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Indonesia and the Changing Front in the War on Terrorism

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As a Member of the United States Senate who has traveled every year to Southeast Asia and met frequently with government leaders from that region when they visited the United States, I believe America has great interests in that region, and we are not paying attention here in Washington, D.C.

Too many of my colleagues seemed to be aware of Indonesia only because it was struck by the tsunami this past December. In fact, our interests in that region of the world go far beyond the humanitarian relief we provided to Indonesia and other countries hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami.

For years we have recognized the importance of our economic and trade relations with Southeast Asia, which is now our third-largest trading partner. In addition, the strategic location of Southeast Asia and the Straits of Malacca, through which our warships pass, provides great military importance to the region. The challenge of China seeking to extend its control over Southeast Asia should concern us both economically and militarily.

Beyond those interests, it is my thesis that we should pay attention to Southeast Asia—and particularly Indonesia—as the second front in the war on terrorism. Indonesia, with approximately 200 million Muslims, has the largest Muslim population in the world. Its neighbor, Malaysia, has nearly 15 million Muslims, and Thailand has a significant Muslim population in the southern part of the country.

Talking Points

- The U.S. should pay attention to Southeast Asia—and particularly Indonesia—as the second front in the war on terrorism.
- These countries represent the best hope for fostering a “moderate” or “civilized” Islam that recognizes the true peaceful nature of that religion, in opposition to the radical, terrorist-inspiring Islam preached by Saudi financed Wahhabism.
- In addition, those countries and the Philippines are moving forward on a path of democratic rule, and moving toward President Bush’s goal of respecting democratic human rights and becoming economically free.

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The Singapore Plot

At the same time there are great threats in the region because of the foothold that terrorist organizations have established there. Let me give you some examples.

In the weeks after the September 11 terrorist attack, the government of Singapore uncovered a plot by Islamic extremists to blow up the U.S., Australian, British, and Israeli embassies in Singapore.

A raid on two terrorist cells led to the first revelation that Southeast Asia had its own homegrown terrorist organization, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), with cells spanning the region, including in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines—all countries with an extensive Western presence and alliances. Unbeknownst to intelligence and law enforcement, JI had been planning the advance of its goal to establish Southeast Asia as an Islamic state, a goal viewed by some as unattainable without attacks on Westerners.

The unfolding investigation of the Singapore plot and the subsequent investigation of the Bali bombings brought to light a web of ties between JI and al-Qaeda. The Singapore plotters made a videotape of their targets, that was subsequently found by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, which I have seen, confirming an al-Qaeda connection to the plot. The extent of the conspiracy gave insight into the expanse of JI, as the plot was organized out of Malaysia and co-conspirators were arrested as far away as the Philippines.

At the trial of cleric Abu Bakar Baayshir for his role in perpetrating the nightclub bombings in Bali, important information came to light about the organization and the activities of Southeast Asia’s

indigenous terrorist network, Jemaah Islamiyah. At the time, JI was a highly structured organization led by a five-member Regional Advisory Council, with the notorious terrorist Hambali sitting at the top. Baayshir and Abdullah Sungkar, who both preach radical interpretations of Islam and have been fighting for the imposition of *sharia* (Islamic law) in Indonesia since the 1960s, served as “spiritual advisors” to the council.

At the trial, launched in Indonesia in the spring of 2003, one of JI’s regional commanders, Nasir Abbas, testified that he was installed in his position by Baayshir and that Baayshir had spoken to “graduating” JI members at a camp in the southern Philippines, where they had been indoctrinated and taught bomb-making and military tactics. The testimony was illuminating as to the role of Baayshir in JI, but deeply troubling in that it revealed JI had expanded its presence into what was before the territory of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) terrorist/separatist group and the vicious Abu Sayyaf (ASG) terrorist group.

Al-Qaeda and Indonesia

Al-Qaeda’s terrorist network has had a presence in Southeast Asia for some time. The 1993 World Trade Center bombers and 9/11 terrorists had connections and spent time in Southeast Asia, either planning attacks or fleeing from U.S. intelligence agents.

Although JI was born later than al-Qaeda and is a separate entity with its own ambitious goal, in a chilling development, the two networks have started to work together. They share members and have planned operations jointly. JI operatives have been trained at al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. The two networks have shared expertise: The most troubling known example of this is the JI operative who possessed advanced scientific expertise and was sent to Afghanistan to try to develop an anthrax program for al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda has also provided JI with considerable financial support—starting with funding the Bali bombing. Apparently, al-Qaeda’s leadership was so delighted with the murder of innocent Australian and American vacationers in Bali, that they rewarded Hambali with \$100,000 to spend as he saw fit.

The Baayshir trial gave evidence that the alliance among these groups has been growing.

When JI stopped sending recruits to Afghanistan because of expense, they turned to the southern Philippines for training—in areas controlled by MILF and ASG. One could infer that it was with consent or cooperation.

In recent days, a bit of a controversy was sparked in the Philippines when our Chargé d’Affaires stated publicly that there are terrorist training camps operating in the southern Philippines. JI members in these camps are engaged in bomb-making training, and arrested JI operatives freely admit to having links with MILF and ASG.

Although the Philippine government has admitted no links between the groups, links between individuals are conclusive. There is a justified fear that the area is becoming a haven for JI. Of the 20 most wanted JI fugitives, several are thought to be taking refuge in Mindanao. So the web grows across Southeast Asia.

Favorable Conditions for Terrorist Networks

Southeast Asia is potentially a very fertile area for expansion of Islamic terror networks. Indonesia has been troubled by sectarian violence and separatist movements, creating the unrest ideal for recruiting people who are open to extreme solutions to their personal difficulties. In fact, it is known that the sectarian conflicts in Sulawesi and the Malukus have been prime recruiting grounds for JI.

In Malaysia, the fundamentalist Islam political party, PAS, has at times, through the political process, controlled two of Malaysia’s 13 states. The Philippines for years has contended with its own separatist conflict, which has spawned the extremist groups MILF and Abu Sayyaf, dedicated to the independence of the Muslim region in the south of the country.

Across Southeast Asia there are thousands of remote islands and expanses of jungles ideal for extremist groups to hide and train. The borders are difficult to patrol and visa requirements are minimum: The “9/11 Report” documents how easily

those plotters moved across Southeast Asia to hold meetings and conduct planning.

The state of the banking regulations, the presence of Islamic banks, and money transfer entities create the opportunity to launder money across borders to fund operations, but even in their absence, the porous borders permit the easy transfer of funds person to person.

The Second Front

If you review the chart of the bombings, attacks, and murders in Southeast Asia, I think you will agree that the region has emerged as the second front in the war on terrorism. That is why I have been calling for increased engagement and more attention to the relations between the United States and our friends in Southeast Asia.

Unlike the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, people of Islamic faith live in democratic countries, their governments are secular, they live side by side with people of different faiths, they practice a moderate form of Islam—and the majority wants it to stay that way.

As former President Richard Nixon detailed in one of his last books before his death, developing strong and supportive relationships with moderate Islamic countries is of critical interest to the United States. He warned of the dangers of radical Islamic teachings even before we experienced the overseas terrorist attacks against Americans in the 1990s, culminating in the massive attacks of September 11.

In this area, the former president was eerily prescient and laid out an important principle for us to follow today. I think that principle and our interests align in Southeast Asia. With Southeast Asia and its large Muslim population, we have an opportunity through constructive engagement to help those countries win their war on terrorism without the need for massive military actions—such as those we have undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq—to root out the terrorists and in those cases, the governments that harbored them.

In addition to supporting democracies and free societies and fighting terrorism, the U.S. has a very strategic interest in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia is home to over 500 million people and 10 coun-

tries, many of which we enjoy close economic and security alliances.

Many leaders in that region have told me, privately, they believe United States active engagement and association with their countries is essential to stop China from extending hegemony over the region. China has made many recent economic moves to gain control over the markets of Southeast Asia, including offers of free trade and other inducements. In addition, China has flexed its muscle in the region by military maneuvers in the South China Sea in order to lay claim potentially to the significant petroleum reserves in that area.

States of Southeast Asia, notably Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia, control the important Malacca Straits through which one-quarter of all the shipping in the world passes and one-half of the petroleum products carried by ocean-going vessels.

The Southeast Asian nations have been generally supportive of our stand on terrorism, in contrast to the People's Republic of China, which has long opposed our efforts against terrorism and may themselves be engaging in proliferation of nuclear and missile technology. The influence of China can already be seen in support for lifting United Nations sanctions and the arms embargo on China. There are many who feel that China may be building military capability, which could be a threat to world peace and security, as well as to the United States—all the more reason to prevent excessive Chinese influence or control in Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia has a dynamic economy that has recovered well from the Asian financial crisis: The region is a very important trading partner for the United States.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has passed Japan and is now the United States' third-largest trading partner: Two-way trade stands at \$120 billion. In 2003, United States exports to Singapore were \$19 billion and over \$17 billion to Malaysia. Although Thailand, with \$6.8 billion in imports from the United States; the Philippines, with \$5.4 billion; and Indonesia, with \$2.8 billion, are relatively smaller, they offer opportunities—with economic progress—to be much more significant trading partners.

Farmers in Missouri and in the Midwest can tell you of the importance of this market after feeling the severe pain of the collapse of the Southeast Asia markets in 1997 and 1998. Our previous \$12 billion per year agricultural exports in the mid-1990s dropped to almost nothing during that period. The impact of that drop on farm prices in the agricultural heartland was extremely harsh. Farmers suffered significant losses of income, and rural communities dependent upon agriculture felt the pain, from equipment dealers to retail stores. Missouri farmers have been very relieved to see the economies, and thus, the demand for agricultural products, recover in the ASEAN region.

Southeast Asia, Trade, and Islam

So the crucial questions for us to decide involve what steps the United States must take to embrace the opportunities and deal with challenges facing us in Southeast Asia.

For starters, there is a major effort underway in Indonesia's mainstream, moderate Muslim population to promote a moderate, pluralistic, democratic Islam, both in Indonesia and throughout the region. Unlike the Middle East, in Indonesia Islamic organizations have been at the forefront of the country's struggle for a democratic society.

During my recent visit to Indonesia, I met Yenny Zannuba Wahid, one of the latest leaders in this movement. Yenny is the daughter of HE Abdurrahman Wahid, also known as Gus Dur, a Muslim cleric and a leader in promoting religious tolerance in Indonesia. He was also one of Indonesia's first democratically elected presidents. Yenny is the founder of the Wahid Institute, a group dedicated "to espousing a moderate and tolerant view of Islam."

Islamist parties gained a sizable vote in the 1999 and 2004 Indonesian elections, raising the question of whether Indonesia will remain on the path of a moderate, pluralistic democracy or if a small but increasingly influential minority of fundamentalist Islamists will steadily gain ground with the people.

Yenny, through the Wahid Institute, is fighting this trend through the funding of scholars, the building of libraries, the promotion of inter-faith dialogues, and the education of the young—

including young women—on tolerant Muslim thinking. This is one among many groups promoting Islam in this manner. The Liberal Islam Network and International Center for Islam and Pluralism have been hard at work at promoting a peaceful Islam for some time. I encourage all to become familiar with these groups.

In neighboring Malaysia, the recently elected Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, has emerged as a strong voice in promoting ethnic and religious tolerance and equality for women. Malaysia has been an economic success story and U.S. businesses consider it a great place to invest and operate. Yet the growing strains of fundamentalist Islam have emerged as a challenge. The new prime minister has confronted them, speaking eloquently about Islam Hadhari, which means “civilisation Islam,” a message encouraging Muslims to undertake education and intellectual and personal development. He has also championed the equality of women in Malaysian society.

The prime minister brought the following message to the World Council of Churches, and it is worth repeating:

Islam Hadhari is an approach that emphasizes development, consistent with the tenets of Islam, and focuses on enhancing the quality of life. It aims to achieve this via the mastery of knowledge; the development of the individual and the nation; the implementation of a dynamic economic, trading and financial system; and the pursuit of integrated and balanced development to develop pious and capable people, with care for the environment and protection of the weak and disadvantaged.

Similarly, we have tried to ensure that the rights of women are protected and that they fulfill their potential without having to face artificial barriers constructed in the name of Islam. We know Islam to be just and fair, and that it honors the position and rights of women. But there are clear instances of prejudices being cloaked in religious teachings in the Muslim world, aimed at passing off gender discrimination as the accepted norm. This will simply not do.

In Singapore, a country that lies between two sizable Muslim countries, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong is leading the way to the creation of the Asia–Middle East Dialogue. Born out of an extensive trip to the Middle East, where he observed in many Middle East countries a mainstream society both diverse and inclusive, the first Asia–Middle East Dialogue, or AMED, will be held June 2005 in Singapore.

An event of great ambition, AMED will bring together officials, academics, religious leaders, and opinion makers from some 50 countries in the Middle East and Asia to forge closer political, economic, and security ties. As important, it will provide a platform for those fighting for economic and political reform and give a voice to those challenging the strains of extremist Islam in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

What the U.S. Should Do

As I said, the United States is receiving critical cooperation from governments across the region. The instances are too numerous to name, but among the highlights, we have advanced a container security initiative with Singapore; our work with the Thais led to the arrest of Hambali, the JI leader; the Malaysians have been very active in stepping up the counter-terrorism activity in the region; we are working closely with the government of the Philippines to achieve peace in Mindanao; and the Indonesians have been eager participants in the Counter Terrorism Fellowship Program.

The sharing of critical intelligence has increased along with the provision of other forms of aid, much of which cannot be discussed. However, more can be done in the following areas:

1. **Promoting Moderate Islam.** The United States Congress and the Bush Administration must recognize, be appreciative of, and support the important work being done by those who refuse to allow Islam to be captured by the extreme elements—most notably, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, who has been outspoken on this subject despite the obvious political consequences. A number of nongovernmental organizations, including the Wahid Institute, deserve international support for their work. Several are currently supported by the U.S.

Agency for International Development and the Asia Foundation, although we must be careful not to attempt to control these messengers.

2. **Education Initiatives.** Where a poor or limited education system exists, the void in young people's lives will be filled by the religious schools (the *madrassas* and the *pesantrens*), where they may be indoctrinated into an intolerant and extreme anti-Western strain of Islam. Indonesia's education system is in great need of improvement. Public funding for education is the lowest in the region. The decentralization process has placed school administration in the hands of local governments, a responsibility new to them. Barely half of students finish nine years of education and Indonesian students consistently score low on international and regional math and science tests.

Too many students are leaving school without the skills to participate in the modern economy. That is even more the case when they attend the rural *pesantrens*. Young people unprepared to enter the workplace compromise Indonesia as a country warranting foreign direct investment, compounding the chronic unemployment and poverty in these areas, which JI and other groups feed upon.

President Bush announced (and USAID has launched) a five-year, \$157 million initiative to improve the education system in Indonesia, the cornerstone of our direct foreign aid plan for Indonesia. The initiative addresses the challenge of local governments running school districts by offering counsel on management. The program also targets teacher training and updating curriculum to include teaching skills relevant to entering the workplace upon leaving school. Wisely, under this plan, works skills will be taught to those who have dropped out.

This is critical step and deserves the attention and support of Congress and the American public. There is a downside to the program, and that is that critics will argue that the U.S. is controlling the curriculum and will view this as manipulation of young Indonesians. How-

ever, I am certain we will find districts out there that are eager for the assistance.

Therefore, we need to mobilize the World Bank and the development banks to focus on education in Indonesia and neighboring countries. Paul Wolfowitz, a former Ambassador to Indonesia, understands the challenges facing Southeast Asia and Indonesia and we hope he will be able to use the resources and prominence of the World Bank to modernize the Indonesian school system. The World Bank can also play a lead in coordinating other assistance from the U.S., Japan, and other countries supporting free societies.

Furthermore, a plan is in development, benefiting from the counsel of the U.S.–Indonesia Society, to boost the number of students earning PhDs in Indonesia. This plan will contribute to the emphasis on education and train many future leaders of the country.

3. **Trade Agreements and Investment.** President Bush has moved forward on the Initiative for ASEAN, which holds out the prospect for free trade agreements (FTAs) with ASEAN countries upon completion of economic reforms. We have an FTA with Singapore; we are in talks with Thailand; we have signed trade and investment frameworks with Malaysia and the Philippines; and we have granted normal trade relations with Laos.

Economic engagement with Southeast Asia through FTAs and investment agreements will lead to further modernization of important sectors, reduce corruption, and weaken existing barriers to foreign direct investment. The economic health of Southeast Asia, along with creating an economic relationship with the United States, are important to raising the standard of living in the region and checking the advance of radical Islam.

4. **Eliminate Funding Sources for Terrorism.** It is well documented the government of Saudi Arabia facilitates the export of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, which calls for adherence to a strict interpretation of Islam and an extreme interpretation of the Qur'an. Saudi

charities are complicit. While many do important charitable work, others have been a conduit for money that ends up funding terrorism. This pipeline is funneling money into Southeast Asia.

Canadian intelligence and the U.N. Security Council have both traced millions of dollars from Saudi charities to al-Qaeda and other militant Islamic groups. It is estimated that 15 percent to 20 percent of Saudi charity dollars sent to Indonesia are diverted to suspect groups and nearly half of Saudi charity dollars sent to the Philippines are diverted in this manner.

This is a question that must be addressed and addressed firmly. It is simply time to get tough on the Saudis and stop them from exporting this garbage into Southeast Asia and the United States. It is time to stop exporting this garbage, period.

5. **Expanding IMET and Normalizing Military-to-Military Relations with Indonesia.** A simple look at the map of the area shows what a tremendous challenge it is to control the borders in Southeast Asia and deal with potential terrorist activities on distant islands or remote jungles. The Indonesian armed forces, the TNI, are a necessary partner in this battle.

There have been various forms of restrictions on our relations with the Indonesian military since 1991, when terrible abuses were committed by the TNI in East Timor. Although we must encourage more reform, I believe the restrictions have limited our ability to have a productive influence on the military. Times changed after the terrorist attacks in Indonesia, and I believe we must expand our relations with the TNI and permit their officers to enter the International Military Education and Training program.

IMET provides training in modern military operations, including adherence to the Code of Military Justice, civilian control of the military, respect for human rights, and proper treatment of civilian populations—precisely the principles that should be instilled in military forces thought to have been involved in human rights abuses in the past. The major benefits of the

program, however, are establishing relationships among our military leaders and commanders of friendly foreign forces to assure they understand how to conduct military or relief operations together.

I appreciate Secretary Condoleezza Rice's taking the steps to restart the IMET program for the Indonesian military and I believe we must look at expanding the opportunity for participation.

6. **Acknowledging JI as a Terrorist Organization.** Jemaah Islamiyah is a terrorist organization. The U.N. Security Council has designated it as such. Doing so in Indonesia has become a complicated political problem, attributable perhaps to the interpretation of the name, which means "Islamic community," and the charge that outlawing it is a plot to destroy Islam. The designation was one of the missing pieces in putting Baayshir away for a long time and perhaps contributed to his reduced sentence. To rally a people to condemn an organization and their actions, their presence and their ill intent must be recognized. Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has laid out an ambitious agenda for anti-corruption and political and economic reform. I hope this makes his agenda as well: It is essential to control the terrorist threat, control the reach of al-Qaeda into Southeast Asia, and eliminate Jemaah Islamiyah.

Finally, as a Congress, a government, and a people, we must recognize the accomplishments of the Indonesian people and congratulate them on a successful transformation to a democratic nation. Since the fall of President Suharto, the Indonesian people have elected three new presidents and impeached one, and experienced several peaceful transfers of power. Most recently, they held direct elections of a president for the first time.

In Congress, we seem to continue to look for every transgression to put our relationship on hold, but the truth is that as a country, they have made truly remarkable progress in a very short period of time. They deserve our congratulations.

—*The Honorable Christopher S. Bond represents Missouri in the United States Senate.*