

Statement of

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Countering Extremism and the Threat of ISIS in Southeast Asia

Chairman Salmon, Ranking Member Sherman, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on the important and timely issue of countering violent extremism and terrorism in Southeast Asia.

We also thank the Committee for its sustained leadership in advancing U.S. interests and supporting and promoting engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. This hearing serves as an important demonstration of the expanded involvement of the United States in the region, and an important reminder that our futures are linked together.

Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia

The terrorist attacks last month in Brussels, in January in Jakarta, and last year in Paris, Mali, and elsewhere underscore the importance of our discussion today. We all have an enormous obligation and responsibility to find ways to defeat this scourge.

The countries in Southeast Asia that we will discuss today are committed to countering the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, in both word and action.

Governments in Southeast Asia are particularly concerned about foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from the region who have traveled to Syria and Iraq to fight alongside the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Da'esh, and al-Nusrah Front. We estimate that by the end of 2015 approximately 1,000 Southeast Asians had traveled to the conflict zone in the Middle East. Many of these fighters may return home with battlefield experience, hardened violent ideologies, and access to global threat networks that can pose a direct threat to their home countries, as they have done in Europe. These returning foreign fighters may also enhance the

capability of extremist networks within Southeast Asia, including al'Qaida affiliated groups like Jemaah Islamiya (JI). There is also the threat of “lone wolf” attacks inspired by violent extremist messaging.

We are aware of reports that ISIL is seeking to support local violent extremist groups that have declared allegiance to ISIL, and remains interested in Southeast Asia as a source of recruits and support generally. While ISIL has not formally announced the establishment of a “province” in Southeast Asia, many counterterrorism analysts believe they may seek to do so in the future.

The pernicious challenges of terrorism and violent extremism, however, require sustained and comprehensive efforts, including increased security cooperation and information sharing, funding, and partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Countries in Southeast Asia continue to demonstrate their commitment to countering these threats through domestic action, regionally through ASEAN, and internationally including through the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Partners in Southeast Asia also pledged support at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and the Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and CVE at the UN General Assembly in September.

Preventing Violent Extremism from Taking Root

We must think and act broadly to prevent violent ideologies from taking hold, and to prevent terrorist networks such as ISIL from expanding their influence and linking up with regional groups, including those in Southeast Asia.

As Secretary Kerry has said, this is a fight that over the long term will require security force operations, but will also be won in schools and houses of worship; on social media; on sports fields and in workplaces; and in the homes of people across the world. We must reach those at risk before terrorist recruiters do, and amplify credible voices to counter messages of violence and hate. It requires a comprehensive approach that tackles this challenge from every angle, harnessing every tool at our disposal, and mobilizing local communities as our partners.

To help deliver on this commitment, the State Department is leading the U.S. effort abroad in coordination with the whole of our government to work with foreign governments, civil society, and individuals to prevent and counter violent extremism. Our approach is governed by five core priorities shaped at the White House Summit one year ago, and that are now part of the first-ever joint USAID and State Department strategy on preventing and countering violent extremism.

First, we are expanding partnerships to develop the expertise to better understand violent extremism and its drivers at the international, regional, national, and local levels.

Second, we are working closely with our partners—at the national and local level—in Asia and around the world to adopt more effective policies to prevent the spread of violent extremism. We are working to implement the UN Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism, which asks Member States to undertake and submit national action plans to address violent extremism. In addition to the national level, we must work with sub-national actors, mayors, governors, and

other municipal officials, which is why we are implementing the Strong Cities Network and other initiatives started by last year's White House CVE Summit process.

Third, we are strengthening local partnerships to address the underlying political, social, and economic factors within certain communities that may increase the likelihood that their young men and women will be targeted for recruitment by violent extremist groups. We are mobilizing public and private sector support behind these efforts through the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund.

Fourth, we are engaging and amplifying locally credible voices that can expose the true nature of violent extremism, its savagery, and its denial of human dignity and provide positive alternatives for opportunity, identity, trust, and resilience. Through the recently announced Global Engagement Center, we're helping to tackle terrorist messaging and recruitment efforts head on by empowering independent, positive voices from the region — voices that represent the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the world. In Southeast Asia, we are working with the Malaysian government to support the development of a regional center to counter terrorist messaging. We look forward to the launch of that center in the coming months.

Fifth, and finally, we are strengthening the capabilities of our partners to prevent radicalization in prisons and help ensure that former fighters are rehabilitated and reintegrated back into society whenever possible.

ASEAN

The United States and ASEAN have a solid record of cooperation on terrorism and countering violent extremism. ASEAN Member States share the deep U.S. concern over the threat of terrorism and the flows of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs).

In Kuala Lumpur in November, the leaders of the East Asia Summit (EAS) adopted a statement on Countering Violent Extremism that sent a clear signal of the region's determination to tackle the challenge posed by ISIL and other violent extremist groups, and to respond to their efforts to spread their ideology of violence and terrorism. This followed up on the 2014 EAS statement, where leaders committed to take actions to stem the flow of foreign fighters to and from Syria and Iraq.

The EAS is a key venue for the leaders and diplomats of this important group of nations to discuss tough issues like stopping the movement of terrorists and their money while countering their violent extremist messaging, in addition to other important security issues like the South China Sea and handling pandemic disease.

The U.S.-ASEAN Special Leaders' Summit at Sunnylands earlier this year also provided a unique opportunity for the United States to engage at the highest level on counterterrorism with all ten ASEAN nations in a free-flowing dialogue. The President and ASEAN leaders discussed how, as the ASEAN Community integrates, flows of people and goods between ASEAN Member States will also increase. As goods and people flow more freely, however, border controls and aviation security throughout ASEAN must be strengthened. The resulting

Sunnylands Declaration affirmed once more our shared resolve to lead on global challenges such as terrorism and violent extremism.

To address this issue in practical ways, at Sunnylands the President also announced a new \$2 million aviation and border security program, launched at a regional workshop in Kuala Lumpur in March, which will improve ASEAN members' connectivity to global databases and real-time information sharing among countries and with INTERPOL. It will strengthen immigration security and border controls to counter the flow of FTFs. U.S. counterterrorism experts from across the U.S. government also engaged with ASEAN member countries as part of the program, including the State Department's Senior Adviser on FTFs, Ambassador Waller, and the Justice Department's representatives to INTERPOL. This project has already yielded significant results: through the assistance of INTERPOL Washington, Malaysia recently began automating daily reporting to INTERPOL of stolen and lost travel documents, becoming one of only approximately a dozen countries in the world to do so. Since going live just one month ago, Malaysia has submitted information on over 10,000 stolen and lost travel documents to INTERPOL databases.

Our increased cooperation with ASEAN on counter terrorism and CVE also offers broader benefits in the fight against trafficking in persons, drugs, wildlife, and timber; money laundering; and other transnational criminal activity.

Situations in Focus Countries

Our approach to preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism globally and in Southeast Asia must recognize the unique situations and motivations that drive individuals to join groups like ISIL and commit acts of violence.

The countries we are focusing on today highlight the diversity in Southeast Asia, and each requires a tailored response consistent with our global approach.

Indonesia

Indonesia has seen considerable success using a civilian-led, rule-of-law-based approach in its domestic counterterrorism operations. Since the 2002 Bali bombings, Indonesia has applied sustained pressure to degrade the capabilities of terrorists and their networks operating within Indonesia's borders. Domestic terrorist groups Jemaah Islamiyah and its offshoot Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid have been degraded, though they are still active. The January 14 attack in central Jakarta, however, shows that extremists in Indonesia still have the ability to carry out small-scale attacks.

Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population and is the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy. The vast majority of Indonesians reject ISIL and other violent extremist organizations; Indonesia's government, religious, and social leaders have repeatedly and forcefully denounced ISIL.

Indonesia recognizes the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and was a co-sponsor of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178. The United States shares Indonesia's concern that terrorist fighters returning from Iraq and Syria with new training, skills, and experience could conduct similar attacks in Indonesia. According to Indonesian officials, there are about 800 Indonesians in Iraq and Syria, although estimates fluctuate among Indonesian agencies and services. The numbers also include women, children, and non-combatants travelling out of a desire to live in the so called Islamic State. Indonesian officials claim to have identified around 300 Indonesian citizens actively involved in fighting in Iraq and Syria. They also believe that about 60 Indonesians have died in Syria and estimate that another 60 to 100 have returned to Indonesia. Most of the returnees are Indonesians and their families who were detained and deported by authorities in transit countries while en route to Syria and Iraq. Fighters may also return undetected by exploiting vulnerabilities in the land and sea borders of this vast archipelagic nation.

Abu Wardah (also known as Santoso) is the leader of Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT) and is Indonesia's most-wanted terrorist. He remains at large in the remote jungle area near Poso, Central Sulawesi, where he is reported to have 20-40 followers. Santoso publicly pledged allegiance to ISIL in 2014, and in 2015 issued a message online calling for Indonesians to join ISIL in Iraq or Syria and to execute attacks on Indonesian authorities. Indonesian officials are committed to eliminating the threat posed by Santoso and MIT. A significant and sustained police operation, which includes Indonesian police's specialized counterterrorism unit Detachment 88, is ongoing. Santoso was put on Indonesia's list of domestic terrorists, under UNSCR 1373, in 2015. In March 2016, the State Department designated Santoso as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under E.O. 13224.

Indonesian prosecutors actively seek to prosecute suspected terrorists – including those participating in ISIL-related activity – but current Indonesian law lacks adequate measures for criminalizing material support, traveling to join foreign terrorist organizations, or commission of extraterritorial offenses. The administration of President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo recently introduced draft legislation to give the government better legal tools to counter terrorism. It is working actively with the Indonesian legislature to secure passage of these reforms, which could happen within a few months. While new legislation is pending, prosecutors continue to use other offenses under Indonesian criminal code. Also, some of Indonesia's efforts dovetail with obligations outlined in UNSCRs 2170 and 2178. For example, Indonesia seeks to prevent the movement of terrorists, including through enhanced controls related to the issuance of identity papers. Indonesia has also implemented several of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)'s good practices against foreign terrorist fighters.

There are roughly 200 terrorist prisoners held throughout Indonesia. Indonesian authorities are concerned they might be able to coordinate with each other, communicate with supporters outside prisons, or radicalize other, non-terrorist convicts. Prison officials are taking steps to prevent high-profile terrorist prisoners from undertaking these activities. Several terrorist convicts were paroled in 2015 after completing their prison terms, including senior leaders of Jemaah Islamiya. Indonesian officials are concerned about the potential recidivism of released terrorist prisoners. One of the attackers early this year in Jakarta had previously been convicted for terrorism-related offenses, incarcerated, and released. In addition, terrorists convicted on

non-terrorism charges are not always counted or tracked through the justice system as convicted terrorists, creating a potential loophole in disengagement and de-radicalization efforts.

Indonesian officials recognize the importance of addressing radicalization to violence and CVE, though face challenges due to limited resources and the vast territory of the Indonesian archipelago. Indonesia's National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), which is responsible for coordinating intelligence and information among stakeholder agencies, conducts community engagement activities throughout Indonesia, often holding discussions at universities. Also, the two largest Islamic civil society organizations in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, are based in Indonesia and are actively involved in countering violent extremist ideologies. In addition, NU, Muhammadiyah, and the Jokowi administration are promoting the Indonesian practice of Islam as a positive and tolerant alternative to violent extremist ideologies.

Our longstanding cooperation with Indonesia covers the full range of counterterrorism activities, including: training and equipment for law enforcement agencies; information-sharing both on terrorism trends and specific cases; specialized training for prosecutors and judges; technical assistance and advice on prisoner management and counter-terror finance; and support for non-governmental organizations doing grass-roots counter-messaging. In addition, our cooperation extends to international, multilateral, and regional fora. Indonesia has expanded regional and international cooperation, especially in response to the foreign terrorist fighter issue, and is an active participant in the UN, GCTF, ASEAN, APEC, and others.

The Philippines

The latest Mindanao peace process between the government and the largest Moro separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), is currently stalled following the failure of the Philippine Congress to pass legislation needed to implement the 2014 peace deal. The continuation of this process will now be in the hands of the next administration and MILF leadership to push forward after the May 9 elections. All of the presidential candidates have indicated a willingness to continue the peace process in Mindanao although most have suggested changes to the current agreement that would require new negotiations. The resolution of the peace process with the MILF will be important for achieving a sustainable political solution to the decades long unrest in the southern Philippines, but will not prevent other armed separatist or terrorist groups from attacking government forces, private sector entities, and local rivals, even if successfully implemented.

Terrorist and criminal elements continue to exploit the poor security environment along the maritime border between the southern Philippines and eastern Malaysia, conducting kidnapping-for-ransom attacks against a range of targets, including Western tourists. Recent kidnappings include the abduction late last year of four tourists—one Norwegian national, two Canadians, and one Filipina—all of whom are still being held captive, as well as the separate kidnappings earlier this month of ten Indonesian sailors and four Malaysian sailors. The Abu Sayyaf Group, a designated foreign terrorist organization, and associated groups are believed to be behind these abductions. Despite a history of association with al-Qaida, the ASG today is mostly focused on criminality, conducting these kidnappings in the hope victims' home governments will pay ransom.

The Philippines is actively engaged in operations against high-value terrorist targets in Philippines territory. They are conducting operations routinely, and achieving some success against their targets, but also taking casualties regularly. As allies, we provide support to those efforts as requested through established train-and-equip programs provided by the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Department of Justice. At the same time, significant capability shortfalls in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), transport, maritime security, and information systems remain outside the small number of high end military and police units that make sustained campaigning against the most dangerous threats difficult.

Malaysia

Malaysia is a leading member of the international community in countering ISIL, foreign terrorist fighters, and violent extremism. Malaysia joined the Global Coalition to Counter-ISIL in September 2015. Since 2013 Malaysian authorities have arrested over 175 terrorist suspects—primarily ISIL supporters—and have prosecuted approximately 40 under the country’s national security legislation. Malaysia passed robust counterterrorism legislation in 2015 that criminalizes foreign terrorist travel, the receipt of terrorist training, the preparation of terrorist acts, and the possession of books and promotional materials associated with terrorist groups.

While most of those legislative changes are consistent with a rule-of-law approach to counter terrorism, we have raised our concerns that some provisions of the new laws reinstate preventive detention and could be used against political opponents of the government.

Malaysia’s chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015 resulted in reaching consensus on ASEAN’s statement on Countering Violent Extremism that reinforced the region’s commitment to respond to violent extremist groups, including ISIL.

In September 2015, at the UN Leaders’ Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism, Malaysia announced that it will establish a regional center to counter ISIL propaganda. The Department of State is supporting Malaysia’s counter messaging efforts, and representatives of the Malaysian government plan to visit the United States in may for training. Senior U.S. Government officials plan to attend the center’s opening in the coming months. Malaysia also recently signed two important counter terrorism and law enforcement information sharing arrangements with the United States, the Homeland Security Presidential Directive Six (HSPD-6) and Preventing and Combatting Serious Crime (PCSC). We are working closely with the Malaysian government to implement both of these arrangements promptly.

Thailand

The United States has a long history of friendship and shared interests with Thailand over the course of our 183-year-old relationship, and Thailand remains a valued law enforcement and counterterrorism partner.

Thai security officials have expressed moderate but growing concern about the potential threat to Thailand from ISIL and fighters transiting from Southeast Asia to the Middle East through

Thailand. We have no evidence of Thai citizens joining ISIL or linkages between insurgent groups in southern Thailand and ISIL, but we continue to track the situation closely.

On August 17, 2015, an explosion in central Bangkok killed 20 and injured over 120 at the Erawan Shrine, a downtown cultural destination popular with Thai and Chinese tourists. The trials of two suspects identified as Chinese Uighurs are currently underway. Some reports suggest that the attacks were related to the July 2015 forced deportation of a group of Uighur migrants to China, although Thai authorities have stated the attacks were in retaliation for a government crackdown on human trafficking networks.

Since 2004, an ethno-nationalist insurgency has claimed the lives of over 6,000 people and injured over 10,000 in Thailand's southernmost provinces. In 2015, the number of violent incidents dropped to the lowest levels in the 12-year history of the conflict although recent months have seen a troubling uptick in attacks.

The United States encourages Thailand to support an inclusive peace process that leads to a lasting resolution to the conflict. We also work with civil society groups to promote peace building and interfaith dialogue in the South. More broadly, the U.S. government funds programs to build the capacity of Thai law enforcement officials and the criminal justice system to combat terrorism and other challenges, within the legal constraints posed by the May 2014 military coup. We also support the joint U.S.-Thai International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok, which builds partner capacity and promotes cooperation especially among ASEAN Member States. We will continue to look for opportunities to expand our partnership with Thailand as we address the shared challenge of countering violent extremism in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the region encompasses a range of countries with shared and unique challenges in addressing terrorism and countering violent extremism. Regional coordination between partner countries in Southeast Asia against terror groups is improving gradually, but sustained efforts by all nations to expand cooperation among security and border and immigration services will be necessary to prevent more widespread attacks in the region.

The Department of State and USAID, working in partnership with other agencies, especially the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice (including the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center), and the Department of Defense, have and will continue to support these countries and their people as they address the immediate security challenges and longer-term root causes of terrorism and violent extremism. With continued U.S. engagement, backed by congressional support, we are confident that the region will continue to maintain its commitment tackling this serious issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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