law enforcement training to intelligence capabilities to a weak rule of law – hindering the abilities of governments to effectively counter threats. Similarly, in some places – such as the southern Philippines – a lack of government control over the territory provides opportunities for terrorist groups to find safe haven. And porous borders throughout much of the region – including in between Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia – mean that terrorists can too often travel easily undetected.

The United States faces difficulties in working with the countries of Southeast Asia to counter the terrorist threat. The colonial pasts of many countries in the region result in intense sensitivity to foreign militaries operating in the region. And the United States too often over-militarizes its approach in ways that can make cooperation with governments more difficult. In addition, Southeast Asian governments perceive the United States as easily distracted from the challenges in Asia, which can cause wariness in the region about whether the United States will make good on long-term commitments to cooperate.

Similarly, the United States too often hampers its own counterterrorism efforts by adopting “us vs. them” rhetoric and actions that portray the United States as engaged in a battle with a religion rather than individual terrorist groups. On the campaign trail, one of the many offensive comments President Donald Trump made about Islam included stating that, “I think Islam hates us.”<sup>2</sup> After President Trump unveiled his first “travel ban” in January 2017, pro-ISIS groups applauded the move because it would help them recruit followers. A retired CIA veteran, Robert Richer, called the travel ban a “strategic mistake” and “a win for jihadists and other anti-U.S. forces.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the gravest self-inflicted wounds the U.S. could inflict on itself is following through on the Trump administration's proposal to drastically cut the size of the State Department and USAID. The most important tools in any counterterrorism strategy in Southeast Asia are diplomats, development professionals, and programming focused on supporting economic growth and capacity building. Cutting the State Department and USAID by roughly 30% – as the Trump administration has proposed – would irreparably damage our counterterrorism efforts in the region by reducing staff necessary for diplomatic efforts and programmatic resources available. As 120 retired generals and admirals put it in a February letter urging Congress to “ensure that resources for the International Affairs Budget keep pace with the growing global threats and opportunities we face,” the military “needs strong civilian partners in the battle against the drivers of extremism – lack of opportunity, insecurity, injustice and hopelessness.”<sup>4</sup> Rather than taking a careful look at the budget to determine how best to maximize resources to tackle specific problems like counterterrorism, the Trump administration is letting artificial reduction goals drive national security decision-making – a dangerous approach.<sup>5</sup>

Another challenge for the United States is making sure that counterterrorism efforts in the region in no way condone or aid in efforts by governments in Southeast Asia to repress their own citizens. Most countries in Southeast Asia have histories of repressive dictatorships that clamped down on dissent and individual liberties under the guise of security needs. Similar challenges exist today, including in the Philippines where President Rodrigo Duterte is ignoring human rights in his campaign against drugs, and in Thailand where the government is run by a former general who overthrew the previous, democratically elected government. Similarly, in Indonesia, Malaysia, and elsewhere, there is often a tenuous balance between efforts to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies and protecting freedom of speech.

While the United States needs to work with many of these regional governments on issues like counterterrorism, the United States will only exacerbate the problem by actively working with governments in ways that could harm innocent civilians and further strengthen autocratic policies and tendencies.

### **Recommendations**

The United States has a number of tools with which to help the countries of Southeast Asia counter the terrorist threat, and there are a series of steps the United States can take to make more progress.

First, the United States must strengthen its diplomatic capacities in Southeast Asia, including through more personnel and resources. Fundamentally, preventing terrorist attacks boils down to having the best intelligence possible about potential threats, and the best intelligence comes from close working partnerships with countries where terrorists may be at work. This is why U.S. diplomats and the work

of the State Department are central to counterterrorism efforts in Southeast Asia (and around the world) – they are almost always the front line officials in working with other countries to prevent and combat these threats. They often know best what is happening in these countries, have the best relationships with foreign counterparts, and are best positioned to develop locally tailored strategies to prevent terrorism. Likewise, development professionals and programs support economic growth and strengthen the rule of law in less developed areas, which can dry up opportunities for terrorist groups to recruit. The United States should be ramping up investments in diplomatic and development personnel and resources across the board.

Second, the United States must prioritize support for democratic, rights-respecting governments and societies in Southeast Asia. The stronger the democratic institutions, rule of law, and tolerance in these countries, the more effective they will be at preventing terrorism and the more resilient they will be in weathering any threats. The United States can best support democratic institutions and societies in the region through robust partnerships with governments that prioritize those interests and through specific programming to help countries build democratic institutions, carry out free and fair elections, and promote education and tolerance. In some instances when regional partners are damaging their country's democratic institutions and values – including now with the governments of the Philippines and Thailand – the United States will need make sure that: regional partners understand the United States prioritizes democracy and human rights; specific cooperation on threats like terrorism in no way aid the regime's undemocratic actions; and that certain assistance and engagement can be postponed or cut off if rights violations persist.

Third, the United States needs to support the institutional capacity of partner governments in Southeast Asia. The United States will not be effective in addressing terrorist threats in the region if the countries of Southeast Asia cannot adequately handle these challenges – and they cannot adequately do so if they do not have a robust rule of law, judiciary systems, and well trained and equipped law enforcement and intelligence agencies. The United States should look carefully at how best to ramp up targeted assistance programming to support countries developing legal frameworks for combating terrorism and training law enforcement and intelligence officials, to name a couple of examples.

Fourth, the United States should invest in economic growth and development in the region. While the region overall is growing economically, millions of people remain impoverished and living in communities cut off from economic opportunities and where people are too often susceptible to terrorist propaganda. Widespread corruption only exacerbates the lack of opportunity, derailing infrastructure projects, trade and investment.<sup>6</sup> In the Philippines, the Mindanao region is home to the highest proportion of poor in the country<sup>7</sup>—and it is no coincidence that Mindanao is also the site of continued fighting between the Philippine government and terrorist insurgents. A wide range of U.S. programs run by USAID, State, and the

Millennium Challenge Corporation can play significant roles in helping to support the efforts of regional governments to expand opportunity for their own citizens, and should receive additional resources. Educational and cultural exchanges like the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) also provide opportunities for individuals that can leave positive impacts in their communities.<sup>8</sup>

Fifth, the U.S. should only use the military sparingly and judiciously. The U.S. military can help prevent terrorist acts when used carefully and in conjunction with other tools. For instance, U.S. military cooperation – including military assistance, training, and the deployment of Special Operations forces – with the Philippines to counter terrorist threats has helped reduce the threats in the south.<sup>9</sup> But the United States must be very cautious about using the military for counterterrorism operations in Southeast Asia because the appearance of military cooperation to combat domestic threats in the region is highly controversial and can easily backfire, making governments less supportive of receiving U.S. support. Again, massive reductions in the budgets of the State Department and USAID will likely push the Pentagon to take a more pro-active role in these efforts in the region, which could be counterproductive.

Sixth, the United States should support regional and international efforts that can strengthen cooperation amongst the countries of Southeast Asia in combating terrorism. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has numerous mechanisms to enable cross-border cooperation, and the United States can support the convening and training of law enforcement officials, diplomats, intelligence and defense officials to coordinate their efforts and share lessons learned. The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) is an international grouping dedicated to sharing best practices for combating terrorism and radicalization. Indonesia is the only Southeast Asian country in the GCTF, and the United States should encourage others to join. And the United States can also increasingly encourage other regional partners – including Australia and Japan – to invest more resources in counterterrorism and development efforts in Southeast Asia.

And seventh, the United States should engage with the countries and peoples of the region as partners instead of lecturing and criticizing. The United States must pursue partnerships with the countries of Southeast Asia by tailoring unique strategies to each environment, and help governments increase their commitments to human rights, the rule of law, and tolerance. Some of the actions and rhetoric from President Trump – including his “travel ban” and language in his speech last week in Warsaw calling for the defense of the “west” and “our civilization” – only deepen suspicions of some in Muslim-majority countries and provide propaganda tools for terrorists. People around the world look to the United States for leadership and to uphold universal values, and so the United States must act in both word and deed to strengthen those universal values, not foster perceptions of an “us vs. them” mentality.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> David Tweed and Jason Koutsoukis, "Southeast Asian Defense Chiefs Sound Alarm on Terror Threat," *Bloomberg Politics*, June 4, 2017, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-06-04/southeast-asian-defense-chiefs-sound-alarm-on-terrorism-threat>

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Schleifer, "Donald Trump: 'I think Islam hates us'" *CNN*, March 10, 2016, available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/donald-trump-islam-hates-us/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Joby Warrick, "Jihadist groups hail Trump's travel ban as a victory," *The Washington Post*, January 29, 2017, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/jihadist-groups-hail-trumps-travel-ban-as-a-victory/2017/01/29/50908986-e66d-11e6-b82f-687d6e6a3e7c\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_rhp-top-table-main\\_jihadist-groups-635pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm\\_term=.ac823a444c67](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/jihadist-groups-hail-trumps-travel-ban-as-a-victory/2017/01/29/50908986-e66d-11e6-b82f-687d6e6a3e7c_story.html?hpid=hp_rhp-top-table-main_jihadist-groups-635pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&utm_term=.ac823a444c67)

<sup>4</sup> Sidney Traynham, "Over 120 Retired Generals, Admirals on State and USAID Budget, 'Now is not the time to retreat,'" *U.S. Global Leadership Coalition*, February 27, 2017, available at <http://www.usglc.org/2017/02/27/over-120-retired-generals-admirals-on-state-and-usaid-budget-now-is-not-the-time-to-retreat/>

<sup>5</sup> Carol Morello and Anne Gearan, "Senators sharply question State Department budget cuts," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2017, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tillerson-argues-state-departments-main-focus-should-be-on-us-security/2017/06/13/0438ebdc-503f-11e7-be25-3a519335381c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.ad8d626adb28](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tillerson-argues-state-departments-main-focus-should-be-on-us-security/2017/06/13/0438ebdc-503f-11e7-be25-3a519335381c_story.html?utm_term=.ad8d626adb28)

<sup>6</sup> "Why ASEAN Needs to Confront Corruption in Southeast Asia," *Transparency International*, April 24, 2015, available at [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/why\\_asean\\_needs\\_to\\_confront\\_corruption\\_in\\_southeast\\_asia](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/why_asean_needs_to_confront_corruption_in_southeast_asia)

<sup>7</sup> DJ Yap, "12M Filipinos living in extreme poverty," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, March 18, 2016, available at <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/775062/12m-filipinos-living-in-extreme-poverty>; "2015 Poverty in the Philippines," *Philippine Statistics Authority*, 2015, available at [http://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2015\\_povstat\\_FINAL.pdf](http://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2015_povstat_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> "Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative," *U.S. Mission to ASEAN*, 2016, available at <https://asean.usmission.gov/yseali/>

<sup>9</sup> Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, Gillian S. Oak, "U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001-2014," *RAND Corporation*, 2016, available at [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1200/RR1236/RAND\\_RR1236.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1236/RAND_RR1236.pdf)

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, and I appreciate everybody's testimony, and we are going to break rank a little bit here, and I am going to let Ms. Wagner go first because she has got another meeting that she has too and then we will let the ranking member go. Go ahead.

Ms. WAGNER. Thank you very much both to the chairman and to the ranking member for their courtesy. I have got a press conference on human trafficking with the Speaker in about 12 minutes.

So the conflict in Marawi is highly concerning and my heart goes out to all those who have lost their lives and been displaced.

It is clear that improving U.S. counterterrorism engagement with our ASEAN partners and allies is critically important.

Dr. Greitens, you mentioned in your statement the June launch of joint patrols and information sharing between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Increased regional cooperation has the potential to be helpful. How can the United States better support regional counterterrorism and border control efforts?

Ms. GREITENS. Thank you very much.

You know, we are seeing the very beginning of some of these forms of multilateral cooperation, particularly, as you mentioned, the joint patrols, which are only a couple of weeks old. One of the things the United States can do is continue to support the intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance capabilities that would guide and support those patrols and to continue to build, via assistance to the Philippines, its overall maritime capacity.

My general sense of these patrols is that the capacity of the Philippine Government in the Sulu Sea and around those southern waters is an area that particularly needs to be beefed up. That is an area where the United States, along with other U.S. security partners like Japan, South Korea, and Australia, can be particularly helpful.

Ms. WAGNER. Great. Thank you very much.

Mr. SANDERSON and Ms. Peery, as you know, many Indonesian officials have been educated in Saudi-funded schools. There are multiple strains of Salafi ideology, as I understand it.

How does Salafi ideology express itself in Indonesia and how influential is Wahhabism? Mr. Sanderson.

Mr. SANDERSON. That is not an area of expertise of mine but let me indicate from field work that I have conducted in the region among all these countries is that Indonesia in particular has a very large moderate mainstream Muslim community. They have large—

Ms. WAGNER. Are there moderate political and jihadi strains involved or—

Mr. SANDERSON. Absolutely. I mean, in every country you would find those. Indonesia happens to be an excellent example where you have very large communities that have rejected those more extreme intolerant interpretations of Islam.

Groups like Nahdlatul Ulama Muhammadiyah and other communities group are—have rejected that. You saw it in the response to the 2002 Bali bombing where there was a rejection of JI's vicious attack that killed 202 people.

So that works to our advantage in the region. But you do have the influence of more extreme forms of Islam that have come in from the Arabian Gulf, that have been pushed through schools and through mosques, and that is of concern to us.

But let me turn to my colleague for more details on that.

Ms. WAGNER. Ms. Peery.

Ms. PEERY. Thank you.

I think the issue of Gulf State funding in general, non-Arab countries with Muslim majority populations is an issue because when we look at the way various Muslim communities practice Islam, it varies greatly and I can full well understand and respect the confusion that there is when people are trying to understand that spectrum and try to create policy with that in mind.

But to your question specifically, the foreign funding that comes into countries like Indonesia are not only spent necessarily to construct mosques or create Islamic schools but they can go to civic organizations like a women's club to do anything that is not really on its face a religious issue.

But that coming together, the way they engage, what they talk about usually is—builds on a foundation of a very, very traditional fundamentalist way of life and that is what is advocated through conversation, socializing, and, for example, in Ramadan the activities that you would have that bring communities together.

I have had conversations that—take this with a grain of salt because it is anecdotal—but people don't want to talk about the fact that, for example, if the Indonesian Government wants to push back on funding that they are not comfortable it has been alleged that the Saudi Government will then come back and say, well, we won't give visas to Indonesians that want to come on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia.

Now, for practising Muslims like my mother, even, going on pilgrimage is a big deal. So for a Muslim-majority country government to do something that can be perceived in the public space as preventing Muslims from practising their faith, the nuances of the issue won't be discussed.

It will become another point that extremists can grab on to and say, this government is not allowing you to be a good Muslim.

Ms. WAGNER. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. Sanderson, there have been reports of Saudi Arabia collaborating with Indonesia on efforts to prevent radicalization and King Salman visited Indonesia this spring.

How effective do you think such deradicalization programs are and is there a role for the U.S. in promoting peaceful ideologies?

Mr. SANDERSON. The Government of Saudi Arabia does not have any interest in sponsoring groups or movements that would then target its own government, which they do.

So what the government may do bilaterally in this case does not always reflect what happens at a different level among clergy, among wealthy individuals who want to fund more conservative ideology, more conservative mosques, more conservative madrasas.

So I applaud Saudi Arabia's effort to work with the Indonesian Government. I think that is a good thing to do. But that is not the only channel of influence and money that comes from Saudi Arabia.

A lot of that comes under the table or it comes privately and I think that is important and that is what we should focus on.

I think the U.S. has a role, certainly, in promoting a range of voices and making sure that there are multiple sources of information and interpretations available to citizens of countries like Indonesia.

Ms. WAGNER. All right. Thank you, Mr. Sanderson.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the time.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Ms. Wagner.

We will go to the ranking member, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. We talk to the Saudis. They say they are not doing anything to promote the extremist views, and I want to draw a distinction between intense orthodox Muslim on the one hand and Islam that has been perverted by those who teach hatred or terrorist acts against those they disagree with.

If a mosque says five times a day means five times a day, no matter what, that doesn't hurt anybody.

If it says fast, continue the fast until the sun goes down and even if there's an ember and better wait another 20 minutes just in case, that doesn't hurt anybody.

So I am focused here on the madrasas and mosques that teach or preach a hatred and the wisdom of engaging in violence against those they disagree with.

Ms. PEERY, you talk about Saudi Arabia pushing Indonesia to have the right to fund certain extremist organizations. Is that only anecdotal or do you have the facts that would allow me to confront the Saudi Government with that?

Ms. PEERY. Unfortunately, so far only anecdotal. But—

Mr. SHERMAN. Then I ask every witness here to try to furnish specific instances where there is an organization—a mosque, a madras, or other organization that you then identify has engaged in a particular act of preaching or teaching hatred or terrorism so that we can turn that to the Saudis and say, are you funding any of these.

I would especially want you to highlight those that you have any evidence that the Saudis are in fact funding. I get all these anecdotal reports, then I get a denial, and then I go on to another subject.

Does any witness here have an example of an entity in Southeast Asia that isn't a terrorist group but which preaches or teaches hatred or violence? Ms. Peery.

Ms. PEERY. There is an organization called Hizb ut-Tahrir which is not specifically connected to Saudi Arabia or any one country that funds any type of extremism or fundamentalism. But—

Mr. SHERMAN. So you are saying that this is an organization doing things on the ground in Southeast Asia?

Ms. PEERY. Yes, as well as 40 other countries.

Mr. SHERMAN. This organization is funded by whom?

Ms. PEERY. Multiple sources, apparently. But the issue with Hizb ut-Tahrir is—for example, there is even a chapter in the United States.

I have attended one of their events maybe 2 years ago in Virginia where they are very comfortable with the headline of the conversa-

tion being pro-caliphate or caliphate in the U.S. or something like that. We are lucky in the United States that——

Mr. SHERMAN. And you are using the term caliphate——

Ms. PEERY. Islamic State, specifically. I went there just to see what kind of audience comes and I was very happy to say three people, if that, and they didn't look particularly into the topic.

But if you look at Hizb ut-Tahrir in Indonesia, they have school organizations. They send pamphlets out. They have conferences or book clubs and Indonesia only now——

Mr. SHERMAN. And we don't know who funds them but we think that Saudi individuals or government might?

Ms. PEERY. I don't think it is Saudi specifically, no. But it——

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, I don't—so you—do you think their funds include donors from the Government or citizens of Saudi Arabia?

Ms. PEERY. It is possible.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. I would ask you to document for the record how this organization preaches or teaches hatred, support for a caliphate.

Ms. PEERY. I point to that example.

Mr. SHERMAN. I mean, when I say support for a caliphate I don't mean, like, the peaceful union of——

Ms. PEERY. Right.

Mr. SHERMAN [continuing]. Adjoining predominantly Muslim states. I mean, North and South Yemen joined together and that is fine. It hasn't worked out so well but it is not——

Ms. PEERY. If I may, I just mentioned Hizb ut-Tahrir to make the point that it is one of the most organized and most expansive——

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay.

Ms. PEERY [continuing]. In terms of reach.

Mr. SHERMAN. Does any other witness have specifics here on organizations that teach or preach hatred?

I will move on to another subject—broadcasting. How important is Voice of America and other U.S.-paid broadcasting to achieving the goals we are trying to achieve in Southeast Asia?

Mr. SANDERSON.

Mr. SANDERSON. I made a visit many years ago in which I interviewed several militant groups in Indonesia, the Philippines, and other areas and it also included engaging with the topic you are discussing here now in terms of putting a message out there to promote American values, to promote democracy, to give people alternative sources of information.

There is a broad, broad community of individuals in these countries that are eager consumers of this information but the groups that we are most concerned with have long ago rejected any kind of message coming from the United States from their own Government, from moderate imams in their communities.

So when you speak of the influence of Voice of America, it is influential on people who may be too young to make a decision at this point. They haven't been influenced yet.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes. I mean, obviously, somebody that——

Mr. SANDERSON. But the folks we are concerned about—those being recruited into battle——

Mr. SHERMAN. I am concerned with the 10-year-olds who might go one way or another when they are 15 or 20.

Mr. SANDERSON. I don't know how appealing Voice of America is to a 10-year-old anywhere in the world, to be honest.

Mr. SHERMAN. And their—and their parents.

Mr. SANDERSON. Yes, so it could get to their parents. Their parents could influence them but—

Mr. SHERMAN. Right. Does anyone else have any comment?

Mr. Fuchs.

Mr. FUCHS. Yes. I would just say, agreeing in part with my colleague. I would also point out that I think broadcasting mediums like VOA are part of a broader strategy that the United States and other countries I think can use very effectively to show people of the region, first of all, what U.S. values are but also as alternative mediums for getting information, as Mr. Sanderson pointed out.

I think similarly, just as I mentioned in my testimony, vehicles like cultural educational exchanges that the United States supports in the region are vital. I understand that they may not be on a level of hundreds of thousands of people.

But even so, on the level of hundreds of people and sometimes thousands of people they have ripple effects in their communities. So I think that supporting those sorts of efforts are very valuable.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. My time has expired.

Mr. YOHO. I kind of want to just set the stage. You guys all probably know—I am sure you know this very well.

But when you look at the Asia Pacific region and you look at nation states—archipelago nations like the Philippines has 7,000 islands, Indonesia 17,000-plus.

I was reading where the government really doesn't know how many. I would hope they would. But when you look at that land mass with that much separation between continuity of a country, I don't know how you police that.

So it is ripe for the development of any kind of a movement. It could be peaceful but in this case we are looking at the growing threat.

I have got so many different questions and it is you and I so we are going to have fun and you guys will have to tolerate us, if you will, please.

But when you look at the land mass and just the logistics problem of policing, it just adds to the potential terrorist threat than can affect not just that region but the whole world. We've got more displaced people today than we have since World War II and now we are adding another 400,000 displaced people just on the island of Mindanao. So this is something that we have to take very seriously.

It is something we have to get under control, and one of my first questions is what have we learned from Afghanistan and Iraq with us going in there militarily, without taking in the culture, the norms of a society, tribal communities in the Middle East, what have we learned from there?

Because in Robert Gates' book that was one of the downfalls that we went in there—we were going to show them how America does it without taking into consideration what the people of those countries want. Does anybody want to tackle that?

Mr. Sanderson.

Mr. SANDERSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me first indicate or suggest that our familiarity with the cultures in Southeast Asia is better than it was with Afghanistan for certain.

It doesn't mean it is perfect but we have, of course, had a long history in the Philippines. We have a good relationship with Malaysia and Indonesia.

So we are more familiar with those nations. We have had bilateral exchanges, multilateral exchanges with them on law enforcement, military, civilian levels. So we are in better shape there. But nonetheless, you still have to work with your local partners.

What we have learned in Afghanistan is legion—well, I hope we have learned it. But what we have observed is quite comprehensive.

One of the most important things, in consideration of your comment, is it is not easy or effective to work with corrupt governments. If we do not have good partners on the other side, and we have a mixed bag here in Southeast Asia, then we will not be that successful.

Also, you mentioned the number of islands, 23,000-plus among those two. One thousand islands in Indonesia are inhabited, 600 permanently inhabited.

So there is a lot of space where these guys can go and go various activities. However, they do need infrastructure in order to carry out activities.

So not all of those places are hospitable even to militant groups. But it is a big space. Encouraging more activity in the maritime space is excellent, as Dr. Greitens pointed out, and I hope we will do that.

Mr. YOHO. Okay.

Dr. Greitens, let me move to you. Reading your testimony here, from 2002 to 2015, the U.S. deployed several hundred special operations personnel to southern Philippines for counter terrorism purposes.

Why was that not effective? Why—I feel like this has kind of just been off the radar. I am sure there is a select few that were there that were aware of this. But it seems like from a U.S. foreign policy standpoint, this is something that has kind of bypassed us and it is, like, uh-oh, we now—now we have to catch up.

Why was that not effective in what we are doing? You know, and I will take just the number of insurgents we thought that were in Marawi.

It was, what, 200 to 300—now we know it is over 400 or 500, and there is no telling how many it is going to be. What is your thoughts on that?

Ms. GREITENS. Thank you.

Sir, I think that the decision to wind down the task force was a product of several different factors. One of which was an estimation that perhaps the task force had been more successful in its primary mission, which had to do more with Abu Sayyaf than what was going on on the land.

The Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines was principally dealing with Abu Sayyaf. At the time there was also a peace

process underway in Mindanao, and there was an agreement reached in 2014, the year before the task force terminated in February 2015, I believe.

And so at the time, things in Mindanao looked like they were perhaps coming together a little bit better than they were. So that is one factor that I think affected the decision. As I know that you are aware, Secretary Mattis has stated that perhaps that decision was premature.

But the other factor that we have to think about is that what's happened in the Middle East has produced displacement effects into Southeast Asia. So we are also seeing that as pressure is exerted against Islamic State in the Middle East, that the Philippines has become more appealing. These groups that splintered away from the MILF, some of whom have been in the lead, really, in Marawi, are both a little bit different and driven by different factors than were the principal emphasis for the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines.

But, as I noted in my testimony, if the Philippine Government recommends it, that is something the U.S. should at least be willing to consider, among a range of other options.

Thank you.

Mr. YOHO. That is what we need to be prepared for because as these radicals, the terrorists, come back over, the fighters come back over, being displaced from Iraq, Syrian, wherever, that they are going to come there and there is going to be a coalition or they are going to coalesce together and it is going to form a stronger—it is going to be ISIS Part II, and that is what I think we all need to be concerned about and that is what we are trying to prevent.

So I am going to go to you, Ms. Peery. One of the questions I wanted to ask you is about the Internet and social media and how it is all interconnected.

How could the U.S. Government, working with the regional governments, work with social media and other technological companies to reduce terrorist groups' ability to leverage social media platforms to spread their extremist messages? Do you have any recommendations on that?

Ms. PEERY. I think there needs to be encouragement to have a collaboration between the government, specifically its law enforcement arms and its intelligence services to work with the private sector to look at what the infrastructure specifically looks like.

As I mentioned in my testimony, for example, if Indonesia has 70 percent of the servers that serves—that proliferates the information in the entire region, that is an opportunity for the Philippines to go directly to Indonesia and have a conversation.

It can be as simple as getting them to talk to each other to understand what information they have, what these—where the companies are that run the servers, whether there is an opportunity to further that collaboration with companies like Facebook and Twitter, which are saying more and more that they are willing to take down extremist information and propaganda.

The second part of that, as I mentioned also in my testimony, is taking down extremist propaganda is only half of the problem.

You have to replace it with an understanding of Islam that not only talks about tolerance and pluralism, excuse me, but also re-

jects ISIS propaganda point by point, and that is something that only the local governments within the region can do if they support the grassroots organizations in the respective countries.

Mr. YOHO. All right.

And when you look at it, it just seems like such a daunting task. You have got the 23,000 islands or whatever it is—to try to police that, and you have different nations in there, different rules of law, different levels of the rule of law.

How do you—how do you police that, and I don't know if you can take an island like Mindanao and just say, we are going to shut down the Internet.

I know this is getting broadcast and I am going to—people are going to say I am against First Amendment. I am not. We are trying to get something under control that if we don't get it under control we are going to be fighting for generations and generations, and certainly we have seen that in the Middle East.

Mr. Fuchs, I wanted to ask you, because one of the things that we learned and you had recommended it here was in one of your opening statements was that in the long run, managing the security challenge and preventing it from growing into a more direct threat to the U.S. interests above all else requires capable governments—I think we are all in agreement with that—that follow the rule of law, prioritize sustainability and equitable economic growth strategies and which protect the values of human rights and tolerance and work to strengthen democratic institutions.

This is something I have struggled with for years in Foreign Relations because we all agree with that. I mean, those are the founding principles, the core values of our country and, of course, it has taken us over 200, 300 years to get to this point and we have fought several wars to protect these rights, number one, to get them and to protect them.

When you go into a country, a foreign country—and certainly we learned this in the Middle East—to instill our values and say this is a part of the process, I would like to hear your thoughts.

Should that be at the beginning or should that be the goal and bring that country to those beliefs as success happens?

Because what I see is the foreign policies of the past, we put these conditions and say this is the only way we are going to help you if you do these things, and put that up here instead of focusing on peace, security, rule of law, and good governance.

What are your thoughts on that and how can we do that different and yet accomplish that, say, maybe over a 5- to 10-year goal if we are working in that direction? I think everybody would be better off.

Mr. FUCHS. Absolutely. I think that is a great question.

I think the reality is that you have to do all of it at once, unfortunately, as difficult as it is.

I think that one of the things to recognize about Southeast Asia as compared to, say, the Middle East or some other places is that over the arc of the last few decades we have actually been dealing with a better and better situation on that time span.

These are countries that have become more democratic, transitioned for authoritarian to democratic, in many instances.

So, for instances, in a country like Indonesia we actually have a partner government that is relatively capable in certain aspects and that we can work with on a lot of these very, very challenging issues.

The Philippines, I will say, which has been up and down, right now is a much more difficult task and I think is a good example of exactly the challenge that you are raising here because with President Aquino up until last year, the United States I think was able to support a lot of aspects of Filipino policy that would get at the roots of terrorism in the region including strengthening anti-corruption efforts, growing of the economy, which I think are important aspects of that.

But with President Duterte, whose interests and policies are quite different—his respect for human rights seems quite low, frankly, in my estimation—it makes it much more difficult for the United States with at the one hand to make sure that we are partnering with him and his government to go after terrorist groups and other security threats while at the same time not condoning the sorts of heavy-handed tactics that he has been using domestically in his fight against drugs.

Mr. YOHO. I just want to end with this before I go to my colleague over here, Mr. Connolly, it was nice to see that President Trump called the leaders of those nations and that Vice President Pence went down there, and then Secretary Tillerson has put an emphasis on that area and General participating in the Shangri-La Dialogue.

The message that I want to come out of this hearing today, out of this committee, that goes out, that is being broadcast is that America is back and our focus in on the Asia Pacific region and we are focussing on economics, trade, national security, and, as you've brought up multiple times, cultural exchanges because I think that is the one missing link that we haven't done in the Middle East like we should have and that is an emphasis that we want to put on that.

With that, I am going to turn to my good friend, Mr. Connolly from Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair, though I must say I hardly think America is back. I think in the brief 6 or 7 months of this administration we have done nothing but retreat including from this area.

Nothing is more catastrophic, starting with the retreat from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It creates an enormous void in this region and gives enormous opportunities to our rival, China.

Maybe some think that is a great leap forward. I think it is a great leap backward and definitely not in U.S. interests, and the proof of that was within 1 week Beijing convened a meeting in Beijing of all the remaining TPP partners to see if they could carve out a trade agreement that circumscribed that part of the globe but without us and without our standards.

I also think it was an enormous retreat and again gave the Chinese in this part of the world an enormous diplomatic advantage in withdrawing unilaterally from the Paris Climate Accord.

We are now in the happy company of two countries exactly—Nicaragua and Syria. What a proud moment for the United States. If that is called we are back again, I would rather not be.

So I think there are other points of view about what has happened in this brief period of time and I honestly believe that those two things actually will be seen by history akin to our refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles that most certainly helped precipitate a successor war to World War I, the war to end all wars. But that is a different matter.

Let me ask—Mr. Fuchs, I don't know—I thought I heard kind of squishy language from you just now on the Philippines. This is a dictator who has said, have at it, vigilante violence, and I think the number I think is 7,000 dead that we know of.

He has even advocated for rape as a tactic—as a tool in order to get rid of what he has decided are criminal elements and druggies and drug dealers and drug users and undesirables.

Now, my friend, Mr. Yoho, read from a statement, quite correctly, that our goal is to establish governments—capable governments that follow the rule of law.

How is this a capable government other than being more efficient and killing people in extrajudicial ways that certainly the United States cannot condone, let alone the rule of law?

I mean, I don't want to put words in your mouth but you sounded like, well, except for that—granted, that is a little messy but other than that we have got strategic goals we share.

Well, I mean, Duterte hasn't even been consistent in that respect. I mean, one day he likes China. One day he likes us. I mean, he is threatening. He is not threatening. He could cut a deal with China. He could throw us out.

My head spins with this guy who seems, frankly, unstable and thuggish if not murderous—hardly a partner we want to do business with, though we do. But we will get to that in a minute.

So did you want to clarify your squishy remarks or—

Mr. FUCHS. Sure. Thank you, Congressman.

Well, I will try to restate I think what I was getting at, which is that this is a very, very difficult challenge and I think that without a doubt, democracy and human rights needs to be an essential component of our strategy for a wide variety of goals but including counterterrorism in Southeast Asia.

Now, the United States, obviously, has a long-time alliance with the Philippines. With the previous government, with President Aquino, there was, I think, a very robust partnership on democracy and human rights as well as a variety of other issues.

At the same time, I don't think that the terrible things that President Duterte is doing—and they are absolutely terrible and I think that they merit a response from the United States, some of which I know that you and your representant and your colleagues have already tried to send in a number of different ways—I think at the same time we need to focus on what our interests are there in supporting democracy and human rights in that country, supporting economic growth and ensuring that our security interests are met.

So I think that while we do not break off diplomatic relations altogether with the country, there are a variety of things the United

States needs to be doing to send messages to Duterte about how unhappy we are with what he's been doing. Can I—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Excuse me. Is one of those things to invite him, among the very first international leaders, to come visit Washington and the White House?

Mr. FUCHS. And that was exactly going to be my next point, which I actually—just as soon as President Trump made that invitation I actually wrote a piece that said specifically the President should not be inviting the President of the Philippines here.

But I think that there are also a number of other things that we can be considering doing to send our—to signal our displeasure including the potential of cutting off certain types of assistance to the Philippines.

The Leahy vetting process is one way of doing that—that already exists. But there, frankly, are other types of cooperation with law enforcement with the armed forces of the Philippines that, frankly, can be suspended or cut off to show him that there is a red line that he is crossing right now in the way that he is running his country and that our cooperation is not a blank check.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I knew you weren't squishy.

Let me ask you final question on this one and then I am going to turn to Mr. Sanderson on foreign aid.

So the Duterte government decided that they needed a special envoy to the United States of America and in light of what you just said, do you believe the selection of Jose Antonio, who is a business partner with Donald Trump in building a tower in the Philippines, is an appropriate choice and sends the right signal?

Or, I mean, is this somebody with whom we can do business? Is this somebody who is designed to flatter the President but not to ameliorate a real human rights crisis underway in the Philippines as we speak?

Mr. FUCHS. I completely agree with you that this is sending exactly the wrong signal and I think that it is actually indicative of a broader problem that we may have with the relations of the United States and the countries in this region right now and President Trump's conflicts of interest—his businesses and his conflicts of interest and what that might wreak on our relationships in the region. That is one example.

But, frankly, their corruption is a widespread problem in Southeast Asia. It is a way of doing business in some of these countries, unfortunately, and part of the problem is that one of the signals that has been sent to some of these countries by President Trump's unwillingness to get rid of his business holdings before taking office is that the United States may actually be moving closer to them in terms of the way we do business and that the result of that in part might be more envoys like this or more entreaties to the United States about business.

Mr. CONNOLLY. That is why a number of ethicists both Republican and Democrat strongly advocated an absolute blind trust so that you weren't having ongoing questions tainting foreign policy as well as other kinds of decisions. Unfortunately, that advice was not taken.

I don't wish to impose on the chairman. So if you will allow me one—just one last set of questions, and I don't mean to preclude

anyone else that may want to comment. But I thought I would put it to you first, Mr. Sanderson, listening to your testimony.

If you look at the budget submitted by the President and, apparently, supported by the Secretary of State, Mr. Tillerson, we make some very substantial cuts in foreign assistance programs including democracy-building efforts in the countries we are talking about here today in terms of humanitarian services, in terms of institution building, you name it—co-ops, health clinics, small micro businesses, women-owned businesses, empowerment, all that stuff, where we have been doing a lot of good work actually for quite some time and we actually have some metrics that show some results.

Takes a little time but, all of that is cut. I mean, not just cut—really cut, I mean, right to the bone. To make it all special, apparently Secretary Tillerson is thinking of absorbing USAID into State Department as just another bureau, even though their missions are quite different.

I wonder if you could comment on that. How does that help us in the mission we are talking about in this region if this America's back again, it looks another example to me of no, we are not—we are retreating and, again, allowing the Chinese to enter that vacuum with their foreign assistance, which isn't as punctilious or meritorious as ours in terms of setting metrics that have to be met, and making sure there are clear rationales that benefit large numbers of people.

Mr. SANDERSON. Nor does it come with the oversight that ours does. You bring up some great points, Congressman. I think it is a mistake to cut the State Department's budget at all. But I understand that all budgets are going to be coming under the knife except for DoD.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Not defense.

Mr. SANDERSON. Yes, except for DoD. So but that does recall the secretary and then General Mattis' comments during his confirmation hearing when he said, if you cut the State Department I have to buy more bullets.

I do think those budgets will not be cut that sharply. I hope they are not cut much at all because those are tremendously important programs.

They seed the field with a lot of positive things that have short, medium, and long-term benefits. We are a great partner overseas. I see it in all the countries that I go to.

People want the assistance that covers everything from military to civilian to economic, judicial. You name it, they want that activity. It is an important part of counterterrorism because you are strengthening economies in communities.

When you have idle hands, they get pulled into the gray market and then they get pulled into militant groups sometimes.

To your comment about engagement, the President has sent mixed messages but largely messages about retreat. His national security staff, which is superb, goes out after those messages and tries to reassure our allies.

So we have gone into Asia and to Southeast Asia to reassure our allies. These are important relationships. The Department of Defense likes to say they—you can't surge trust.

When you are dealing with a complicated environment like Southeast Asia, like foreign fighters, and all the insurgencies that you have there, a good healthy widespread multifaceted relationship between the United States and our Asian partners in Southeast Asia in particular is excellent for the counterterrorism partnerships.

If the rest of the relationship is good, that often redounds to the—to the other issues that we are looking at and that is why I would encourage deep engagement and budgets that do bring American culture, society, and engagement on a high level.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. YOHO. And I appreciate that dialogue and I can always appreciate my colleague bringing the politics into this.

But truth be known, TPP wouldn't have passed. There wasn't support in the House, either Republicans or Democrats, or in the Senate, Republicans or Democrats. So it was off the table.

It was a good call so it can be renegotiated and that is why we put in free trade agreements with many countries in the Asia Pacific that we are working on now.

And let us see—what was the other one? I forget. You were talking about—

Mr. CONNOLLY. The Paris climate—

Mr. YOHO. Oh, the Paris climate—and, again, that would have put this country at a disadvantage. We are going to lead on energy and you are going to see great things come out of that.

So I do feel like we are back in that area. The President being down there, the Secretary of State, and the State Department is light on people.

People are working double time in these positions. Over 130 positions have been appointed. They just haven't gone through the process in the Senate. So it is being held up in the Senate again.

But I do want to point out you were talking—Mr. Fuchs, you were talking about the importance of diplomatic relations in that area. You said strong diplomatic ties will help thwart terrorism.

Have we not had that over the last 8 years in the previous administration? I mean, what is your thoughts on that or anybody else that wants to weigh in on that.

Mr. FUCHS. Well, I think that we actually have had very positive relationships with a number of the countries in the region over the last 8 years and, of course, it does not mean that you are going to prevent every terrorist threat from spawning in the region.

But I think that fundamentally you are not going to get anything done on counterterrorism in the region if you do not have those strong diplomatic relationships because, again, these are the ones who have the relationships with their counterparts in the governments in Indonesia and Malaysia and the Philippines.

They are the ones who have the best information about what is going on in the cities and towns and villages in these countries and the best feel for these countries.

They really are the front lines here in Southeast Asia for our counterterrorism strategy. Of course, they are not 100 percent of the strategy but they are an essential component of it.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. Then I guess my question is if we have got these great relationships, did we just drop the ball on this? Did we

not follow up or was this just behind the scene we were distracted by North Korea? The Middle East? Anybody's thoughts on that.

Mr. FUCHS. If I—

Mr. SANDERSON. I would remark that we do have a very full plate worldwide—

Mr. YOHO. We sure do.

Mr. SANDERSON [continuing]. And it is hard to dedicate sufficient energy to every single relationship, and then when things like Marawi—the battle of Marawi flare-up then we shift our resources here and so it is a question of resources and attention.

But that gets also back to cutting budgets and making sure the Senate moves people through and what not, which I hope that you do because we do retain the leadership position globally.

We do need to be a part of most of these issues and then solving problems and I don't know if it is a question of dropping the ball or just being distracted by somewhere else.

Mr. YOHO. Well, when you look at where we are as a nation. We are \$20 trillion in debt. I was at a meeting last night.

They said our deficit spending next year is going to be around \$750 billion. We are getting worse. There are going to be some austerity measures.

We want to make sure that we cut in the right area, and I agree with General Mattis—if you cut foreign aid you are going to have to buy more bullets and that is certainly not the direction we want it.

So we want to have strong diplomacy, we want to have strong policies, and we want to make sure that the ideas that you give us that we can enact in the legislation are that much stronger.

I think I had one more question and it was for you, Dr. Greitens. Talking about North Korea, funnelling money through there—what nexus does that go through?

Does that go through any of the Chinese banks or any of the world banks that we could put secondary sanctions on?

Ms. GREITENS. Yes. It does both, sir. North Korea has revenue-generating operations throughout Southeast Asia, and one of the things that we've seen in recent months is that countries in Southeast Asia—Singapore, Malaysia, some other countries in the region—have actually started to tighten down on some of these North Korean revenue-generating operations.

There is banking that goes through Singapore and some of the other financial nodes in the region. But as you indicated, a lot of the companies that do business with North Korea, around 80 percent, maybe 90 percent of North Korea's trade, is with China. So from both a banking and a trade perspective, China is really the dominant actor.

That said, North Korea has been very good at adapting when one source of revenue or one set of banking networks comes under pressure. I have in the past advocated for the United States to engage on the North Korean question in Southeast Asia, in part to keep North Korea from moving its center of activity to Southeast Asia if China comes under pressure, and I think that is an important part.

The Philippines, according to the World Trade Organization, is the third largest trade partner of North Korea today, after India

and China, and that is not insignificant. So we should be putting all tools on the table.

Mr. YOHO. We really do and, of course, we just saw that load of ivory tusks—I think it was 7,000 pounds—that just got confiscated and those are the kind of things that are funding terrorist organizations and it doesn't serve humanity.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate it and, again, feel free to offer suggestions that we can do legislation with. We have done this in the past and I look forward to your input.

I thank you for your time. I value your time and everybody else here.

So with that, we thank the panel for joining us today to share their experience, and this meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:33 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

# APPENDIX

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific  
Ted Yoho (R-FL), Chairman**

July 12, 2017

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

**DATE:** Wednesday, July 12, 2017  
**TIME:** 2:30 p.m.  
**SUBJECT:** Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia  
**WITNESSES:** Mr. Thomas M. Sanderson  
Senior Fellow and Director  
Transnational Threats Project  
Center for Strategic and International Studies  
  
Ms. Supna Zaidi Peery  
Research Analyst  
Counter Extremism Project  
  
Sheena Greitens, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
University of Missouri  
  
Mr. Michael Fuchs  
Senior Fellow  
Center for American Progress

**By Direction of the Chairman**

*The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.*

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Asia and the Pacific HEARING

Day Wednesday Date July 12, 2017 Room RHOB 2200

Starting Time 3:10pm Ending Time 4:32pm

Recesses  ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Ted Yoho

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

"Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia"

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Ted Yoho, Rep. Ann Wagner, Rep. Scott Perry, Rep. Steve Chabot  
Rep. Brad Sherman, Rep. Gerald Connolly

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes  No

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

Connolly SFR

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED \_\_\_\_\_

  
Subcommittee Staff Associate

**Statement for the Record**

Congressman Gerald Connolly

AP Subcommittee Hearing: "Black Flags over Mindanao: Terrorism in Southeast Asia"

July 12, 2017

ISIS-linked militants have occupied parts of the city of Marawi on Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines since late May. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law in Mindanao as government soldiers have attempted to wrest back control of the provincial capital. The ongoing battle has displaced more than 400,000 civilians and killed more than 475 people. Civilian casualties number 39 deaths, but are expected to rise sharply when Philippine soldiers can reenter terrorist-controlled areas.

The threat of terrorism is not new to Southeast Asia. For decades, several local separatist movements and extremist groups have perpetrated violence throughout the region. However, growing currents of conservatism in traditionally moderate Muslim-majority states, including Indonesia and Malaysia, and the growing influence of the Islamic State have compounded these risks. More than 1,000 Southeast Asians have traveled to the Middle East to fight in Iraq and Syria. Regional leaders have expressed concern that battle-trained fighters may return to Southeast Asia to conduct attacks and that ISIS may declare an Islamic caliphate in the southern Philippines. Reports have confirmed the presence of foreign fighters in Marawi, and the ISIS-linked militants are part of an alliance of two extremist groups, Abu Sayyaf and the Maute, who have both pledged allegiance to ISIS.

The United States has a long record of collaborating with governments in Southeast Asia to combat terrorist organizations including Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia and Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines. Given the growing threat of ISIS in Southeast Asia, U.S. Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs are critical to bolstering the capacity of civil society and governments to promote community engagement and the rule of law, enhance border controls, and train law enforcement to combat radicalism before it takes root. The United States helped Indonesia create a centralized antiterrorism unit and provided U.S. troops to help combat violent groups in the southern Philippine island of Basilan. Encouraging structural changes in at-risk Southeast Asian communities leverages U.S. development and governance expertise into an asset working on behalf of the security interests of the United States and our regional partners.

While President Trump has been outspoken on his commitment to defeat ISIS, his strategy remains opaque and the extent to which such a policy covers Southeast Asia is unclear. Trump has twice pledged to hold a press conference on the fight against ISIS, but that has yet to occur. The President's FY 2018 international affairs budget represents a unilateral retreat from U.S. global leadership and a radical realignment of U.S. priorities. Nearly every Southeast Asian country is subject to a sizeable decrease in U.S. foreign assistance. Digging deeper, the President's budget decimates regional programs that foster democratic governance, economic growth, and global health. The Trump Administration's shortsighted approach to counterterrorism fails to invest in the development measures that will be necessary to ensure terrorists do not return or find safe haven in the first place.

Beyond budgetary concerns, President Trump's sprawling conflicts of interests call into question whether his policies are pursued in the interest of U.S. national security or his family businesses. In the Philippines, the Trump Organization is building a \$150 million Trump-branded luxury housing tower in Manila, which is expected to open sometime in 2017. President Duterte appointed Trump's business partner in the Philippines, Jose E.B. Antonio, as special envoy to the United States for trade, investment, and economic affairs. Duterte is a brutal authoritarian leader who has ordered extrajudicial killings using death squads in the Philippines' war on drugs. In April, Trump invited Duterte to the White House and reportedly congratulated him on his "unbelievable job on the drug problem."

As Kurt Eichenwald summarized in Newsweek, "The man writing millions of dollars' worth of checks to the Trump family is the Duterte government's special representative to the United States. To argue that these payments will be constitutional if they are paid to the Trump children, and not to Trump personally, is absurd." It is also absurd to argue that Trump can deconflict his business interests from the interests of the American people. As President, Trump's demonstrable affinity for authoritarian leaders like Duterte undermines U.S. efforts to promote human rights and democratic values.

The hard truth is that when the United States does not act as a forceful advocate for our values and our interests abroad, we leave a vacuum. When U.S. leadership retreats, adversaries who do not share our interests and values fill the vacuum and instability rises. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the United States can combat the rise of ISIS-linked militants in Southeast Asia and address President Trump's extensive conflicts of interest.

