

Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2017

OVERVIEW

The terrorism threat to Singapore remains the highest in recent years. Singapore was specifically targeted in the past year and the regional threat has heightened. Even though there is no credible intelligence of an imminent attack at this point in time, our security agencies remain on high vigilance. The public should continue to stay alert and be prepared.

WORSENING REGIONAL THREAT SITUATION

2. The most serious threat to Singapore emanates from the group which calls itself the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). While threats from groups like Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) remain, it is the ISIS threat which has shaped our security landscape for the last few years.

3. Setbacks in the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq have prompted ISIS to carry out attacks in countries of the anti-ISIS coalition. ISIS has also encouraged its supporters to carry out attacks in their home countries. Such attacks have been seen in Europe, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

ISIS-Linked Attacks & Plots in Southeast Asia

4. ISIS has been linked to several attacks across Southeast Asia. These include the first ISIS-claimed attack in a suicide-bombing-cum-shooting in Jakarta, Indonesia in January 2016, and the grenade attack carried out on a nightspot in Puchong, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in June 2016. The Puchong attack was at the behest of Syria-based Malaysian ISIS militant Muhammad Wanndy Mohamed Jedi (Wanndy).[1]

5. Pro-ISIS militants could set up base in parts of Southeast Asia which are more difficult for security agencies to deal with.

6. In the Philippines, a group in southern Philippines which calls itself "IS East Asia" claims to be the de facto ISIS group in this region. In January 2016, the ISIS leadership in Syria said that the leader of this group, Isnilon Hapilon, was the "overall emir in the Philippines". In recent times, there are indications that the group is seeking to expand its operations beyond its strongholds in southern Philippines.[2] The group's recent siege of Marawi City also attests to their potential to turn Mindanao into an ISIS *wilayat* (province) for Southeast Asian militants. Should this entity proliferate into a regional network, like the JI had done previously, the terrorism threat will deepen further in Southeast Asia.

7. Regional militant groups are likely to continue stepping up their capabilities. In Indonesia, militants from the pro-ISIS umbrella group Jamaah Anshorut Daulah (JAD) had previously used low explosive devices in attacks in 2016, but have recently begun to assemble homemade bombs using high explosive materials. JI has also been building up its capabilities by conducting militant training and attempting to acquire weapons.

8. Authorities have stepped up counter-terrorism efforts, resulting in more plots uncovered and more militants arrested. According to media reports, Malaysian authorities disrupted 4 plots and arrested 85 militants in 2015. In 2016, they disrupted 7 plots and arrested 119 militants. As for the Indonesian authorities, they disrupted 9 plots and arrested 65 militants in 2015, and disrupted 15 plots and arrested over 150 militants in 2016.

9. The Indonesian and Philippine authorities have put pressure on pro-ISIS militants in Poso and the southern Philippines, with some key leaders killed or injured. Nevertheless, the threat continues to increase.

PERSISTENT TERRORISM THREAT TO SINGAPORE

10. The terrorism threat to Singapore is thus very serious.

11. Singapore is a key target. We have taken part in international coalitions against terrorism, and we represent many things that are anathema to ISIS. We are a secular democracy. We are also host to many economic and commercial interests belonging to Western nations that ISIS considers as "infidels". We will continue to be a target as ISIS comes under siege in Syria and Iraq and aims to export its fight overseas in a show of prowess.

ISIS-Linked Plots against Singapore

12. ISIS has demonstrated that Singapore is very much on its radar. It had already plotted to carry out two attacks against Singapore that the authorities are aware of.

13. Last year, there was reliable information that foreign ISIS militants were considering carrying out an attack in Singapore in the first half of 2016. The Singapore authorities acted swiftly but discreetly to mitigate the threat.

14. In August 2016, the Indonesian authorities foiled a plot by Batam-based terrorists who were acting on the instructions of Bahrin Naim, an Indonesian ISIS militant based in Syria. The group, called Katibah Gonggong Rebus, had planned to launch a rocket attack against the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) integrated resort. They had considered using a hill or an outer island of Batam as a launch point, and were arrested by Indonesian authorities before they could do so. While the assessment is that the plot was more aspirational in nature at the time the group members were arrested, it should not detract from the fact that terrorist elements are thinking of ways to hit Singapore.

Terrorist Targeting of Singapore

15. Singapore has been cited as a target in jihadist publications and videos, by both ISIS and other groups.

16. For instance, an Arabic publication titled "The Fall of the Idol: External Action and Individual Jihad" was circulated online around October 2016. It named two entities in Singapore as potential targets in the wider bid to bring down the US and Western interests by attacking the international economy. Following the publication, the security agencies have worked with these entities to enhance their security measures.

17. An ISIS publication released in September 2015 also named Singapore (among other countries) as a member of the "crusader coalition" which ISIS was fighting against. A May 2016 ISIS video named Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines as countries infiltrated by "disbelievers" and threatened action against the "tyrants" of these countries.

Threat from Home-Grown, Self-Radicalised Lone Actors

18. Like in many cases across the globe, Singapore also faces the risk of an attack by individuals who are radicalised by the propaganda of ISIS and may heed the call of the group to carry out attacks wherever they are residing.

19. While the self-radicalisation phenomenon in Singapore is not new and pre-dates ISIS, ISIS has exerted a radicalising influence well beyond what other terrorist groups, including AQ and JI, have ever been able to muster.

20. Two Singaporeans have gone to Syria to join in the conflict with their respective families. There is also a significant rise in the number of radicalised Singaporeans detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Between 2007 and 2014, 11 radicalised Singaporeans were dealt with under the ISA. In contrast, since 2015, there have already been 14 Singaporeans who were radicalised by ISIS who had to be dealt with under the ISA.

21. Among the recently detained Singaporeans, two of them said that they were prepared to carry out attacks in Singapore on behalf of ISIS. One of them said he wanted to assassinate the President and Prime Minister of Singapore so that the country would become leaderless and could be turned into an Islamic state under the "ISIS caliphate". If he was unable to carry out these plans, he planned instead to carry out attacks in public places in order to strike fear within our society, using easily available weapons such as knives.

22. ISIS online propaganda has also radicalised foreigners in Singapore. Since late 2015, some 40 Bangladeshi nationals in Singapore were found to have been radicalised. They supported the use of violence to pursue their extremist ideology. Several of them were planning to carry out armed violence against the government in Bangladesh.

23. While there was no indication that they planned to carry out attacks in Singapore, one of those arrested (the leader of the group calling itself "Islamic State in Bangladesh") admitted that he would carry out attacks anywhere if directed by ISIS. All the Bangladeshi nationals have since been repatriated to Bangladesh except for six who are currently serving sentences in Singapore for terrorism financing offences.

24. Since 2015, eight Indonesian domestic helpers in Singapore were also investigated and deported after they were found to be radicalised. None of them had any plans to carry out acts of violence here at the time they were investigated but their radicalisation and association with terrorists overseas were of security concern.

THREAT PROGNOSIS

25. While there is no credible intelligence of an imminent attack at this point in time, our security agencies remain on high vigilance.

26. Radicalised individuals are a grave security concern. The threat they pose is great because they might heed the calls by ISIS to carry out lone-actor attacks using any means they have at their disposal. Such attacks are hard to prevent, and can happen quickly without much warning. The perpetrators do not need sophisticated weapons and can turn instead to everyday items for weapons, like cars and knives.

27. Even after ISIS is weakened in Syria and Iraq, Southeast Asian militants based there are likely to continue instigating attacks in our region. They influence and direct attacks primarily through social media and encrypted messaging applications. Examples of such militants include Indonesian militant Bahrun Naim[3] and Malaysian militant Muhammad Wannady[4].

28. As ISIS loses ground in Syria and Iraq, we may see an increased flow of returning fighters to Southeast Asia. There could also be non-Southeast Asian militants unable or unwilling to return to their home countries. Returning fighters are likely to be more skilled in attack tactics, more ideologically motivated, and able to access wider terror networks and links formed in Syria and Iraq.

29. Released terrorist prisoners in the region are also a concern. They may return to terrorism if they have not been de-radicalised. Around 200 terrorist prisoners in the region will be released from prison over the next two years.

SGSECURE- A CALL TO ACTION

30. A strong community response to the terrorist threat is critical given the high likelihood of an attack. That is why the SGSecure movement was launched in September 2016 to sensitise, train and mobilise the community in the fight against terror. Every member of the community must do his part by staying alert to ever-present security threats, staying united during peacetime and in crisis, and staying strong to be resilient and to bounce back quickly in a crisis.

31. One area where the community can play a part is in detecting and reporting radicalised individuals. In such cases, it is often family and friends who are first to notice tell-tale behavioural changes. They are thus best-placed to counsel the possibly self-radicalised individuals before they step off the precipice, or to alert the authorities if they are unable to rein in the individuals.

32. In some of the self-radicalisation cases Singapore has detected previously, there have been friends and family members who have knowingly withheld information from the authorities, either out of denial (that there is a problem) or because they believe misguidedly that they are protecting their loved ones. The opposite is true – by alerting the authorities to signs of radicalisation early, friends and family members are in fact helping to save them from harming themselves and those around them.

CONCLUSION

33. The terrorism threat to Singapore is multifaceted and serious. The possibility of an attack on Singapore by regional terrorist elements or an organised terrorist network/cell remains but our greatest concern is the threat of an attack by radicalised individuals in our midst, who have been galvanised by ISIS' relentless exhortation to its supporters to take things into their own hands.

34. The amorphous nature of the enemy we face today means that even though our security agencies will do what it takes to detect and prevent terrorist attacks, they cannot do so alone. What is at stake is not just property and lives, but our way of life and our identity as a multi-racial, multi-religious society. Each one of us has a part to play in keeping Singapore safe.

List of Annexes

[Annex A- Background of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria \(ISIS\)](#)

[Annex B- Recent Islamic State in Iraq and Syria \(ISIS\)-linked Attacks in Region](#)

[1] Wanndy was reportedly killed in a drone attack in Syria in April 2017.

[2] ISIS has featured the southern Philippines prominently in its propaganda material. In June 2016, an ISIS video encouraged Southeast Asian militants to fight in the southern Philippines if they could not travel to Syria. Some have responded to this call. In March 2017, Indonesian authorities arrested a number of pro-ISIS militants who had received military training in the southern Philippines. In January 2017, Malaysian authorities disrupted a militant cell which was facilitating travel to the southern Philippines.

[3] Bahrun Naim was involved in recruiting, instigating and funding ISIS operations in Indonesia, including directing militants in Batam for the rocket attack on MBS.

[4] Wanndy had instigated and coordinated attacks in the region, including the June 2016 Puchong attack and had ordered his followers in the region to conduct more attacks on Malaysia. Following Wanndy's reported death in April 2017, Malaysian authorities have said that four Syria-based Malaysian militants - Rafi Udin, Akel Zainal, Zahar Abdullah and Muhammad Fudhail Omar – could take his place.