THE NEXT FRONTLINE OF THE BATTLE AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE? SOUTHEAST ASIA

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The global network of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh,² is expanding rapidly. Southeast Asia is especially vulnerable because of its large Muslim population and its history of extremist groups. In fact, some experts predict that Daesh could establish a strong satellite presence in Southeast Asia within the next year, with dire consequences for the region.³ As the leader in the global fight against terror and in the Global Coalition to Counter Daesh, the United States (U.S.) needs to increase its counter terrorism cooperation with the governments in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia, where Daesh has made the farthest inroads. The aim of this paper is to highlight United States-Southeast Asian cooperation in fighting the spread of Daesh in Southeast Asia.

To understand the state of terrorism and U.S.-Southeast Asian collaboration in the region, the scope of this paper begins in 2008, though background information will predate this timeframe to explain how Daesh evolved from other extremist movements, such as al Qaeda. The paper will primarily focus on the current terrorist threat of Daesh and U.S.-Southeast Asian efforts to combat its threat thus far. Two countries facing the most severe threats from

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² The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, known by several acronyms, such as ISIL and ISIS, is also known as Daesh, which stands for the Arabic phrase *al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq wa al-Sham* (*Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*). For clarity, this paper will use the term Daesh because of its Arabic origin and its increasing usage by the international community.

³ Prashanth Parameswaran. "Islamic State Eyes Asia Base in 2016 in Philippines, Indonesia." *The Diplomat*. January 14, 2016.

Daesh will be analyzed as case studies: Indonesia and Malaysia. Understanding why, how, and to what extent Daesh networks within Southeast Asia exist can offer insight into how to best counter this threat, including how the U.S. can effectively collaborate with Southeast Asian governments towards this goal.

Accordingly, this paper is organized into four parts. The first part provides critical background information: a short history of Islamic extremism in Southeast Asia, a brief summary of U.S.-Southeast Asian Counter-Terrorism Cooperation, the origins of Daesh in the Middle East, and Daesh's growing influence in Southeast Asia since 2008. The second part explores the extent of Daesh's penetration into Indonesia. The third part delves into the second case study, Malaysia. The conclusion considers the prospects for future cooperation between the U.S. and Indonesia and Malaysia and offers a number of historically informed policy recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

A Short History of Islamic Extremism in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia has a significant and diverse Muslim population. Indonesia, home to over 200 million Muslims, is the world's largest Islamic nation-state. There are also significant Muslim populations in Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Burma, and Singapore. Together, they make up 40 percent of the world's Muslims.⁴ Generally speaking, the nature of Islam in Southeast Asia is considered more moderate in character than in the Middle East due to the animist, mystic, Hindu, and Buddhist influences in the region.⁵ Nonetheless, Islamic extremism does exist, in part as an extension of terrorist networks from the Middle East and South Asia.⁶ These links can be traced historically and ideologically. For example, during the Cold War, some Southeast Asians fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, traveled to South Asia for religious schooling, and returned home with a new interpretation

⁴ Bruce Vaughn, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Richard Cronin, Mark Manyin, and Larry Niksch. "Terrorism in Southeast Asia," *Congressional Research Service*, February 7, 2005. 3. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL31672.pdf>.

⁵ Vincent J. H. Houben. "Southeast Asia and Islam." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (2003): 149-70. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/stable/1049859>.

⁶ Zachary Abuza. "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 3 (2002): 427-65. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/stable/25798610>. 428.

of Islam inspired by their experiences, including fighting outsiders, or “infidels.”⁷ In the post-Cold War world, the lure of Islamic extremist revivalism in Southeast Asia is similar to that in other countries. Poverty and feelings of humiliation and alienation, frustration with oppressive governments, a desire for a pan-Islamic Southeast Asia, disapproval of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, anger with U.S. foreign policy towards Muslim countries, and links with terrorist groups elsewhere have also contributed to the surge of extremist ideology.⁸ As a result, security threats from Islamic militant organizations that arise from this ideology have become a modern day security problem.⁹

To understand the rise of Daesh in Southeast Asia, it is important to understand its global terrorism predecessor, al Qaeda, which operates on the platform of establishing an Islamic Caliphate and condones violence as means of jihad against perceived enemies of Islam. Though al Qaeda began in Afghanistan, its ultimate aim is to spread its anti-Western international campaign of terror and establish a global Islamic Caliphate. In the 1990s, al Qaeda expanded its efforts and began making inroads into Southeast Asia, attracted by the region’s Muslim populations. For the most part, it was relatively easy for al Qaeda to expand its networks into Southeast Asia because of loose borders, lax travel entrance requirements, widespread networks of Islamic charities, minimal financial controls, especially in Indonesia, and the presence of veterans of the Mujahidin from Afghanistan.¹⁰ Once al Qaeda operatives arrived in Southeast Asian countries, they established local cells for regional operations as part of their global network. These cells operated as centers for planning and carrying out attacks as well as sheltering operatives fleeing the U.S. and other countries.¹¹

Al Qaeda cells within Southeast Asia have been active in the region and

⁷ Ibid., 429.

⁸ Ibid. 429.

⁹ Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggot. “The Evolving Terrorist Threat in Southeast Asia,” *RAND Corporation*. 2009. Xiii. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG846.pdf.

¹⁰ Vaughn, Bruce, Emma Chantlett-Avery, Ben Dolven, Mark Manyin, Michael Martin, and Larry

Niksch. “Terrorism in Southeast Asia,” *Congressional Research Service*. October 16, 2009. 1. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL34194.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

the international community. The Manila branch of al Qaeda was particularly active during the early-1990s with several failed attacks, including plotting to blow up 11 airliners; planning to crash a hijacked airplane into the Central Intelligence Agency; providing a safe haven for leader Ramzi Yousef after the 1993 World Trade Center bombings; and trying to assassinate the Pope during his most recent visit to the Philippines. Subsequently, al Qaeda pivoted its focus away from the Philippines to Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. By 2002, about “one-fifth of al Qaeda’s organizational strength was centered in Southeast Asia.”¹² This recent history clearly demonstrates the region’s susceptibility to the growth of extremist organizations.

Al Qaeda operatives influenced the creation of other terrorist networks, most notably the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Indonesia where it gave extensive support to al Qaeda and sought to establish an Islamic Caliphate in Indonesia.¹³ Most famously, JI carried out bombings in Bali in 2002 and 2005 and attacked a Marriott hotel in Jakarta in August 2003.¹⁴ Al Qaeda also still has ties to other regional extremist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the *Abu Sayyaf Group* (ASG), both in the Philippines.¹⁵ In Malaysia, al Qaeda has connections to the *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia* (KMM), which was formed in 2002 as a direct consequence of Malaysians returning home from fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.¹⁶

Ultimately, the continued presence of al Qaeda in the region demonstrates that there is a long history of terrorist activity in Southeast Asia and of established networks between these militant groups and those in the Middle East. Understanding the terrorist networks of the past is important to grasp the mechanics of Daesh’s growing presence in Southeast Asia today, as will be discussed later.

A Brief Summary of U.S.-Southeast Asian Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

Islamic extremism has long been a facet of the security milieu in Southeast Asia and, naturally, these terrorist organizations are of great concern to the U.S.

¹² Bruce Vaughn, 2009. 3.

¹³ Bruce Vaughn, 2005.

¹⁴ Anton Chan, “The Call of ISIS: The Medium and the Message Attractive Southeast Asians,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis* 7, no. 5 (2015). 4. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CTTA-May-2015.pdf>.

¹⁵ Bruce Vaughn, 2009. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and its counter-terrorism agenda abroad. After 9/11, terrorist organizations in Southeast Asia, including Al Qaeda and JI, came to the forefront of American national security interests in the region, as some scholars and policy makers soon considered Southeast Asia a “second front” (with the Middle East as the first) in the “war against terror.” In response, U.S. cooperation with Southeast Asian governments on counter-terrorism varied by country, with the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia, most eager to work with the United States to combat their respective terrorist threats.

For example, in the Philippines, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo agreed on the deployment of U.S. military personnel to train the Philippine military against the ASG.¹⁷ Thailand and the U.S. also cooperated closely on matters of counter-terrorism, including the establishment of both a joint Counter Terrorism Intelligence Center in 2001 and a black site for CIA operations against terrorists.¹⁸ In the case of Singapore, authorities worked with the U.S. to crack down on suspected Islamic militants after the 9/11 attacks and succeeded in preventing some planned attacks. This bilateral relationship also included increased intelligence cooperation and the Container Security Initiative, a series of bilateral agreements that allow U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officials to screen U.S. bound containers.¹⁹ Malaysia also worked closely with the U.S., but its approach to counter terrorism was somewhat different, focusing on “combatting what it sees as the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty and the denial of human rights.”²⁰ Nonetheless, Malaysia was very supportive of U.S. counter-terrorism efforts in the region and became America’s main Muslim Southeast Asian partner in 2001.

In Indonesia, the U.S. helped fund and equip Detachment 88, also known as Densus 88, in 2003 after the first Bali bombings in 2002. Densus 88 is a Special Forces counter-terrorism squad that has been widely heralded as a success in its efforts to clamp down JI activity. Because of political turmoil in Indonesia in the early 2000s, cooperation between the U.S. and Indonesia on

¹⁷ Bruce Vaughn, 2009. 16.

¹⁸ Emma Chanlett-Avery, “Thailand: Background and U.S. Relations”, *CRS Report for Congress*, updated October 2, 2006 (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2005), pp. 1-19.

¹⁹ Bruce Vaughn, 2009., 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

matters of counter-terrorism did not increase until after President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's election in 2004.²¹ This history of U.S. cooperation with Southeast Asian governments on matters of counter-terrorism is important for analyzing potential areas of expansion for collaboration. Furthermore, these relationships reflect the extent to which the U.S. regarded Southeast Asia as a cornerstone of its counter-terrorism agenda after 9/11. This history of cooperation should be used as a foundation on which to build new policies in order to address the new growing threat of Daesh in the region.

The Origins of Daesh

The global security landscape and nature of terrorist organizations changed dramatically with the emergence of Daesh. The organization first garnered international attention in 2014, but its origins can be traced back to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, when a Jordanian militant, Abu Musab al Zarqawi, established al Qaeda in Iraq. Al Zarqawi became disillusioned with the movement for its fixation on the U.S. rather than on tangible efforts towards a global caliphate. Advocating his new interpretation of jihad, the creation of a caliphate through any means, al Zarqawi was soon criticized by Osama Bin Laden for his unrestricted use of violence against the Shias and their holy sites. As a result, al Zarqawi and his followers broke ties with al Qaeda in 2006. Later that year, several organizations, inspired by al Zarqawi after his death in June 2006, came together under the umbrella of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI).²² In 2011, the organization rebranded itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham after it capitalized on the power vacuum created by the Syrian Civil War by expanding into the country.²³ In 2014, Daesh made massive advances in North Syria and Iraq, formally announcing the creation of a Caliphate with Raqqa, Syria as its capital.²⁴

The objective of Daesh is to maintain its caliphate, with parts of Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon merging into a unified state entity under its control. Though Daesh builds off the ideology of al Qaeda, it is distinct from its predecessor in several key facets. It condones more extreme uses of violence, maintains that it alone is

²¹ Ibid.

²² Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, December 2015. 8. https://www.aspi.org.au/publications/black-flag-rising-isil-in-southeast-asia-and-australia/Black-flag-rising_ISIL.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

the only true caliphate, calls on all Muslims to pledge allegiance to its current Emir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and actively encourages migration to its territory.²⁵ Daesh also supports “governates” in other parts of the world, accepting pledges of allegiance from jihadist groups.²⁶ The influence of Daesh extends beyond the Middle East and North Africa, reaching Muslims in all countries, as evident by the growing number of Muslims traveling to Daesh territory.

In 2017, Daesh is now the greatest terrorist threat the world faces. Although al Qaeda was, and is, a global concern, Daesh has surpassed al Qaeda capabilities with its unprecedented territorial advances, which includes the establishment infrastructure and social services in the area it controls. By 2014, Daesh maintained control over parts of Iraq and Syria, adding to the organization’s legitimacy in the eyes of its recruits and increasing its ability to wage attacks around the world. Since 2015, however, Daesh’s territorial holdings have begun to decrease. Daesh may soon lose territory in Iraq as it continues to battle Iraqi and Kurdish forces in the battle for Mosul, which began in October 2016. Likewise, it continues to battle Syrian forces in Raqqa, its self-proclaimed capital, which it has been fighting since 2011. Although Daesh may be losing territory in the Middle East, the group is still a threat because of its ideological presence around the world, which continues to inspire terrorist attacks and the creation of localized terrorist cells. In fact, in 2016 alone, Daesh conducted or inspired 28 terrorist attacks in countries other than Syria and Iraq.²⁷ This should demonstrate the extent to which it holds ambitions beyond its territory in the Middle East. Furthermore, the frequency and severity of attacks underscores that Daesh’s threat does not end with its territory in the Middle East, rather it stretches as far as its ideology can reach. Consequently, though Daesh as a territorial entity may not pose a direct existential threat to the U.S. because of the distance between the two entities, it nonetheless threatens U.S. citizens, allies, and the stability of vital countries worldwide.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Tim Lister, Ray Sanchez, Mark Bixler, Sean O’Key, Michael Hogenmiller and Mohammed Tawfeeq, “ISIS Goes Global: 143 attacks in 29 countries have killed 2,043,” *CNN*. February 13, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/>

Daesh's Growing Influence in Southeast Asia since 2008

Due to its large Muslim population, Southeast Asia has been a central target of Daesh's expansionist agenda.²⁸ Over two-dozen Southeast Asian extremist groups have pledged support for Daesh and are actively recruiting militants.²⁹ Daesh utilizes a variety of general recruitment tactics in all its operations, including those in Southeast Asia. A major method is using the large Islamist publication industry in the region to distribute pamphlets, newsletters, magazines, and periodicals advocating for Daesh's ideology, which is to establish a global caliphate rooted in the early years of Islam.³⁰ These materials are available for less than one US dollar, making them easily accessible to the general public. Another important recruitment tactic comes in the form of social media, which has been formative in connecting militants across borders. Facebook in particular has been found to connect Indonesian and Malaysian militants to Daesh recruiters. Elsewhere on the internet, other Daesh members have mastered Twitter and hashtags to spread their message.³¹ Additionally, Islamic extremists that have been part of the security environment in Southeast Asia for decades amplify the message of Daesh by contributing to Daesh's social media campaign and assisting Daesh with translation and other media-related recruitment methods.³²

Another popular source of Daesh propaganda is the online magazine *Dabiq* (which is the name of a northern town in Syria). This magazine, which was launched in July 2014, has been an effective recruitment tool because of its use of alluring imagery depicting life under the caliphate. It also publishes in a diverse array of languages, including English, which makes the magazine accessible to people around the world.³³ Another Daesh propaganda magazine, *al Fatihin* (the Conquerors), contains articles written in Indonesian about life in Syria and

²⁸ Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia."

²⁹ Rohan Gunaratna, "The Rise of the Islamic State: Terrorism's New Face in Asia." In *From the Desert to World Cities: The New Terrorism*, edited by Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister, 9. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ltd, 2015. http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_42032-1522-2-30.pdf.

³⁰ Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 18.

³¹ "The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia." *Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict*, no. 13. September 24, 2014. http://file.understandingconflict.org/file/2014/09/IPAC_13_Evolution_of_ISIS.pdf.

³² Eliza King, "The ISIS Threat in Southeast Asia." *International Policy Digest*. October 30, 2015. <http://intpolicydigest.org/2015/10/30/the-isis-threat-in-southeast-asia/>.

³³ "Overview of Daesh's Online Recruitment Propaganda Magazine, Dabiq." *The Carter Center*. December, 2015. https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/peace/conflict_resolution/countering-isis/dabiq-report-12-17-15.pdf.

Iraq.³⁴ Furthermore, on June 20, 2016, Daesh launched a new online magazine targeting Southeast Asians.

The creation of a Southeast Asian magazine marks a dangerous development in Daesh's recruitment techniques in the region because it demonstrates that Daesh is streamlining its approach to Southeast Asia. The magazine emphasizes regional unity through common logos and experiences rather than focusing on each country individually.³⁵ Simultaneously, Daesh translates their united global ideology through this platform to Southeast Asia coherently and powerfully. The expansive network of Daesh supporters assisting recruitment in the region and the scale of Daesh's resources ensures that its message is not lost in translation.

Blogs are another popular source of propaganda for recruiters to romanticize life in Daesh-controlled territory. One blog called 'Shams' (The Levant) documents the life of a 26-year old Singaporean female who left her home to marry a Malaysian Daesh militant in Syria, providing a compelling but dangerous how-to-guide for other women unhappy with their lives who might be tempted to follow her example.³⁶

Besides magazines and blogs, Daesh has also become infamous for its video productions. It has recently begun targeting Muslims in Southeast Asian countries with videos in their native languages. For instance, in July 2014, Daesh released a video specifically targeting Indonesia's Muslims. The video, called *Join the Ranks*, features a speech from an Indonesian man imploring Indonesians to join the fight in the Middle East.³⁷ Another video targeting the Southeast Asian population is entitled *Education in the Caliphate*, which features Malay-speaking children studying in a Daesh school and handling weapons.³⁸ The message translated via these tactics is a source of inspiration for potential recruits, as it promises a more meaningful life under the Islamic State. Most recently, in June 2016, Daesh released a video featuring Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino

³⁴ Yenni Kwok, "ISIS has launched a newspaper to recruit Southeast Asian fighters," *Times Magazine*. July 11, 2016. <http://time.com/4400505/isis-newspaper-malay-southeast-asia-al-fatihin/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Anton Chan., 7.

³⁷ Peter Lloyd and Suzanne Dredge, "ISIS recruitment video Join the Ranks urges Indonesian Muslims to migrate to the Islamic State. *ABC News*. July 28, 2014. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-28/isis-releases-recruitment-video-target-indonesian-muslims/5629960>.

³⁸ Ibid.

fighters in which the militants acknowledge the leader of the ASG, Isnilon Hapilon, as Emir of Daesh in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the video instructs possible recruits to train with the ASG in the Philippines if they cannot travel to Syria and Iraq. This most recent video clearly demonstrates the growing network among Southeast Asian militants as well as that between those in the region and Daesh in the Middle East.³⁹

Despite the diverse array of recruitment techniques, however, there is no single type of Daesh recruit. People of all ages, educational backgrounds, and vocations have pledged support to Daesh. Notwithstanding this diversity, there are two clear trends in the pathways through which nearly all would-be Daesh recruits become affiliated with the group. One path is that most Daesh supporters become connected with the organization following previous involvement in other jihadist groups, or through personal relationships with militants. Another trend is that the Internet and social media continue to play a formative role in attracting vulnerable persons not already associated with an extremist group. The Internet has played an especially large role in Malaysia, where there are fewer established jihadi organizations.⁴⁰

Another major development that has contributed to the increase of Daesh fighters from Southeast Asia is the establishment of a Malay-speaking unit in Syria in 2014. The unit, called the *Majmua al Arkhabiliy or Katibah Nusantara*, is mostly comprised of militants from Indonesia and Malaysia, though some are from the Philippines and Singapore. The unit operates in northern Syria but has a known training center in Poso, Indonesia.⁴¹ The formation of *Katibah Nusantara* reinforces the narrative that Daesh comprises not just Arab-speaking fighters, but rather Muslims from around the world who share the same ideology. In turn, Daesh's reputation as an all-inclusive organization enhances its global Caliphate image.

Daesh successfully makes its appeal to Muslims in Southeast Asia through several tactics. First, Daesh recruiters exploit sentiments surrounding the end-of-

³⁹ "Malaysia on alert for lone-wolf attacks by ISIS supporters," *The Straits Times*. June 24, 2016. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-on-alert-for-lone-wolf-attacks-by-isis-supporters>

⁴⁰ Greg Fealy and John Funston. "Indonesian and Malaysian Support for the Islamic State." *Management Systems International*. January 6, 2016. 2. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2016/PBAAD863.pdf>.

⁴¹ Anton Chan., 7.

time prophecy *Khilafah Minhaj Nebuwwah* (“end-of-times caliphate”),⁴² which states that the greatest battle of time will be fought in *Sham* (Greater Syria) between Islam and the ‘infidels’.⁴³ Daesh holds territory in the region mentioned in the prophecy and claims to be waging war against ‘infidels.’ These factors strengthen its legitimacy as the pro-Islam force that will fight during the end of time battle and makes martyrdom for Daesh appealing to the segment of Southeast Asian Muslims who believe this.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Daesh has created a living space for non-combatants as well as militants by providing social services. Thus, it has more or less successfully upheld its narrative as a legitimized “State.” Daesh’s success in fighting Western-backed forces also adds to the symbolic power for Daesh’s cause. Lastly, in both Indonesia and Malaysia, fighters are motivated by the notion that Daesh’s fight is a “Just War” to protect Muslims in the Middle East.⁴⁵ These factors are unique to Daesh, making it a greater threat than other extremist groups both ideologically and logistically. Hence, the U.S. has to cooperate with other countries to combat these unprecedented challenges in the fight against terrorism.

Currently, Daesh does not have an official organizational structure in any Southeast Asian country and must rely on existing networks and sources of funding. Most of Daesh’s central funding comes from localized sources in the Middle East tied to its existing governing structures. The most identifiable sources of its income come from its oil reserves, private donations, taxes within its territory, petty crime, and sales of plundered antiquities from its conquered land. Daesh is “the best-funded terrorist organization the U.S. has ever confronted.”⁴⁶ Yet, because Daesh does not appear to move cash in and out of its borders, the sources of Daesh funding in Southeast Asia are unclear. However, it is presumed that Daesh operatives in Southeast Asia use similar tactics as those used by jihadi organizations already established in the region.⁴⁷ Traditionally, Southeast Asian

⁴² Joseph Chinyong Liow. “ISIS Goes to Asia.” *The Brookings Institute*. September 21, 2014. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2014/09/21-isis-goes-to-asia-liow>.

⁴³ Rohan Gunaratna., 10.

⁴⁴ Greg Fealy and John Funston.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁶ Janine Di Giovanni, Leah McGrath Goodman, and Damien Sharkov. “How Does ISIS Fund its Reign of Terror?” *Newsweek*. November 6, 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/11/14/how-does-isis-fund-its-reign-terror-282607.html>.

⁴⁷ Greg Fealy and John Funston., 19.

terrorist organizations have received funding through several means including cash exchanged by individuals, funds from Islamic charities, proceeds from *hawala* shops, donations from members or outsiders, and money from petty crime.⁴⁸ As Daesh's endowment has enhanced its capability to attract recruits to the Middle East as well as fund highly sophisticated recruitment campaigns, this will also be a key factor in its ability to establish a strong foothold in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asian governments' greatest concern regarding Daesh is the prospect of vigilante attacks from militants within their countries. The U.S. shares similar concerns domestically, as well as concerns over instability in the Middle East and in other parts of the world. Not only is the stability of Southeast Asia in U.S.'s national security interest, but also the protection of American nationals abroad. Daesh implores its followers around the world to target Westerners and to carry out terrorist attacks. For example, in September 2014, in response to the U.S.-led coalition in Syria, Daesh spokesman Al-Adnani called on supporters to kill foreigners everywhere. This resulted in several deadly attacks in Europe, the United States, the Middle East and North Africa, in addition to Malaysia and Indonesia.⁴⁹ Hence, the U.S. sees Daesh as a threat to the safety of Americans in Southeast Asia and not just to the integrity of the countries themselves. As such, the U.S. government has assisted Southeast Asian governments in varying degrees with their counterterrorism efforts.

INDONESIA

The Daesh Threat in Indonesia and the Indonesian Government's Response

Indonesia is a major link in the global terrorist network. Historically vulnerable to terrorist groups in the past, it has become a key target of Daesh's recruitment strategies and is experiencing the greatest influence of Daesh's global network thus far in the region. Several Indonesians have been instrumental in the spread of Daesh throughout the country. This includes Muhammad Fachry, who began participating in online religious forums led by Omar Bakri, the famous leader of the former al Muhajiroun terrorist organization based in Britain. Al

⁴⁸ Zachary Abuza, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiya", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 25:2 (2003), pp.169-199. 172.

⁴⁹ "US and allies strike ISIL targets in Syria," *AlJazeera*. September 23, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/us-begins-bombing-isil-positions-syria-201492313622252650.html>

Mahajiroun is a Salafi jihadist organization that supports the creation of an Islamic caliphate. Unlike al Qaeda, al Muhajiroun stressed the necessity to carve out territory for the creation of an Islamic state.⁵⁰ In 2005, Omar Bakri permitted Fachry to start his own Indonesian-based al Muhajiroun group. When the Arab Spring began in 2011, Fachry and his supporters saw the changes occurring in the Middle East as an opening to establish an Islamic caliphate. The group *Sharia4Indonesia*, which he had created years prior, campaigned for Daesh. He also started a website called *Al Mustaqbal*, meaning “The Future,” with links to various local militant networks in Indonesia, and supports many ceremonies of groups pledging allegiance to Daesh. Some of these fighters have gone on to fight in Syria, including Bahrum Syah, who formed the Indonesian-Malaysian unit of Daesh, which “reportedly aims at eventually establishing an archipelagic Islamic State in Southeast Asia, to be called *Daulah Islamiyah Nusantara* in Malaysia.”⁵¹

In 2013, Fachry and his followers created the *Forum of Islamic Law Activists* (FAKSI). Another individual, Aman Abdurrahman, a vocal jihadi ideologue who plays a key role in the propagation of pro-Daesh information, acted as a mentor for the group.⁵² With support from Aman, the FAKSI group believes and advocates that Daesh possesses the capabilities to create an enduring Islamic state. In order to recruit more members, FAKSI held public declarations of support for Daesh and arranged pro-Daesh speaker events and demonstrations. These acts were then shared via social media sites. One tweet read: “The Islamic State will soon come to Indonesia, *insha’llah* (God Willing), and change the name of Indonesia to ‘Islamic State of Southeast Asia!’”⁵³ Furthermore, in April 2014, Abdurrahman released an online pledge of loyalty to Daesh, after which several FAKSI members left Indonesia to fight in Syria.⁵⁴

In Indonesia, Islamic entities that sympathize with Daesh also play a role in Daesh’s campaign in the country and promote their message through a variety of tools, including social media, online discussion forums, and the magazine *Al Muhajirn*. Another organization, the *Forum Pendukung Daulah* (FPDI), founded

⁵⁰ “The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia.” 2.

⁵¹ “The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia.” 1.

⁵² Navhat Nuraniyah, “How ISIS Charmed the New Generation of Indonesian Militants.” *The Middle East Institute*. January 9, 2015.

⁵³ “The Evolution of ISIS in Indonesia.”, 12.

⁵⁴ Tia M. Kibtiah, “Mobilizations and Movements of Foreign Fighters from Southeast Asia to Syria and Iraq,” *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, Vol 4, No. 1 (2016), pp 79-86.

on July 15, 2014, has held a series of public gatherings in support of Daesh. The same year at a FPDJ meeting, more than 500 men met at the Baitu Makmur Mosque where they collectively supported the creation of an Islamic State in the Middle East. Indonesian authorities have identified two other local networks that have pledged allegiance to Daesh: *Anshar ul Khalifah*, which was established in Sempu, Malang in August 2014, and the *Tasikmalaya Group*, whose exact creation date and location are not known. Authorities believe that Ustaz Dani and Amin Mude established the *Tasikmalaya Group* cell to train Indonesians and to arrange travel for them to fight for Daesh in the Middle East. Other pro-Daesh groups include the *Jamaah Anshorut Tauhid (JAT)*, the *Mujahidin Indonesia Timur*, *Ring Banten*, *Gema Salam*, and *Mujahidin Indonesia Barat*.⁵⁵ Extremist groups that favor Daesh over al Qaeda often perceive Daesh as closer to victory because it holds territory.⁵⁶

It is important to note, however, that some prominent groups in Southeast Asia, including JI, do not endorse Daesh. This is because of both ideological and personality differences within the Southeast Asian groups, such as disagreements over the concept of *takfir* (Muslims judging other Muslims for being un-Islamic), interpretations of Islamic law, and the use of violence.⁵⁷ In JI's case, the group began to criticize Daesh's overly violent methods and focused its efforts on supporting al Qaeda instead.

Indonesia officially banned Daesh in 2014 and designated groups that support its operations, directly or indirectly, as criminal.⁵⁸ In order to combat the return of nationals to Indonesia after fighting for Daesh in the Middle East, the Indonesian Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs announced in January 2015 that those leaving to fight in the Middle East would have their passports revoked.⁵⁹ That year, Indonesian authorities also created a new special force called *Koopsugab* within the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (the armed forces). The Indonesian government claims that this task force will enhance its ability to respond to Daesh threats and will work with local police to accomplish its goals. Furthermore, the government has made a greater effort to track Islamic websites and social media chat rooms that might act as a medium for recruitment. Accordingly, on March

⁵⁵ Greg Fealy and John Funston.

⁵⁶ Navhat Nuraniyah.

⁵⁷ Joseph Chinyong Liow.

⁵⁸ Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia."

⁵⁹ Greg Fealy and John Funston.

30, 2015, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology blocked over 22 media outlets deemed to threaten national security.⁶⁰ Indonesia has also taken soft power approaches to counter Daesh's growing influence. For instance, the government has consistently assured its citizens that Daesh's ideology is fundamentally contradictory to the unitary state ideology of *Pancasila*. Moreover, the government has looked to local and prominent religious leaders to speak out against Daesh.⁶¹

Though Indonesia has made significant process in the fight against Daesh, a major weakness in Indonesia's strategy is its approach to prisons. Indonesia's prisons have been effective grounds for recruitment of terrorists via propaganda, because jihadist solidarity and affinity easily grows between inmates, especially as the prison system is rife with problems such as "corruption, overcrowding, organized violence, protection rackets, and also poorly managed and trained staff."⁶² The penal system is thus a hot bed for terrorist indoctrination. Overcrowding allows inmates convicted of terrorist offenses to propagate their violent ideology and exploit the grievances of their fellow inmates. In some prisons, convicted militants have been known to give extremist sermons to fellow inmates. These extremist sermons are also often transmitted to other inmates and prisons through smuggled audio recordings and cell phones.⁶³ In one famous instance, a militant prisoner was able to inspire a prison guard who went on to become one of the 2002 Bali bombers.⁶⁴ Despite these instances, Indonesian authorities have made little effort to target sources of propaganda and recruitment that infiltrate jails or address the ideological roots that lead to inmates engaging in terrorist recidivism. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on monitoring the communications and reading materials of inmates as well as the activities during religious meetings. More importantly, the government needs to identify a better strategy for targeting Daesh's electronic and written recruitment methods.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 17.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 12.

⁶³ Susan Sim and Noor Huda Ismail, "Indonesian prisons as breeding grounds for terror," *The Strait Times*, January 26, 2016.

⁶⁴ Hannah Beech, "Indonesia's overcrowded prisons are a breeding ground for Islamic extremism," *Time Magazine*, February 5, 2016.

⁶⁵ Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 18.

Additionally, inmates convicted for terrorist offenses are often released without proper rehabilitation, leading to recidivism.⁶⁶ For instance, two of the four militants involved in the January 2016 terrorist attacks in Jakarta had previously served jail time for offenses related to terrorism. Recidivism rates are hard to calculate because there is no national tracking database for arrests, however experts estimate that the recidivism rate is at least 15 per cent based on 47 cases in Indonesia thus far.⁶⁷ Corrections officers need to target the extremist ideology among inmates convicted of terrorist-related offenses as released convicted terrorists could spread the information further or become more actively involved in the Daesh network. In order to do so, prisons would need to implement a comprehensive de-radicalization program. Another step to address this problem is to improve tracking and supervision of convicted terrorists who have been released from prison.⁶⁸ All in all, Indonesia's approach to countering Daesh cannot be complete without the integration of a prison strategy.

In total, 2,000 Indonesians are estimated to have pledged support for Daesh.⁶⁹ While not all of these individuals may end up traveling to Syria or Iraq or joining terrorist networks within the region, the large and growing number of supporters is indicative of the appeal that the Islamic caliphate can have on the Indonesian public. By 2015, the BNPT estimated that roughly 500 nationals had left Indonesia to wage jihad in the Middle East and that around 43 had died while fighting.⁷⁰ Currently, Indonesian authorities are tracking around 40 people who have returned from Syria, 10 of whom have been held for questioning.⁷¹

While the actual numbers of Indonesians leaving to fight for Daesh in the Middle East seem minimal, there are several important security implications for both Indonesia and the U.S. First, there is great concern over nationals fighting for Daesh in the Middle East and then returning home to carry out attacks in-country

⁶⁶ Susan Sim and Noor Huda Ismail, "Predicting terrorist recidivism in Indonesia's prisons," *The Brookings Institution*, January 28, 2016.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Sidney Jones. "Battling ISIS in Indonesia." *The New York Times*. January 18, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/19/opinion/battling-isis-in-indonesia.html?_r=0.

⁶⁹ Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 13.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ "Indonesia tracks dozens of militants who have returned from Syria," *Asharq al-Awsat*, October 18, 2016. <http://english.aawsat.com/2016/10/article55360407/indonesia-tracks-dozens-militants-returned-syria>

or to recruit supporters.⁷² One such attack occurred in Jakarta on January 14, 2016, the first successful Daesh inspired attack in the region, killing seven people, including the five attackers, and injuring 23.⁷³ More recently, Daesh committed a suicide attack against a police station in Central Java on July 4, 2016, injuring one officer and killing the attacker.⁷⁴ These attacks threaten Indonesian citizens as well as U.S. citizens who travel there. The attacks also indicate Daesh's desire to spread to other parts of the world and not remain confined to the Middle East. The longer the presence of Daesh in Southeast Asia remains unchecked, the stronger Daesh's recruitment efforts will grow and the more fighters it will employ, both domestically within Indonesia and in the Middle East.

U.S.-Indonesian Cooperation and Policy Recommendations

Until now, cooperation between the U.S. and Indonesia has mostly centered on the U.S. providing funding for Densus 88.⁷⁵ The U.S. continues to provide training and equipment to support this task force through the Office of Antiterrorism Assistance in the Department of State.⁷⁶ This force has been active in combatting the threat of Daesh and has made numerous arrests. After 9/11, Densus 88 was cited by many as a successful collaborative effort in the fight against terrorism and al Qaeda affiliates like the JI. Densus 88 was able to arrest many top operatives of terrorist organizations, leading to its success. Hence, the U.S. should continue to support Densus 88 efforts. Considering that individuals play a large role in promulgating Daesh's message and recruiting Indonesians, Densus 88 should target specific high-ranking operatives within Daesh's Indonesia network. The U.S. should also focus trainings on countering bomb threats, which can aid the Indonesian police in preventing terrorist attacks like the ones in January 2016 and in July 2016 in Java and Jakarta.

In Indonesia, the U.S. also provides several million dollars a year for

⁷² Peter Chalk, "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 14.

⁷³ Joe Cochrane and Thomas Fuller, "Jakarta Attacks Raises Fears of ISIS' Spread to Southeast Asia," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/15/world/asia/jakarta-explosion.html?_r=0.

⁷⁴ Yenni Kwok, "Suicide Bomber attacks police station in Indonesia," *Times Magazine*, July 5, 2016. <http://time.com/4392782/indonesia-suicide-bomber-solo-surakarta-terrorism/>

⁷⁵ Greg Fealy and John Funston.

⁷⁶ "Fiscal Year 2010 Year In Review." *Bureau of Diplomatic Security, U.S. Department of State*. 2010.

law enforcement development programs aimed at bolstering the counter terrorism capabilities of the military and police. For example, Indonesia receives funding from the International Narcotics Law Enforcement Program, (INL), the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program, and the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), all of which include a counter-terrorism component.⁷⁷ Moreover, the U.S. provides assistance for strengthening democratic institutions, fostering transparent governance, and boosting economic growth.⁷⁸ The U.S. should continue these programs and emphasize counter-messaging in the counter-terrorism components of all-related programs. Counter messaging is a critical component of any effort to weaken the ideological appeal of Daesh, and should be employed in conjunction with any police or security related efforts. Furthermore, the U.S. should include funding to train Indonesian corrections officers on implementing de-radicalization programs in prisons through its programs like ICITAP, as prisons have been identified as hotbeds of terrorist propagation.

Despite bilateral cooperation between Indonesia and the U.S., Indonesia is unlikely to join the 65-nation, U.S.-led Global Coalition against Daesh. According to Arto Suryodipuro, the deputy chief of mission at the Indonesian Embassy in the U.S., Indonesia sees its primary role in the fight against Daesh as ideological and, hence, prefers to pursue a “soft approach” in combatting Daesh.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Indonesia is looking to increase cooperation with the U.S. in areas of soft power, especially through bilateral exchanges. For instance, the establishment of a Council on Religion and Pluralism in August 2011 is cited as a successful collaboration between Washington and Jakarta, as this council promotes tolerance, moderation, and pluralism amongst Indonesians. Arto Suryodipuro has also emphasized that the U.S. and Indonesia should cooperate through other means, like intelligence sharing and political cooperation.⁸⁰ In addition to collaborating on the Council on Religion and Pluralism, the U.S. can also encourage Indonesian support of moderate Muslim groups. For example, two of the largest Muslim movements in

⁷⁷ Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggot. “The Evolving Terrorist

Threat in Southeast Asia,” *RAND Corporation*. 2009. XVI. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG846.pdf

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Prashanth Parameswaran. “Indonesia will not join US anti-ISIS coalition.” *The Diplomat*. March 5, 2016.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

the world, *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah*, with around 40 and 30 million members respectively, are located in Indonesia. Both groups, which are led by internationally respected clerics, have launched anti-ISIS platforms. Elevating the moderate messages of groups such of these is a possible area for Indonesian and U.S. cooperation in fighting the narrative of Daesh.⁸¹

Though the U.S. and Indonesia cooperate on other fronts that indirectly target Daesh, such as economic development and socio-cultural exchanges, the partnership lacks a comprehensive strategy against Daesh. Currently, Indonesia and the U.S. are implementing policies on an ad-hoc basis without a comprehensive and long term plan. The U.S. should continue funding programs to provide counter-terrorism training and equipment that will naturally aid the country in fighting the Daesh threat. At the same time, the two countries will need to develop a multi-faceted plan specifically aimed at Daesh if they hope to curb its growing influence in the country. In the future, the U.S. and Indonesia should not only continue to cooperate via a multi-pronged approach, which includes diplomacy, cooperation between intelligence and Densus 88, and economic development, but also add elements that focus on tracking suspected and known Daesh supporters and targeting social and traditional media sources. This cooperation should be paired with greater emphasis on populations vulnerable to Daesh recruitment, as well as tracking individuals promulgating Daesh propaganda.

MALAYSIA

The Daesh Threat in Malaysia and the Malaysian Government's Response

Like Indonesia, Malaysia has been a prime target for Daesh recruitment because of its Muslim population. The political climate of Malaysia in particular creates conditions that could potentially be conducive to growing ideologies like Daesh. For instance, the dominant political party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), is a Malay-Muslim party that infuses Muslims ideals through its institutions and policies, maintaining that Malay-Muslim people deserve their special privileges mandated under the 1957 constitution. Moreover,

⁸¹ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "ISIS in the pacific: assessing terrorism in Southeast Asia and the threat to the homeland," *The Brookings Institute*. April 27, 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/isis-in-the-pacific-assessing-terrorism-in-southeast-asia-and-the-threat-to-the-homeland/>

to compete with other Muslim parties, the UMNO uses religious credentials for political legitimacy, blurring the line between religious and political aspects of society. Furthermore, religious efforts on behalf of the UMNO have led to right-wing groups preaching messages against non-Muslims, creating an atmosphere of intolerance that has contributed to Daesh's popularity. This phenomenon is evident in the proliferation of Malay websites with a pro-Daesh orientation, showing that Daesh sentiments have found an audience.⁸²

The estimated number of Malaysians who have traveled to join Daesh ranges from 30 to 150, and the number of nationals killed while fighting ranges from 10 to 15.⁸³ Other estimates suggest that 30 Malaysians have died fighting for Daesh in Syria and Iraq.⁸⁴ Most nationals who have left for Daesh are believed to still be fighting in the Middle East. However, a few have returned to the country to encourage Islamist militant action in Malaysia and to join Daesh's cause.⁸⁵

Malaysian militants who return from fighting in the Middle East so far appear to be most interested in carrying out attacks in Malaysia itself and recruiting in the country.⁸⁶ In 2016 alone, it is reported that at least 119 suspected militants were arrested for their association with Daesh.⁸⁷ According to the Malaysian Transport Minister, police intelligence estimates that there are 50,000 Daesh sympathizers in Malaysia. Hence, even if a small fraction of the estimated number becomes further radicalized and decides to take action, it is nevertheless a huge threat to Malaysia.⁸⁸ Most recently, Daesh militants were able to carry out their first successful terrorist attack in the country on June 28, 2016. The attack, which occurred outside of Kuala Lumpur in Puchong, injured eight people. Prior to that, Malaysian police had successfully thwarted nine other Daesh plots since 2014, including several planned attacks in Kuala Lumpur.⁸⁹

⁸² Joseph Chinyong Liow.

⁸³ Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggot., 11.

⁸⁴ "Malaysia Uncovers ISIS cell transitioning through Sabah"

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Peter Chalk, Angel Rabasa, William Rosenau, and Leanne Piggot.

⁸⁷ "Malaysia Uncovers ISIS cell transitioning through Sabah," *The Straits Times*. January 24, 2017. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysia-uncovers-isis-cell-transiting-through-sabah>

⁸⁸ "Malaysia Minister: 50,000 ISIL Sympathizers in Country." *Aljazeera*. December 12, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/malaysia-minister-50000-isil-sympathisers-country-151212151155422.html>.

⁸⁹ Marc Lourdes. "Islamic State launches first successful attack in Malaysia." *CNN*. July 4th, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/04/homepage2/islamic-state-attack-malaysia/>

Like Indonesia, Malaysian recruits come from various backgrounds, ranging from an Islamic Studies professor at a major university to small traders and military members. In December 2014, the government identified six civil servants who had joined or assisted Daesh in some capacity.⁹⁰ In April 2015, authorities detained 17 people in Kuala Lumpur and Kedah for plotting to kidnap the Prime Minister, Defense Minister, and other high profile officials. Two of those arrested were identified as members of the Royal Malaysian Air Force who had been allegedly making flight arrangements for Malaysians to travel to the Middle East. An earlier raid in 2014 also included the detainment of uniformed personnel. These instances have sparked concern among security officials about the appeal of Daesh' ideology to members of the armed forces. In fact, an estimated 71 soldiers have some connection to the group, though the degree of connection is unclear. Furthermore, many militants arrested have no criminal record, showing that Daesh is targeting operatives without suspicious backgrounds who can "move under the radar of intelligence and police agencies."⁹¹ Regardless, Daesh infiltration of the armed forces has dire consequences for the security situation by undermining the security apparatus and its ability to effectively prevent attacks.

In Malaysia, social media has been the most important component of Daesh's recruitment efforts as the nation has high internet penetration, which recruiters have taken advantage of by developing a consistent and sophisticated campaign. According to estimates by the Home Affairs Minister Zahid, 75 percent of Malaysian are recruited through social media.⁹² Furthermore, social media has played a large role in recruiting Malaysian women to Daesh. In many cases, women take on lead recruitment roles and make up a large part of Daesh's institutional base. There have been several instances where women have been arrested for activity in Daesh cells. For example, in May 2014, a 55-year-old Malaysian woman named Azizah Md Yusof was arrested for using Facebook to recruit and "support terrorist activities."⁹³ Whereas women generally have a

⁹⁰ Greg Fealy and John Funston., 12.

⁹¹ Peter Chalk." Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 11.

⁹² Greg Fealy and John Funston., 20.

⁹³ Dr. Zacahry Abuza, "Joining the New Caravan: ISIS and the Regeneration of Terrorism in Southeast Asia," *Strategic Studies Institute*. June 25, 2015. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/joining-the-new-caravan/2015/06/25>

passive role in most jihadist movements, Daesh actively recruits women and empowers them in the arena of social media and recruitment, adding to its appeal.

Malaysians have also been targeted through other media forums including videos. The Malaysian members of *Katibah Nusantara*, the Southeast Asian unit of Daesh, released a video on January 25, 2016 entitled “*Mesej Awam Kepada Malaysia*” (Public Message for Malaysia). The video threatened to attack the Malaysian government. In the video, the militants specifically addressed the “disconnect” between Malaysia’s democratic governance and Allah’s (God’s) wishes.⁹⁴ In June 2016, Daesh released another video targeting Malaysians, Indonesians, and Filipinos, in which a Malaysian militant aimed at attacking the Malaysian Police headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur.⁹⁵ These videos’ targeting of Malaysians illustrates Daesh’s increasing pivot towards the country and region as a whole. Bearing in mind the huge influence of social media on the recruitment of Malaysians, it will be important for any future collaboration between Malaysia and the U.S. to include a dynamic counter-Daesh social media campaign.

Meanwhile, Malaysia’s government has passed a series of laws to curb Daesh’s growing presence in the country. For instance, in August 2014, it formally classified Daesh as a terrorist organization. Then, in April 2015, the government passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), which included a variety of anti-terrorism measures, some controversial, such as granting authorities the power to hold terror suspects for 59 days without trial with the possibility of extending the detention to two years, if deemed necessary.⁹⁶ The Malaysian Parliament also approved the Special Measures against Foreign Terrorism Act in June 2015, which targets the passports and other travel documents of any person suspected of ties with overseas terrorism organizations.⁹⁷ Malaysia’s government has also taken steps to target the potential sources of Daesh’s funding in the country. For instance, in September 2015, the Parliament passed an addition to the 2001 Anti-Terrorist Financing Act, thereby increasing the government’s ability to investigate, track,

⁹⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran. “Islamic State Vows Revenge on Malaysia Amid Crackdown.” *The Diplomat*. January 25, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/islamic-state-vows-revenge-on-malaysia-amid-crackdown-terror-meet/>.

⁹⁵ Rachel Middleton, “New ISIS video targets Malaysia but police are not shaken by new threats,” *International Business Times*, June 24, 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/new-isis-video-targets-malaysia-police-are-not-shaken-by-new-threats-1567172>

⁹⁶ Peter Chalk. “Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia,” 19.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

and freeze money associated with extremist militant activity.

In order to further address the growing threat from Daesh, Malaysia launched the National Special Operations Force (NSOF) in October 2016. The force, which is comprised of officers from all branches of the armed services, the Royal Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, is the first integrated security force of its kind. Currently, the NSOF has 170 personnel total, all of which are prepared to mobilize by air, land, or maritime units in order to respond swiftly to terrorism threats and attacks. The NSOF will be based outside of Kuala Lumpur at the Sangai Besi military camp.⁹⁸ Though it is too soon to determine the success of the NSOF, Malaysia's effort to streamline procedures and security forces is promising. Furthermore, the creation of the NSOF shows that the Malaysian government takes the threat of Daesh seriously. If the NSOF proves successful in thwarting terrorism threats, not just from Daesh but other regional groups as well, it could act as a model for other countries to follow. Moreover, though NSOF does not receive international funding at present, there may be opportunity for U.S. assistance for the NSOF should the Malaysian government seek international partners.

Additionally, the government has engaged moderate Islamic organizations to help combat Daesh's appeal. In this connection, The Malaysian Islamic Development Authority, which supervises the majority of the country's mosques, issued a fatwa against Daesh and condemned labeling those who die on its behalf as "martyrs". The Authority has also closely monitored Friday sermons in mosque by requiring a dedicated session to educate Muslims on the peaceful nature of Islam. Moreover, Malaysia's Global Movement of Moderates, established in April 2012, holds events to gather civil society members and non-traditional stakeholders to disperse counter-narratives that discredit Daesh's ideology.⁹⁹ However, scholars have criticized the government's "war against ideas" for being too reactive to Daesh's efforts.¹⁰⁰

The need for a better counter-narrative is apparent in the opinions of Malaysians towards al-Baghdadi, Daesh's leader. According to a Pew Research Center Poll taken in March 2015, only 20 percent of respondents said that they

⁹⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Malaysia's New Anti-Terror Force," *The Diplomat*. November 1, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/11/malysias-new-anti-terror-force/>

⁹⁹ Peter Chalk. "Black Flag Rising: ISIL in Southeast Asia and Australia," 19.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

were actively opposed to his movement, suggesting that most of the country is either indifferent to, or supportive of Daesh and its goals.”¹⁰¹ This percentage is troubling and is providing fertile recruiting ground for Daesh operatives. In response, Malaysia should thus focus on providing an alternative narrative. For example, the government can provide disenfranchised youth with economic incentives or those who are ideologically attracted to Daesh with peaceful narratives of Islam. By providing counter-narratives to Daesh and an alternative avenue to the Islamic community, Malaysia should be able to thwart Daesh’s reach in the country, as individuals vulnerable to Daesh recruitment will have other narratives to look up to and other avenues to express grievances. Furthermore, these counter-narratives should be dispersed via social media whenever possible, since social media is the main forum from which Daesh recruits in the country.

U.S.-Malaysian Cooperation and Policy Recommendations

Malaysia has become an important U.S. partner in the fight against Daesh. On September 29, 2015, Malaysia became a member of the 64-nation U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter Daesh. Currently, Malaysia is participating in the anti-messaging campaign, which aims at delegitimizing Daesh’s narrative by contrasting the group’s violence and hatred with a vision of hope for a better future. The main goal of the counter-messaging group is to “defeat ISIL as an idea.”¹⁰² Hopefully, counter-messaging can help increase the percentage of Malaysians actively opposed to Daesh taking into account the percentage of Malaysians who do not feel adamantly opposed to Daesh operations. Though details of Malaysia’s future role in the coalition have not been disclosed thus far, U.S. officials are hoping that Malaysia’s government will co-lead one of the five existing working groups: counter-finance, stabilization support, public diplomacy and counter messaging, and foreign terrorist fighters.¹⁰³

As a member of the Global Coalition, Malaysia receives several benefits. First, it receives access to the Coalition Collaboration Workspace (CCW), a virtual private portal that provides Coalition members a secure workspace. Secondly, in conjunction with the U.S., Malaysia received funding for a joint messaging

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Prashanth Parameswaran. “Exclusive: US, Malaysia and the War against the Islamic State.” *The Diplomat*. November 25, 2015. <http://thediplomat.com/2015/11/exclusive-us-malaysia-and-the-war-against-the-islamic-state/>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

center known as the Regional Digital Counter-Messaging Communications Center (RDC3) thereby making Malaysia the regional hub for coordinating and launching counter-Daesh messaging.¹⁰⁴ The RDC3 was originally expected to begin operations on May 1, 2016. The RDC3 plan includes building a unit in every state of Malaysia in order to stiffen the Daesh narrative broadcasted in the cyber world.¹⁰⁵ The U.S. helps fund the RDC3 and provide technology and other expertise. However, various issues regarding RDC3 are still being worked out within the Malaysian government, and the Center was not operational until November 2016.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the creation of RDC3, President Barack Obama signed a document in November 2015 called the Preventing and Combating Serious Crime (PCSC), outlining cooperation between Malaysia and the U.S. in exchanging information such as biometric and DNA data for law enforcement efforts. The Royal Malaysian Police will be able to use the shared information to track suspected terrorists in the country. The agreement does come with certain restrictions that Malaysia will have to comply with, such as reporting information to Interpol within an established timeframe.¹⁰⁷

Clearly, there has been concrete cooperation between Kuala Lumpur and Washington in regard to combatting Daesh. By joining the Global Coalition, Malaysia has agreed to partner with countries around the world in the global fight against Daesh, as well as take on a regional leadership role with the establishment of the RDC3. But, the U.S. will need to prove its commitment to its collaboration on RDC3 by helping to ensure continues operation, as well as provide consistent training and expertise. The U.S. could also seek opportunities to work with Malaysia's NSOF. Considering that social media is the biggest source of recruitment within the community, Malaysia is focusing its efforts on the counter-messaging component of the Coalition's agenda. Nonetheless,

¹⁰⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran. "Malaysia to Launch New Center to Counter Islamic State Messaging." *The Diplomat*. January 27, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/malaysia-to-launch-new-center-to-counter-isis-messaging/>.

¹⁰⁵ Melissa Goh. "Malaysia to launch counter-messaging centre to fight against Islamic State." *Channel News Asia*. March 25, 2016. <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/malaysia-to-launch/2636900.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Prashanth Parameswaran. "Malaysia to Launch New Center to Counter Islamic State Messaging."

¹⁰⁷ Prashanth Parameswaran. "Exclusive: US, Malaysia and the War against the Islamic State."

Malaysia and the U.S. should pair its soft-power approaches with a strategic plan for targeting individuals prominent in the recruitment and the operations of Daesh in the country, especially in the militant hotspots of Kedah and Perak. Despite little information being available on the individuals responsible for the spread of Daesh's influence, greater binational cooperation between the U.S. and Malaysia in areas of intelligence and local law enforcement development could help thwart further Daesh activities in the region.

CONCLUSION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BETTER U.S. COOPERATION WITH INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA IN COMBATting THE DAESH THREAT

This section proceeds by first outlying general recommendations for US cooperation with Malaysia and Indonesia and then turns to specific recommendations for each country. Regarding the first component, the U.S. should take a variety of steps in regard to its counter-terrorism relationships with Indonesia and Malaysia in order to more effectively counter the growing Daesh threat. One step that the U.S. should take with both countries is to support localized police-driven security measures through assistance programs such as ICITAP and INL. Improved community-police relations can lead to greater trust within the community, making it easier for law enforcement to identify possible terrorist networks. This strategy is especially beneficial in Indonesia, where its archipelago topography makes it difficult for a centrally located law enforcement approach to combatting Daesh inroads in the country. Another step the U.S. should take is to develop a soft power approach. For instance, one approach can include encouraging both countries to empower moderate Muslim organizations and to incorporate civil society organizations into their strategy, like the Council of Religious Pluralism in Malaysia. Another soft power approach can include social media campaigns to counter the narrative Daesh propagates through these channels. Additionally, the U.S. can work with Indonesia and Malaysia to develop economic initiatives and aid to undercut Daesh's economic appeal.

As for specific country recommendations, in the case of Indonesia, Densus 88 has been a successful counter-terrorism tool in the past, and the U.S. should continue to support its operations. In particular, the U.S. and Indonesia should target high ranking Daesh operatives in the country, as they have played a formative role in establishing Daesh networks. Another important component of a U.S.-Indonesian strategy should be soft power approaches. Accordingly, the U.S. should continue to pursue collaborative efforts like the Council on Religion and Pluralism

in order to target Daesh's ideological aims. Another area for cooperation is Indonesia's prison systems. The U.S. can use channels already in place, such as aid through ICITAP or INL, to provide assistance for corrections programs and de-radicalization measures in prisons training. Prisons are an important key in Daesh's propagation in Indonesia, so it must be addressed in any Indonesia's counter terrorism strategy.

The nature of cooperation between the U.S. and Malaysia contrasts with U.S. cooperation with Indonesia, most notably because of Malaysia's cooperation in the support of U.S.-led Coalition to Counter Daesh. Malaysia has also been more successful at thwarting the Daesh threat than Indonesia and has suffered fewer attacks. The U.S. should help ensure the success of RDC3 and continue to support its operations. Since the majority of Daesh recruits are attracted through social media and messaging efforts, targeted local counter-messaging through the RDC3 could prove to be a successful anti-terrorism measure. Furthermore, Malaysian authorities have been able to thwart most planned Daesh related terrorist attacks thus far, which is a testament to the country's strong security apparatus. Yet, the threat of Daesh is not diminishing. Thus, the U.S. and Malaysia should collaborate on targeting individuals who play a key role in Daesh's operations in the country, especially those within the armed forces. Moreover, the U.S. and Malaysia should increase cooperation on various areas within the Coalition in order to utilize Malaysia's position to counter Daesh operations in Southeast Asia to its full capacity. Finally, the U.S. should support the operations of the NSOF. If the NSOF proves successful, it could be used as a model for future counter Daesh and counter terrorism strategies in other countries.

Both Indonesia and Malaysia are at a pivotal moment in their fight against Daesh. Although the presence of Daesh is relatively limited in both countries, support for Daesh is growing amongst smaller jihadi movements, as well as people from all socio-economic backgrounds. As such, it is important for the U.S. to support efforts to curb Daesh's present influence in the region to prevent the organization from making further inroads. The Trump Administration has made clear its commitment to counter-terrorism efforts, even taking extreme and controversial measures such as the Executive Order 13780 signed on March 06, 2017, which temporarily bans immigrants from six different majority

Muslim countries.¹⁰⁸ Yet, the new Administration has not made its intentions with Southeast Asia clear. Continuing and strengthening cooperation on counter-Daesh operations in the region is of vital importance for the U.S. for several reasons. If Daesh is able to create a cell within Southeast Asia, which would most likely be in Indonesia where Daesh has had significant success so far, it would have implications for the stability of the region. The Daesh Southeast Asian branch could lure individuals from neighboring Asian countries who cannot make the trip to Syria. With such a high concentration of operatives within the region, Daesh could wage greater and more frequent attacks on Southeast Asian countries and as well as on other regions of Asia. This would likely have a snowball effect, as more attacks lead to greater media attention and to the potential for gaining more recruits.

Daesh operatives within Southeast Asia do not operate on an isolated basis in each country. Rather, they are part of the growing Daesh network, and it is vital to recognize this factor when assessing a U.S. strategy for the region as a whole. At the same time, the spread of Daesh in each country is nuanced and can be attributed to a unique set of factors specific to each country, such as their political climate, geography, and religious environment. As such, the U.S. should continue to work with countries like Indonesia and Malaysia through bilateral cooperation on an individualized basis that addresses the specific factors and circumstances present in each country.

Daesh's presence in Southeast Asia cannot be allowed to grow. While the international community was unable to prevent the territorial rise of Daesh in the Middle East, it can take steps now to prevent a similar situation in Southeast Asia. But expedient action is paramount. Daesh's recent loss of territory in the Middle East threatens a further pivot to Southeast Asia. The future of global security depends on timely and effective U.S. cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, to contain as well as prevent further Daesh expansion.

¹⁰⁸ Exec. Order No. 13780, 3 C.F.R. (2017). Web.

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