

*The U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken has remarked that the Islamic terrorist groups like ISIS and Daesh can potentially take root in Bangladesh. He has opined this in a somber mood in a U.S. Congressional hearing on his recent rebalance visit to the sixth Asia Pacific region held on Friday as questioned by the House Small Business Committee Chair and State of Ohio's first congressional district representative and member of the Republican Party, Steven Joseph Chabot.*

## **U.S. Congressional Hearing TEXT**

Blinken said, 'With each trip, I will have to tell you I have seen growing dividends of this effort to rebalance our focus on the region and strengthen a rules based, institution based order. That is advancing our interest and increasingly not only the region, but globally. As you said Mr. Chairman, nowhere in the world, our economic and strategic opportunities clear and or compelling in the Asia Pacific region. Home to 4 of our top 10 trading partners, five of our seven treaty allies, the world's largest and fastest growing economies, including 40% of overall global growth nearly 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the global middle class and of course some of the most wired innovative people of the world. Over last 7 years, this rebalanced Asia that is, deepening our strategic, economic and diplomatic ties with the region commensurate importance has helped shape-up positive and trajectory in the region. We have given substance to rebalance by bolstering our treaty allies, deeply engaging with the merging powers, strengthening regional institutions, promoting trade and investment, enhancing our military posture, advancing democratic reform and creating new networks of trilateral and multilateral relationships.

Chabot questioned, 'Let me turn to another topic, I don't know if we discussed Bangladesh in any length this morning, they clearly deserve more attention than they often receive, either by this administration or in just whole range of things. But, first of all, we all know an election was held a while back and Sheikh Hasina was re-elected of course. Khaleda Zia and her party boycotted the election and it is a political situation, I think if you were there. Let me ask you this – Bangladesh long been considered a moderate Muslim country and resisting Islamic radicalism. There have been couple of incidences just within the last week, it's believed these are linked to extremist Islamic intolerant type of groups, could you comment on that and what can be done about it?'

Blinken replied, 'I am glad you are putting focus on that. That is the concern we very much share and we have seen a series of terrorist attacks in Bangladesh over the last several months, including the ones you have referred to, which the government has sometimes claimed these are actually the work of the opposition, one fashion or another, but we have seen based on the evidence, to date in fact, extremist group whether they are indigenous or affiliated with ISIL or Daesh are responsible. This gives us concern about the potential for ISIL or Daesh to take root in Bangladesh, which you rightly pointed out, has been in an important country, in terms of having a moderate Muslim country orientation, it can be an important player in dealing with the problem. So, as a result of that, we have been both engaging with the government on this problem. Also, for example, with India, given the relationship between India and Bangladesh, to raise the concern and try to work together with them on countering terrorism before it take root in Bangladesh. That is the last thing we want.'