

**Forum:** Historical Security Council (HSC)

**Issue:** Terrorist threats in Southeast Asia: The escalating terrorist threats in Southeast Asia: Addressing the Zamboanga bombing and its impact on regional security (2 October 2002)

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## Table of Contents

### I. Introduction

### II. Key Terms

- A. Non-state armed group
- B. State sovereignty
- C. Insurgency
- D. Self-defence (Article 51 of the UN Charter)
- E. Regional security cooperation

### III. General Overview

- A. Security Landscape in Southeast Asia
  - 1. Internal conflicts in the southern Philippines
  - 2. Transnational terrorist networks and penetrable borders
- B. Key Issues for Regional and International Security
  - 1. Civilian protection and local governance
  - 2. Sovereignty and regional stability

### IV. Major Parties Involved

- A. Republic of the Philippines
- B. United States of America
- C. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)
- D. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)
- E. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)
- F. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
- G. United Nations Security Council

### V. Timeline of Key Events

- A. Creation of ARMM
- B. Formation of Abu Sayyaf

- C. MNLF–Government Peace Agreement
  - D. 9/11 and War on Terror
  - E. Adoption of UNSC 1373
  - F. ASEAN Counter Terrorism Declaration
  - G. Expansion of OEF–Philippines
  - H. First Zamboanga Bombing
  - I. Bali Nightclub Bombings
  - J. Further Zamboanga Attacks
- VI. Previous & Possible Solutions**
- VII. Questions to Consider**
- VIII. Bibliography & Sources for further research**
- IX. Works Cited**

## **I. Introduction**

On 2 October 2002, in Zamboanga City, an explosion took place in a very crowded area. This led to casualties of Filipino civilians and a United States military member, alongside many others, being injured. While this situation was thought to be a single act initially, further bombings took place in Zamboanga. It is evident that a pattern of violence has broken out in the region, aiming to destabilize the southern part of the country.

Focusing on the escalating terrorist threats in Southeast Asia, the Zamboanga bombing demonstrates the national and international consequences of locally planned attacks. Terrorist activities in the region intersect with the lack of authority of the administration, insecure maritime borders, and long-lasting internal conflicts between groups of people from differing backgrounds. In terms of the United Nations and the Security Council, this situation calls for more effective counter terrorism resolutions, increased impact by regional and global intergovernmental organizations, and a thorough evaluation of how to protect the well-being of civilian populations while respecting state sovereignty.

The agenda item, “Terrorist threats in Southeast Asia: Addressing the Zamboanga bombing and its impact on regional security (2 October 2002),” invites all delegates of the Historical Security Council to debate concrete solutions to minimize the negative impacts of terrorism in the region.

## II. Definition of Key Terms

- A. **Non-state armed group:** *“There is no internationally agreed definition of non-state armed groups in international treaties. This term refers to a non-state party to an international or non-international armed conflict. Humanitarian law uses the term of “armed forces” to designate and define the combatants fighting within a State party to the conflict.” (Médecins sans frontières)*
- B. **State sovereignty:** *“A State’s sovereignty is based on the exclusive power that it exercises over its territory and its nationals. In international law, States themselves (i.e., governments) write the rules that they will be required to follow.” (Médecins sans frontières)*
- C. **Insurgency:** *Is a “term historically restricted to rebellious acts that did not reach the proportions of an organized revolution.” (Britannica)*
- D. **Self-defence (Article 51 of the UN Charter):** *“Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.” (Article 51 - Office of Legal Affairs - the United Nations)*
- E. **Regional security cooperation:** Joint attempts by nearby nations to prevent and handle security threats in the region through shared operations, information, and policies.

## III. General Overview

### A. Security Landscape in Southeast Asia

#### 1. Internal conflicts in the southern Philippines

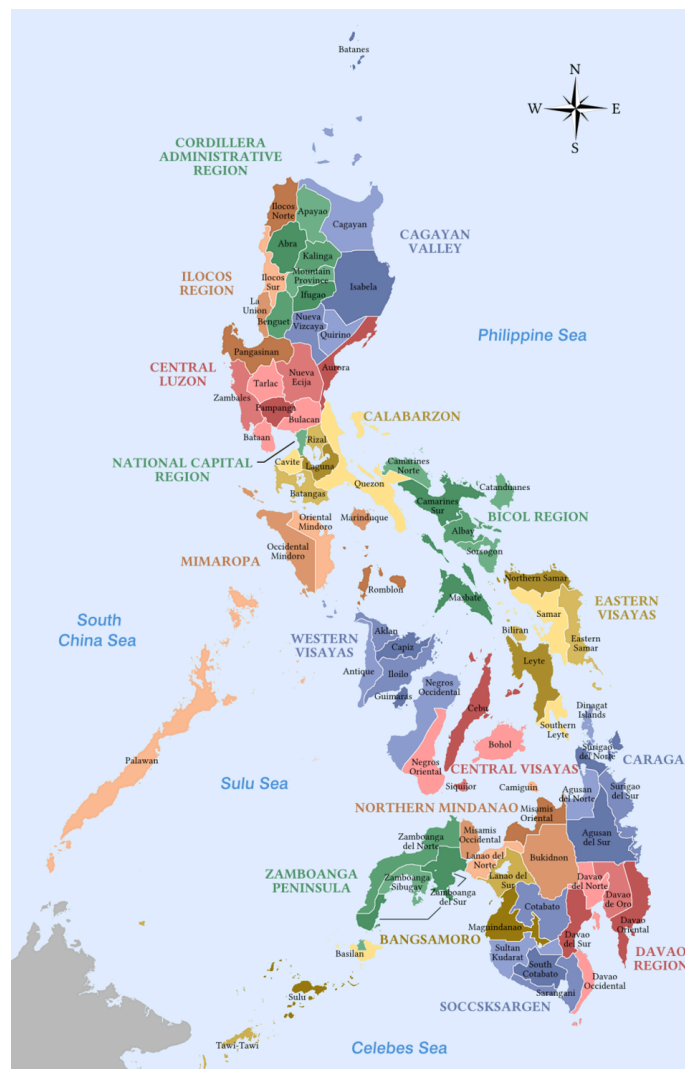
Before the bombing in 2002, the Philippines had already endured several decades of conflicts between the Moro people, who have long sought greater political representation and, in some cases, independence from the national government. Armed civilian groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front are present in Mindanao and nearby islands, undermining the central authority of the government and leading to displacement and violence, which both affect the society as a whole.

Within this violent environment, more radical factions with more members have, gained strength. Notably, The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) has expanded its activities in Sulu and Basilan, as well as parts of Zamboanga.

The group has become known for extortion, kidnapping, and bombings. The existence of non-governmental and illegal armed actors, alongside poverty and lack of public services, leads to support for extremist ideologies and groups throughout the region.

For many civilians in affected areas, supporting an extremist group is regarded as an opportunity for the civil society to be protected and to access their basic necessities, such as food, shelter, and community support.

Aforementioned key locations related to the issue are shown in Map 1 below.



**Map 1: Key Locations in the Southern Philippines (Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Zamboanga)**

## **B. Key Issues for Regional and International Security**

### **1. Sovereignty and regional stability**

The primary responsibility for addressing security concerns lies with the Republic of the Philippines, as the terrorist activities take place within its national territory. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that a wider network of alliances and actors is involved in regional and international security. Thus, foreign support is essential in increasing the Philippines' capacity to respond to terrorist threats. Such cooperation, however, should be handled carefully to ensure that public perception is respected and national sovereignty is not compromised.

Delegates are highly encouraged to fully examine the Zamboanga conflict and similar incidents across the region by considering both local and regional implications. It must be noted that these terrorist incidents often affect neighbouring states and international peace.

## **IV. Major Parties Involved**

### **A. United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**

- As the primary organ responsible for worldwide peacekeeping and safety, after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September, 2001, the UNSC adopted counter terrorism resolutions and formed new monitoring schemes. Specifically, for the situation in Zamboanga and terrorism in Southeast Asian countries, the Security Council must consider how to support national and regional efforts.

### **B. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

- ASEAN is the regional organization facilitating cooperation among Southeast Asian states. All member states are concerned with and focused on cross-border terrorism, safe havens for extremist groups, and extremist transnational networks. ASEAN promotes and creates schemes for information sharing, joint policies, and joint operations. While doing so, the organization maintains the core principle of respecting its member states' sovereignty and avoiding open regional conflict.

### C. Republic of the Philippines

- The Republic of the Philippines is the state directly affected by the bombings. The administration of the country and its law enforcement agencies are fighting terrorism in the south of the country. Simultaneously, they act to maintain territorial integrity, protect civilians, and manage foreign military assistance.

### D. United States of America

- The USA is an ally of the Philippines and the initiator of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). In the past, U.S. military members were present in Mindanao to assist in operations against the Abu Sayyaf Group. Some U.S. service members have been killed in Zamboanga, underscoring the threat and depth of U.S.-Philippine security cooperation.

### E. Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG)

- The ASG is a violent, armed, non-state extremist group known to be responsible for bombings, kidnappings, and extortion. The group is widely suspected of involvement in attacks in Zamboanga and elsewhere in the southern Philippines. Its activities continue to pose a major challenge to both national and regional security, directly threatening civilians and undermining governmental authority.

### F. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

- The MILF is a group seeking greater autonomy and, for some members, full independence and representation for Muslim communities in the southern Philippines. It must be noted that MILF is distinct from the Abu Sayyaf Group, both in its objectives and its organizational structure.

### G. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI)

- Jemaah Islamiyah is an extremist terrorist network operating across multiple Southeast Asian states. Its major aim is to form an Islamic state in the region, and it has been linked to various plots and attacks in different countries. Allegations of cooperation, be it logistical, ideological, or operational, between JI and armed groups in the Philippines remain a major concern for regional authorities, particularly given the cross-border terrorist activity in the period 2001 to 2002.

## V. Timeline of Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
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17 November 1989	The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is formed through a nationwide plebiscite.
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Early 1990s	The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) emerges as a splinter faction from the Moro National Liberation Front.
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2 September 1996	The Moro National Liberation Front and the Philippine government signed the 1996 Final Peace Agreement.
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11 September 2001	The terrorist attacks occur on 11 September 2001 in the United States, prompting the launch of the international War on Terror.
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28 September 2001	The United Nations Security Council adopts resolution 1373, forming binding counter-terrorism obligations on member states.
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5 November 2001	ASEAN adopts the ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism, urging regional cooperation.
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Early 2002	The Philippines expands U.S. military support to the Philippine forces in operations against Abu Sayyaf.
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2 October 2002	A bomb explodes outside a karaoke bar near a military camp in Zamboanga City, killing a U.S. soldier and Filipino civilians.
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12 October 2002 Nightclub bombings in Bali, Indonesia, kill 202 people, demonstrating the regional reach of Jemaah Islamiyah–linked terrorism in Southeast Asia.

17 & 21 October 2002 Additional bombings strike a department store and the Fort Pilar shrine in Zamboanga City, causing further casualties and intensifying security concerns.

## **VI. Previous & Possible Solutions**

### **A. Previous Attempts to Address the Issue**

#### **1. National measures in the Philippines**

Before and throughout 2002, the Philippine government implemented a combination of military, legal, and political measures to minimize activities by the aforementioned armed groups in the southern part of the country. Local police and military units have fought against these groups, especially Abu Sayyaf, including hostage rescue operations, arrests, and raids. Additionally, the government pursued political initiatives, such as the establishment of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the signing of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front.

These measures were significant steps towards progress, but due to local conditions, gaps in state authority, socioeconomic challenges, and limited capacity, they were not fully successful. More radical groups have continuously organized terrorist activities.

#### **2. Regional and international frameworks**

As the situation was a common security threat for all nations in the region, ASEAN has called on its member states from Southeast Asia to adopt mechanisms for information sharing and mutual legal cooperation. However, due to differing national priorities and sovereignty concerns, their implementation has been very limited.

The United Nations Security Council has passed resolutions on counter terrorism, particularly Resolution 1373. External partners have also provided training, equipment, and advisory services to concerned countries in the region, such as the Philippines, strengthening their fight against terrorism.



## **B. Possible Solutions to be Implemented**

### **1. Enhancing regional security cooperation**

The Security Council may encourage more structured and organized cooperation between Southeast Asian states. This could be accomplished through the request for regular reporting on measures and improved information-sharing mechanisms. Emphasis should be placed on the sharing of information, technical and strategic assistance, and joint investigations.

### **2. Supporting national capacity and governance**

The Security Council could highlight the need for effective law enforcement, judicial processes, and border management in the Philippines, in addition to the safeguarding of civilians and their human rights. Delegates may also want to consider promoting development, education, and local governance in affected areas, as long-term prevention of terrorism requires addressing underlying socioeconomic conditions, not only military responses.

### **3. Targeted measures against terrorist actors**

Within the already existing measures of the Security Council, it is possible to implement asset freezes and travel restrictions on individuals and entities responsible for bombings, attacks, and other terrorist actions. Such proposals could also include monitoring mechanisms, aiming to minimize unintended consequences which would affect the public as a whole.

## **VIII. Questions to Consider**

- How can the Security Council support the Philippine government and law enforcement agencies in countering terrorist groups, such as but not limited to Abu Sayyaf, while fully respecting their state sovereignty and avoiding a multinational military presence in the region?
- How can counter terrorism operations organized by military agencies be redesigned to minimize civilian casualties, protect human rights, and avoid increased radicalisation in the region?

- To what extent could sanctioning or freezing assets of specific individuals or organisations minimize the terrorist acts in the region? Would doing so undermine the state authority?
- How should international actors, such as the United States of America, be involved to be able to assist the government while not undermining local legitimacy and regional stability?
- How can the Philippine government and international partners pursue counter-terrorism while maintaining dialogue with armed groups whose political aims differ from those of terrorist factions?
- Displacement, poverty, and limited access to services remain central drivers of instability. Should the Security Council encourage greater humanitarian support or stronger coordination with agencies such as UNDP, UNHCR, or the Red Cross?
- What measures can be implemented to reduce the risk of extremist networks spreading across borders, particularly given concerns about Jemaah Islamiyah's regional reach?
- Even in 2002, discussions continue regarding autonomy, self-governance, and political representation in Mindanao. Should the Security Council promote renewed efforts in political dialogue or decentralization?

## IX. Sources for further research

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This monograph analyses every detail of the Abu Sayyaf Group, including its origin, background, and tactics. This piece would be useful to understand ASG more deeply than news coverage.
2. [ASEAN – “2001 ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism”](#)  
This declaration is a shared commitment by leaders of ASEAN member states to cooperate against terrorist threats through information sharing and joint operations.
3. [Congressional Research Service – “Terrorism in Southeast Asia” \(Bruce Vaughn, 2005\)](#)  
This policy evaluation report offers an overview of the key terrorist groups in Southeast Asia (the ones recognized by the USA). It also mentions their historical backgrounds and how the United States has responded to their actions.

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