Malaysia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On November 20, 2019, Malaysian authorities released Yazid Sufaat from the Simpang Renggam penitentiary in Johor and sent him to his home near Kuala Lumpur. Sufaat, a U.S.-educated biochemist, has served a string of jail sentences for his involvement with both ISIS and al-Qaeda. The former army captain, now aged 55, rose to notoriety when he was jailed in 2002 for his exploits in Kandahar, Afghanistan, where he was a leading figure in al-Qaeda's push to develop weapons of mass destruction, including anthrax for use as a biological weapon. In January 2000 Yazid provided lodgings in his flat for al-Qaeda operatives who took part in a meeting in Kuala Lumpur of senior leaders from the group, including two September 11 hijackers, to discuss future terror plots. He was released in 2010 but sent back to jail in 2013 for recruiting ISIS members to fight in Syria. In 2017, he was again released, only to be rearrested shortly afterwards when it was discovered he had been recruiting fellow inmates for al-Qaeda while in jail. His latest release raises concerns among U.S. terrorist experts who believe there is no solid evidence that Sufaat has abandoned his extremist creed. Malaysian authorities have some safety measures in place as Sufaat will be required to report to local police twice a week and can only leave the vicinity of his house with written permission from the Selangor police chief. These specific measures were aimed at preventing Sufaat from reoffending and carrying out further recruitment. (Sources: Arab News [1], South Morning China Post [2])

Overview

Malaysia faced a domestic communist insurgency beginning in the 1930s when the country was part of the British colonies and protectorates. Communist insurgents formed the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM), which sought to overthrow British colonial rule. Even after Malaya independence in 1957 and the establishment of the independent state of Malaysia in 1963, the CPM continued to call for militant struggle, and violent activities intensified during the 1970s and 1980s. The CPM and Malaysian government negotiated a peace agreement on December 2, 1989, and the last holdouts of the communist insurgency laid down their arms in 1990. By the late 1990s, Malaysia came under threat from domestic Islamic extremist group Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM)—comprised of Malaysian fighters from the Soviet-Afghan war—and regional terror groups such as Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Philippines' Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). (Sources: *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* [3], Central Intelligence Agency [4], Global Security [5], Malay Mail Online [6], *Patterns of Global Terrorism* [7])

In January 2000, several al-Qaeda operatives—including perpetrators of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—gathered in Kuala Lumpur for training. Osama bin Laden sent four operatives to the capital city to train for a suicide operation in either the United States or Asia. Kuala Lumpur-trained operative, Walid Muhammad Salih bin Roshayed bin Attash (a.k.a. Tawfiq bin Attash) helped bomb the USS *Cole* warship in Yemen in October 2000. Two others, Khalid al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, were the first of the 9/11 hijackers to settle in the United States in early 2000. The fourth trainee, Abu Bara al-Yemeni, was encouraged by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed to launch an attack using commercial passenger planes. (Source: *9/11 Commission Report* [8])

Following the 9/11 attacks, the Malaysian government cracked down on KMM and JI activities in the country. Some KMM and Malaysian JI members fled to Indonesia to avoid arrest. Since the start of conflict in Syria in 2011, former members of both KMM and JI are believed to have joined Syrian jihadists in their fight. Malaysian networks of these extremist groups are believed to support ISIS, according to Southeast Asian terrorism analysts and a regional study completed for the U.S. Agency for International Development. (Sources: Global Security [5], Malay Mail Online [6], USAID [9], SEARCCT [10])

Analysts believe that Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country, is at high risk for terror threats, citing reports of thwarted attacks as early as August 2014. Regional terrorist groups such as the ASG continue to pose a threat to Malaysia's northern state of Sabah and Malaysian maritime security. Mass arrests of suspects allegedly involved in terrorism have also raised concerns of an imminent threat in the country, as Malaysian authorities have arrested more than 100 individuals for ISIS-related activities. Following a deadly ISIS attack in neighboring Indonesia on January 14, 2016, and a subsequent arrest of a suspected suicide bomber in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak ordered police to heighten security. (Sources: Deutsche Welle [11], Reuters [12], CNN [13], CNBC [14])

In October 2015, the United States selected Malaysia to host a regional center to counter ISIS online propaganda, underscoring closer counterterrorism cooperation between the two governments. In September 2015, Malaysia joined the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIS. Malaysia has also implemented U.N. resolutions, such as the resolution to

address the threat of foreign fighters. Malaysia has met with Indonesia and the Philippines to address regional security concerns. Beginning in 2016, the three governments met several times to discuss maritime cooperation, culminating in a March 2017 agreement to launch joint patrols of the Sulu Sea to safeguard ships' crew from piracy and kidnapping. (Sources: *The Star* [15], Malay Mail Online [16], The Diplomat [17], Benar News [18], Malaysian Digest [19], U.N. Press Center [20], *Wall Street Journal* [21], Daily-Sun [22])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization and Recruitment

Currently reported to be inactive, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM) aspired to create an Islamic state comprising of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the southern Philippines. KMM's violent activities included trying to overthrow the Malaysian government, assassinating politicians, and trying to kill U.S. Navy personnel stationed in Kelang and Lumut Port. To radicalize and recruit members, KMM adopted techniques similar to those of Indonesia-based Jemaah Islamiyah [23] (JI)—namely, using personal networks and in-person meetings. KMM primarily recruited at Malaysian religious schools. Such schools are no longer a major recruitment hub since law enforcement authorities have increased oversight and mosques are increasingly state-controlled. (Sources: SEARCCT [10], TRAC [24], SEARCCT [25], Malay Mail Online [6], Malay Mail Online [26], Mohd Mizan Aslam [27], TodayOnline [28])

ISIS primarily uses the Internet to reach Malaysians. According to the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), ISIS's radicalization and recruitment in Malaysia has been facilitated via social media platforms, particularly Facebook. Malaysia has high rates of Internet access, and according to Malaysian Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, social media comprises 75 percent of ISIS recruitment efforts. Malaysians radicalized and recruited by ISIS appear to come from diverse backgrounds. Some are religious, some are secular who sought to redeem themselves for a religious cause, and others joined for thrill-seeking reasons. (Sources: SEARCCT [10], Middle East Institute [29], *Straits Times* [30])

Malaysian police Special Branch's Counter-Terrorism Division warned in August 2016 that ISIS was getting more aggressive in distributing its propaganda. ISIS has translated articles from its online magazine *Dabiq* into Malay and posted them to a website called Isdarat Daulah Islamiyah. The terrorist group has also created Malay-language videos, brochures, and tutorials. ISIS has also targeted Malaysians through propaganda videos that call for "lone wolf" attacks and encourage Malaysian sympathizers to join with ISIS supporters in the Philippines. (Sources: The Star [31], India Express [32], The Malaysian Insider [33])

Malaysian youth have attempted to join ISIS abroad or carry out domestic extremist activities. In February 2015, a 14-year-old girl was arrested by Malaysian police before boarding a Cairo-bound flight. She reportedly planned to marry a 22-year-old Malaysian student in Cairo with whom she would travel through Turkey to ISIS-controlled territory in Syria. In January 2016, a 16-year-old boy attempted to launch an ISIS-inspired so-called "lone cub" attack when he tried to kidnap a sales associate at a shopping mall. Authorities believe he had been influenced by Islamic extremism since 2013 and was exposed through email and social media. (Sources: *Straits Times* [34], The Star [35])

ISIS has even found a ppeal among the ranks of Malaysia's security services. In April 2015, Malaysian Defense Minister Abdul Rahim Bakri told parliament that as many as 70 Malaysian military personnel were found to have "joined" ISIS. While Abdul Rahim did not provide specifics on the extent of the alleged involvement, 10 Malaysian military personnel reportedly have died in ISIS suicide attacks. Others, including current Malaysian military enlistees, were being monitored by the military's intelligence and human resource personnel units. In July 2016, Malaysian Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar said that two low-ranking policemen were among 15 ISIS-linked people arrested. One was suspected of planning a terrorist attack and seeking funds for local ISIS cells. Authorities believed the other helped an ISIS member to avoid arrest. (Sources: *International Business Times* [36], The Diplomat [37], *International Business Times* [38], New Straits Times [39])

As of March 2017, the Malaysian government reportedly was cracking down on persons suspected of promoting ISIS ideology and recruiting new members for ISIS. The Ministry of Home Affairs announced that 234 Malaysians suspected of having links to ISIS had been detained by police as of February 22. Another 95 Malaysians were identified as having joined

ISIS in Syria, 30 of whom had died while another eight were arrested upon returning to Malaysia. (Source: Southeast Asia Globe [40])

Indonesia-based terrorist group Jemaah Islamiah (JI) operates regional units, including in Malaysia. The Malaysian unit provides sources of financing for overall JI operations, including terror attacks and training. Specific sources of financing are reported to include money skimmed from charities operating in the region, cash transported from sympathizers, proceeds from weapons smuggling, profits from front companies, and extortion. In addition, JI cells are believed to train in parts of Malaysia, in particular in the state of Sabah on the island of Borneo. Senior JI leaders—such as notable recruiter Mohamed Iqbal Abdurraham—have been arrested in Malaysia. (Sources: Counter Extremism Project [41], Yanina Golburt, Tufts University [42])

Foreign Fighters

Malaysian militants joined the fight against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, eventually returning home to Malaysia. Several the returning fighters are believed to have become members of KMM and Darul Islam, a precursor to JI. According to the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), Malaysian extremists began traveling to Syria to fight with al-Qaeda as early as 2012, but many eventually joined ISIS. (Sources: SEARCCT [10], Global Security [5], Malay Mail Online [6], USAID [9])

In January 2016, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Filipino ISIS fighters in Syria were featured in an ISIS video that called for "lone wolf" attacks in their respective countries. Malaysian police identified one of the men as Mohd Rafi Udin. Rafi called on ISIS's supporters in Southeast Asia to back ASG leader Isnilon Hapilon, who was reportedly appointed as an ISIS leader in the Philippines. The one-minute-long video, "Public Message to Malaysia," also called on al-Shabab [43] members to pledge allegiance to ISIS's caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Analysts believe this call in the Malay language hints at the possibility that Malaysian or Malay-speaking fighters are members of the Somalia-based group. (Sources: *Straits Times* [44], Manila Times [45], SEARCCT [10], FBI [46])

Two Malaysians—identified as Mohd Faris Anuar and Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi—were involved in an ISIS beheading video posted in February 2015. Mohd Faris is seen executing a Syrian accused of spying for the Assad regime, while Muhammad Wanndy is believed to have recorded the video. Muhammad Wanndy, a Malaysian ISIS operative based in ISIS-controlled territory and reportedly killed in a drone strike on April 29, 2017, was suspected of directing operatives in Malaysia to launch the June 28, 2016, grenade attack on a nightclub near Kuala Lumpur. The U.S. Treasury Department had designated Muhammad Wanndy a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on March 30, 2017, under Executive Order 13224 for "provid[ing] financial and operational support for ISIS' recruitment and attack-plotting in Malaysia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia." According to Malaysian police, about one-third of 250 people arrested in Malaysia for suspected ISIS ties between 2013 and 2016 were believed to have been recruited by or otherwise linked to Muhammad Wanndy. (Sources: International Business Times [47], *Straits Times* [48], CNN [49], U.S. Treasury Department [50], Benar News [51])

On January 13, 2017, three Malaysian ISIS militants were reportedly killed in an airstrike in Raqqa, Syria. One of those killed, Zainuri Kamaruddin, appeared in a May 2016 video burning his Malaysian passport and pledging allegiance to ISIS. On November 15, 2016, Malaysian national Hasan Zakaria, 25, reportedly drove a car bomb into a group of Kurdish soldiers in Syria, killing 15, including himself, and injuring many others. Three other Malaysians—one with a degree in finance and who had recently become a father—died fighting for ISIS against the Syrian army. As of August 27, 2014, three Malaysian women were believed to have traveled to Syria to offer themselves as sexual "comfort women" to ISIS fighters to boost their morale, according to Malaysian intelligence official. (Sources: NSNBC [52], Al Alam [53], Straits Times [54])

A number of Malaysian children are believed to live in ISIS-held territory. A May 2016 ISIS video entitled, "The Generation of the Epic Battles," featured young boys at a training camp in Syria. The 15-minute propaganda video shows 23 boys who appear to be from Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines learning to shoot guns and quoting the Quran. The Malaysian police's Special Branch believe that children as young as two-years-old were brought to Syria by their parents or were born to Malaysian parents in Syria. (Sources: Vocativ [55], SEARCCT [10])

In July 2018, Malaysia issued a conditional return offer to around 102 Malaysians who had left the country to join ISIS. This offer involved compliance with security checks, investigations, psychological examinations, and counseling sessions

with religious clerics to evaluate their level of radicalization. Under the offer, all returnees will be interrogated but not all will be detained, subject to the outcome of investigations. After preliminary investigations, those who did not participate in militant activities or criminal offences will undergo a one-month government-run rehabilitation program before they are re-integrated into society. Those found involved in criminal offences or militant activities will face court trials. The process differs for women and children, hence, their situation will be assessed on a case-to-case basis before the government decides on a suitable de-radicalization process. (Source: Today Online [56])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Most terrorist incidents in Malaysia have been attacks on Malaysian seafarers or kidnappings of Malaysian nationals by regional terrorist groups. Since the beginning of 2016, Malaysian security forces have disrupted plots to launch attacks on Malaysian soil—including some allegedly directed by ISIS—and arrested individuals tied to foreign extremist groups. (Source: USAID [9])

- **March 8, 2017 - March 12, 2017:**Malaysian authorities arrest seven ISIS suspects in the Malaysian state of Sabah and the Kuala Lumpur Airport.
  One individual, a female immigration officer, allegedly arranged for false documents allowing militants to travel to southern Philippines. The other suspects included Filipinos with permanent residency status and a Malaysian man. Source: Straits Times [57]
- **February 21, 2017 - February 26, 2017:**Malaysian police arrest seven ISIS members who planned to attack Saudi King Salman on an upcoming visit to Malaysia.
  The group—including one Malaysian, one Indonesian, four Yemenis, and one other person identified as East Asian—are believed to have links to ISIS and planned to use a car bomb in the attack. Source: BBC News [58]
- **January 27, 2017 - January 29, 2017:**Malaysian authorities arrest three men with suspected links to ISIS.
  One, a 37-year-old Indonesia man, worked as a security guard for Malaysian Airlines and allegedly had connections to Malaysian ISIS militants in Syria. The other suspect reportedly planned to attack a Muslim religious institution he claimed did not follow the teachings of Islam. Source: AsiaOne [59]
- **January 23, 2017:**Malaysian police arrest four people, including three foreigners, with links to an ISIS cell based out of Mindanao in southern Philippines.
  The cell was led by a former university lecturer, Mahmud Ahmad, known to be a Malaysian ISIS member, according to Malaysian police. The cell had allegedly planned to facilitate the transit of South Asian and Southeast Asian militant recruits to join ISIS in the Philippines. Source: Straits Times [60]
- **January 4, 2017:**Malaysian authorities detain at an undisclosed location in Malaysia a suspected Indonesian ISIS member planning to travel to Myanmar to carry out attacks.
  The suspect reportedly had connections to Syria-based Malaysian ISIS operative Muhammad Wanndy Muhammad Jedi. Source: Reuters [61]
- **January 2017:**At the Woodlands Checkpoint, Singapore border police refuse entry to and remand to Malaysian custody eight Indonesians found to possess ISIS propaganda, including photos of the ISIS flag and bombing-making instructions obtained from a WhatsApp group.
  Source: Straits Times [62]
- **November 3, 2016 - December 16, 2016:**Malaysian authorities arrest seven persons suspected of links to ISIS, including four foreigners, two of them students.
  The seven were detained in raids in the Malaysian states of Malacca, Selangor, Sabah, and Johor. One of the students was under investigation by a foreign government and was suspected of attempting to obtain security information about a private school in Selangor. Another of the detained persons was believed to have received bomb-making training from an ISIS militant in Syria. Source: *The Jakarta Post* [63]
- **November 4, 2016:**Malaysian police arrest two suspected ISIS members at Kuala Lumpur Airport.
  The two men, ages 29 and 24, had been deported by Turkey after attempting to cross into Syria and were believed to have been recruited by Muhammad Wanndy. Source: International Business Times [64]
- **September 21, 2016 - October 6, 2016:**Malaysian authorities arrest 16 suspected extremists, including a North African believed linked to Jahbat al-Nusra in Syria and 14 others said to be involved in an ISIS-linked cell headed by Muhammad Wanndy.
  The arrests—made in the Malaysian states of Selangor, Kelantan, Perak, Kedah, Penang and Sabah—included a student, a businessman, a school counselor, and a bank employee. Source: International Business Times [65]
- **August 27, 2016 - August 29, 2016:**Malaysian police in the states of Selangor and Pahang arrest three persons, ages 20 to 27, believed linked to the ISIS and planning attacks in the capital Kuala Lampur on Malaysia's 59th Independence Day.
  Targets are believed to have included a famous Hindu temple in Batu Caves, entertainment outlets, and a police station. The three suspects reportedly were directed by Muhammad Wanndy. Sources: *TIME* [66], Times of India [67],

Indian Express [68]

- **July 20, 2016 - August 9, 2016:**Malaysian police arrest nine suspected ISIS members, including two persons said to have been involved in a nightclub bombing in Puchong on June 28, 2016.
  Those arrested range in age from 17 to 56 and include three foreigners. Some were purportedly awaiting orders from Muhammad Wanndy to attack entertainment venues in Johor Baru. The arrests occurred in locations throughout Malaysia, including Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Sabah and Kelantan. Source: Straits Times [69]
- **July 18, 2016:**ASG militants reportedly kidnap five Malaysian tugboat crewmen off the coast of Sabah in northeastern Malaysia.
  Sources: Channel News Asia [70], GMA News [71]
- **July 13, 2016:**Malaysia's top counterterrorism officer receives a death threat Muhammad Wanndy.
  Source: The Star [72]
- **June 28, 2016:**Two assailants throw a grenade into a nightclub in Puchong, near Kuala Lumpur, injuring eight people. Malaysian police claim that the attack was ordered by Muhammad Wanndy, making it ISIS's first successful attack in the country. Sources: Reuters [73], CNN [49]
- **June 23, 2016:**ISIS releases a 20-minute video with Malaysian ISIS members calling for lone wolf attacks on Malaysian soil, using "whatever means at their disposal."
  Source: India Express [32]
- **April 1, 2016:**Eight armed assailants storm a Malaysian vessel underway from Manila, Philippines to Sabah, Malaysia, kidnapping four Malaysian crewmembers.
  Malaysian officials suspect the gunmen are Filipino Muslims militants. Sources: The Diplomat [74], Inquirer [75]
- **January 15, 2016:**Authorities detain a 28-year-old Malaysian insurance salesman believed to be plotting a suicide bombing at a karaoke bar in Kuala Lumpur.
  He later confesses to having been tasked with the attack by ISIS operatives in Syria. Sources: Associated Press [76], Reuters [77]
- **January 11, 2016 - January 15, 2016:**Malaysian authorities arrest three Malaysians, including one woman, at Kuala Lumpur Airport after they attempted to travel to Syria via Turkey to join ISIS.
  The three were recruited through Facebook and the messaging app Telegram by a Syria-based Malaysian ISIS operative. Source: Reuters [77]
- **November 18, 2015:**ASG beheads Malaysian hostage Bernard Then.
  Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak condemns the killing and calls on Philippine authorities to find the perpetrators. Sources: Al Jazeera [78], PhilStar [79]
- **November 9, 2015:**ASG releases Malaysian Thien Nyk Fun after reportedly receiving a ransom payment of 30 million pesos ($900,000).
  The Vice Governor of the Philippines' Sulu Province, where the terror group is based, helped negotiate Thien's release. Two Malaysian security officials facilitated the exchange. Source: *Straits Times* [80]
- **May 14, 2015:**Four armed gunmen attack a popular seafood restaurant in Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia, kidnap two hostages.
  ASG demand a ransom for the captives, 50-year-old restaurant manager Thien Nyuk Fun and 39-year-old diner Bernard Then. Sources: Malay Mail Online [81], *Straits Times* [80]
- **April 27, 2015:**Malaysian police arrest 12 alleged ISIS-inspired militants while they are mixing chemicals for explosives.
  It is reportedly the first time ISIS terrorists are apprehended in the process of terrorist acts, as the improvised explosive devices were intended for attacks on government buildings, clubs and other public targets. The arrests were made at the foothills of Hutan Lipur Gunung Nuang in Hulu Langat and in Cheras. Source: The Star [82]
- **January 2015:**A group calling itself "Cyber Caliphate" with alleged links to ISIS hacks the website of Malaysian Airlines, posting messages like "ISIS Will Prevail" and "404-Plane Not Found," a reference to the Malaysian Airlines flight that went missing in March 2014.
  Source: Bloomberg [83]
- **February 13, 2013:**Malaysian authorities arrest former Malaysian Army captain Yazzid Sufaat and a female accomplice for having recruited Malaysians to fight for ISIS in Syria.
  While Sufaat allegedly was recruiting fighters out of his home in Kuala Lumpur, the location of his arrest was undisclosed. Source: NSNBC [52]
- **December 2007:**At least 19 KMM and 68 JI leaders are detained under Malaysia's Internal Security Act, according to the head of police in Kuala Lumpur, as Malaysian authorities dismantle the groups' networking, financial, and logistical capabilities.
  Source: Mohd Mizan Aslam [27]
- **October 13, 2001:**KMM sets fire to the Christ of King Church in the town of Sungai Petani, 190 miles northwest of Kuala Lumpur.
  Source: Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam [84]
- **July 19, 2001:**KMM sets fire to a Christian community center in Sungai Petani.
  Source: Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam [84]
- **October 25, 2000:**A homemade bomb explodes at the Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple at Jalan Pudu Lama, near Pudu Raya

Kuala Lumpur Bus Station, on Deepavali Festival day.
Parts of the Temple are damaged by smoke and burn marks. A passer-by suffers light injuries from debris. Terrorism researcher Elaine Noor attributes the attack to KMM, saying the group aims to "spark strive between Muslims and non-Muslims as a prelude to an all-out religious war in Malaysia and beyond." Source: Mohd Mizan Mohammad Aslam [84]
- **1970 - 1980:**Communist Party Malaysia members attempt to blow up the National Monument in Kuala Lumpur and carry out ambushes against police, killing the police chief in Perak state and the Inspector-General of Police. Source: Cheah Boon Kheng, National University of Singapore [3]
- **February 7, 1952:**Communist insurgents assassinate British High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney. Source: Cheah Boon Kheng, National University of Singapore [3]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

According to the U.S. Department of State, there were no ISIS-affiliated attacks in Malaysia in 2018. However, the country remained a source, transit point, and destination country for terrorist groups including ISIS, Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), al-Qaeda, and Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Suspected ISIS supporters deported from Turkey and individuals planning to travel to the southern Philippines to support ISIS-affiliated groups used Malaysia as a transit point. Malaysia also cooperated with the United States and others to increase border security capacity at airports and in the Sulu Sea, to counter terrorist messaging on social media, and to improve terrorist prosecutions. The national elections in May of 2018 resulted in the first transition of power since independence, and the new government pledged to review and potentially amend or repeal several pieces of legislation that govern how terrorist suspects are arrested, investigated, and detained. (Source: U.S. Department of State [85])

Legislation

Since 2015, Malaysia has enacted two important legislative acts, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) and the National Security Council Act (NSCA). Both POTA and NSCA supplement existing legislation, namely the Prevention of Crime Act (POCA), Penal Code, and Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA). SOSMA, in particular, was seen as inadequate in managing the threat of terrorism, according to a March 2015 analysis published by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. (Source: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies [86])

POTA was introduced in April 2015 and enacted on September 1, 2015. The legislation emerged as a direct response to the rise of ISIS. It allows authorities to detain suspected terrorists for two years—with an option to extend by an additional two years—without being formally charged. POTA allows also for "restrictions and conditions" on terrorist suspects, including limiting their Internet access, but it stops short of regulating social media content. Former Malaysian Inspector-General of Police Musa Hassan said following POTA's enactment: "The government does not have stringent social media regulations at the moment. As such, it is crucial for us to closely monitor social media," as opposed to regulating social media content. Whereas, human rights groups have argued that Malaysian laws preceding POTA criminalized certain activity on social media, POTA itself does not. (Sources: Attorney-General of Malaysia [87], Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 [88], Malaysian Digest [19], Human Rights Watch [89])

The NSCA, which came into force on August 1, 2016, gives sweeping powers to a new National Security Council. The Council is chaired by the Prime Minister, who can designate an area as a "national security area" for up to six months with options for six-month renewals. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced the appointment of Chief of Defense Forces General Zulkifeli Mohd Zin to serve as the Council's first director-general effective August 15, 2016. Under the NSCA, a "national security area" can be subject to martial law, allowing security forces to stop and search persons, enter and search premises without a warrant, and arrest suspects without a warrant. Human rights groups have argued for repeal of the legislation, describing it as a "tool for repression." (Sources: Library of Congress [90], Malay Mail Online [91], Human Rights Watch [92], Website of the Prime Minister of Malaysia [93], Malaysia Today [94], Astro Awani [95])

In March 2017, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced that the government would seek to strictly enforce existing criminal laws "with the aim of enabling the government to prosecute those suspected of terrorism," according to media reports citing a statement by the ministry. Cooperation also had increased between the police and the Malaysian

Communications and Multimedia Commission in order to monitor the Internet for sites and users promoting ISIS's ideology, propaganda, and recruitment efforts. (Sources: Southeast Asia Globe [40], Prevention of Crime Act 1959 [96])

Government Agencies

In October 2016, Malaysia launched its first multi-agency counterterrorism force, the National Special Operations Force. The NSOF "acts as a quick-reaction force to curb terrorism in its early stages… to confront, fight, and eliminate threats," read a Ministry of Defense statement. The NSOF is comprised of 17 officers and 170 personnel from the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysian Police, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (Sources: *Strait Times* [97], Daily Express [98])

Rehabilitation and Deradicalization Programs

Speaking at a U.N. Security Council meeting on May 29, 2015, Home Affairs Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi emphasized that Malaysia sees rehabilitation and deradicalization as integral pillars in combating terrorism. According to Kumar Ramakrishna of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, "there is a continual exchange of ideas on deradicalisation and rehabilitation both within and outside [the Malaysian] government with neighbouring Southeast Asian countries as well as with partners further afield." Malaysia has asserted that its deradicalization efforts are extremely successful—claiming a 95 percent success rate—and has offered to export its programs to other countries, including Australia. However, National War College Southeast Asia expert Zachary Abuza "completely reject[s] Malaysia's assertion of a 95% success rate." Abuza prefers to characterize the program as one of "disengagement" rather than "deradicalization." (Sources: U.N. Press Center [20], South East Asia Globe [99])

Malaysia is also making substantial efforts to monitor and deradicalize educational institutions. The Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) identifies Muslim student leaders at local universities to assist in disseminating the "true meaning" of jihad and in conducting various anti-violence, anti-militancy awareness campaigns on campuses. Security officials also hold briefings for school children, including at Islamic schools, to raise awareness of the dangers of ISIS. (Source: The Star [100])

International Counter-Extremism

ISIS

Malaysia has implemented U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2170 and 2178. The Security Council adopted resolution 2170 on August 15, 2014, "[c]alling on all United Nations Member States to act to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria…" It asks Member States to "take national measures to prevent fighters travelling from their soil to join groups…" Resolution 2178 was adopted by the Security Council on September 24, 2015. It details more specific provisions that Member States should pursue in order to accomplish the goals of resolution 2170, pertaining to travel bans, risk assessments, screening, and information exchange, to identify foreign terrorist fighters and to prevent radicalization and recruitment. (Sources: U.N. Security Council [101], U.N. Security Council [102], U.N. Press Center [20])

Malaysia is only the second Southeast Asian country to join the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, along with Singapore. Established in September 2014 and the Global Coalition is "committed to degrading and ultimately defeating Daesh," referring to ISIS. Malaysia joined one year later and has since "taken the lead among ASEAN members in addressing the threat posed to the Asia-Pacific region." The Global Coalition focuses on disrupting ISIS's infrastructure, stopping the flow of foreign fighters, helping to rebuild infrastructure in liberated areas, and offering a counter-narrative against ISIS propaganda. (Sources: Global Coalition [103], Benar News [18], *Global Politics and the Responsibility to Protect* [104])

Southeast Asia and Oceana

In July 2003, the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs founded the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism

(SEARCCT). SEARCCT is designed "to train and enhance the capacity of enforcement, security and government officials on counter-terrorism issues in collaboration with established think-tank institutions and international organisations." In addition, SEARCCT cooperates with a wide range of governments outside of Southeast Asia, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as two U.N. bodies, the U.N. Office on Crime and Drugs (UNODC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive-Directorate (CTED). (Sources: SEARCCT [105], SEARCCT [106])

In August 2016, the Indonesian and Malaysian Ministers of Home Affairs agreed to share between their two countries' law enforcement personnel biometric data of suspected and convicted terrorists and best practices in deradicalization and countering violent extremism. (Source: Channel News Asia [107])

In November 2016, Prime Minister Najib Razak met with Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte to discuss military and police operations against Philippines-based terrorist group, ASG. ASG has kidnapped Malaysian and Filipino sailors, harming trade and commerce. The group has carried out kidnapping and piracy operations in and around the Sulu Archipelago, a chain of islands between Malaysia and the Philippines, and in the Malacca Strait, the channel of water separating the Malaysian mainland and Indonesia's largest island, Sumatra. The leaders discussed border control and border crossings. (Sources: United Press International [108], ABC News [109], Sydney Morning Herald [110])

In March 2017, Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi met in Putrajaya with New Zealand Attorney General Christopher Finlayson, who is responsible for New Zealand's intelligence services. According to Ahmad Zahid, Finlayson was impressed with Malaysia's counterterrorism efforts and deradicalization program and requested training from Malaysian security forces. (Source: Malaysia Outlook [111])

On June 22, 2017, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia agreed to enhance cooperation to address the threat of terrorism and extremism. In a joint statement, the three countries agreed to prevent extremists from making Southeast Asia or any country a base for their operations, and to help counter the "narrative" that the terrorists were waging a "legal jihad." The three countries also agreed to cooperate on coming up with socio-economic programs to fight the underlying causes of terrorism and not stop at finding a "military solution." (Source: ABS-CBN News [112])

Europe

In April 2017, Malaysia's Deputy Home Minister Nur Jazlan Mohamed and visiting U.K. Minister for Asia and the Pacific Alok Sharma discussed closer cooperation on counterterrorism and counter-extremism. Sharma said Malaysia was a key counter-extremism partner because it is a "modern, moderate Islamic nation." Nur Jazlan said Malaysia would share its counterterrorism experience with the British government and "emulate the U.K. in its implementation of deradicalization and rehabilitation of extremists. (Source: Astro Awani [113])

In April 2016, the European Union and Malaysia entered into a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) which aims, in part, to "enhance political dialogue and intensify cooperation on regional and global issues," including counterterrorism. Similar PCAs exist between the EU and five other Southeast Asian nations—Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, respectively. (Source: European Union [114])

Terrorism Financing

In 2016, Malaysia became a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a policy-making body established in 1989 by the G7 Summit in Paris. The FATF "aims to promote the effective implementation of legal and regulatory measures for combating money laundering, terrorism financing, and other related threats." Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said Malaysia's membership demonstrated the country's serious commitment to fighting terrorism financing. (Source: The Star [115])

Public Opinion

According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted between April 5 and May 21, 2015, only 26 percent of Malaysians polled were "very concerned" about Islamic extremism in their country. In 2015, the percentage of Malaysians who were

"very concerned" about extremism increased seven percent year-over-year. The poll also found that opinions varied depending upon religion—30 percent of Malaysian Muslims were "very concerned" about a terrorist threat, whereas only 18 percent of Buddhist Malays were "very concerned" about a terrorist threat. (Source: Pew Research Center [116])

In November 2015, the Pew Research Center release data on countries with significant Muslim populations, showing that most expressed negative views of ISIS. In Malaysia, 64 percent of those polled had an "unfavorable" opinion of ISIS, while 11 percent had a favorable view. (Source: Pew Research Center [117])

By February 2017, more Malaysians—according to media interviews—sensed increased levels of Islamic observance in Malaysia and expressed greater concern for potential radicalization. "I can see the Islamic values getting stronger. A lot more people are wearing the hijab. A lot more people are going to the mosque," said a Malaysian cab driver. There also was growing debate in Malaysian society about what it means to be a "good" Muslim, leading to confusion among young people about their own levels of religious observance. International Islamic University Malaysia lecturer Ahmad El-Muhamady, an advisor to a rehabilitation program run by the Malaysian police, says that this confusion can be exploited by Islamic extremists for recruitment purposes. (Source: Channel News Asia [118])