

Ranking Member Brian Higgins Opening Statement

“ISIS in the Pacific: Assessing Terrorism in Southeast Asia and the Threat to the Homeland”

Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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