

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S EVOLVING TERRORISM LANDSCAPE

Over the last two decades, Southeast Asia's terrorism and counterterrorism dynamics have evolved in response to shifts in tactics, a growing use of women, and the participation of Southeast Asians in conflicts from Afghanistan to Syria.

LINK TO REPORT

(New York, NY – June 3, 2021) A new report, [*Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia: Emerging Trends and Dynamics*](#), analyzes contemporary terrorism and counterterrorism issues in Southeast Asia. The paper highlights a number of key issues: the increasing prevalence of suicide bombings as a tactic; the growing roles played by women in perpetrating and facilitating terrorist violence; and the rise of online 'self-radicalization.' The report examines these developments against the backdrop of the Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) phenomenon, which saw many Southeast Asian operatives embedding themselves in conflicts from Afghanistan to Syria and Iraq.

The report notes that since 2015, more women than ever have also been arrested for terrorist activity in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore – about ninety compared to barely half a dozen in the fifteen years prior. “Historically counterterrorism efforts have been impacted by gender stereotypes. These have shaped threat analyses, operational responses, preventive engagement, and media reporting, where female operatives receive disproportionately more media attention than male attackers,” notes Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Executive Director of The Soufan Center. “We worry this means law enforcement won't be sufficiently prepared to address this issue, and there could be more female attackers and supporters.”

Southeast Asia has faced the challenges of foreign terrorist fighters before – the terrorist operatives who orchestrated the 2002 Bali bombings were trained in Afghanistan and Mindanao. The destructive legacy of returnees with hardened views and combat experience from conflict zones has prompted states' reluctance to repatriate their nationals from conflict zones – Indonesia, for example, has more than 400 nationals in the camps for ISIS-associated persons in Syria.

“The security dynamics in this region are complex. Looking forward, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan later this year will be a specific area for Southeast Asia experts to watch very carefully,” warns lead author of the report, Susan Sim, Senior Research Fellow at The Soufan Center. “Extremists from the region may very well look there in search of a new statebuilding project to replace the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Or simply to develop skills, networks, and financing for future attacks back home.”

ABOUT THE SOUFAN CENTER (TSC)

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