



**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Peter T. King (R-NY)
Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee**

*ISIS in the Pacific: Assessing Terrorism in Southeast Asia and the Threat to the Homeland
April 27, 2016*

Remarks as Prepared

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

There are indications of ISIS and Islamist ideology spreading through parts of Southeast Asia that are reminiscent of the violent ideology's expansion in Yemen, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, and elsewhere in Africa. In recent years, there have been several high profile terrorist plots in the region, primarily linked to violent Islamist extremist networks. In 2016, there have been a number of attacks and security concerns throughout the region.

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

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

Also on Monday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that Abu Sayyef had killed John Ridsdel, a Canadian citizen who had been kidnapped from a resort in the Philippines last September.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to both of their families.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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