



**PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE  
AND TERRORISM RESEARCH**

*Paper Series, July 2008*

**COMBATING TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THE 'ASEAN WAY'**

***Col Francisco N Cruz Jr.***

***Abstract***

*Many ASEAN scholars contend that ASEAN has to reinvent itself or else it fades into obsolescence. The regional interaction process called the ASEAN way, basically founded on principles of non-interference and non-binding commitments, has become the problem rather than the solution to overcoming regional threats and insecurity. This paper subscribes to the perspective that ASEAN has become an instrument of its member states to serve their narrow interests. The sense of 'we feeling' has become illusory over the years. In facing transnational threats like terrorism, ASEAN can be viewed as ineffectual. While terrorists have overcome their collective action problems, the regional governments have not. In this context, reforms in the ASEAN consensus and decision-making process are essential for it to become an effective regional vehicle against transnational terrorism.*

**I INTRODUCTION**

Terrorism comes in two elemental categories: domestic and transnational. Domestic terrorism is 'homegrown and has consequences for just the host country, its institutions, citizens, property, and policies.' In contrast, transnational terrorism involves more than one country 'through its victims, targets, institutions, supporters, terrorists, or implications.'<sup>1</sup> The attack on World Trade Center towers was a transnational terrorist act because victims were from many different countries, the operation had been planned abroad, the terrorists were foreigners, and the effects of the event (e.g., financial/economic repercussions) were global. The Bali bombing was also transnational inasmuch as it victimized foreign nationals and it adversely affected international trade and tourism. After the Bali bombings, Indonesia's tourist arrivals fell by 2.2% in 2002.<sup>2</sup> Terrorist acts severely

---

<sup>1</sup>Todd Sandler, *Controlling Transnational Terrorism: Cooperation Dilemma*, School of International Relations, University of Southern California, Dec 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Geoff Raby, *The Costs of Terrorism and the Benefits of Cooperating to Combat Terrorism*, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, paper presented to APEC in Senior Officials Meeting on 21 Feb 2003.

disrupt international trade. Terrorist events in one country can impose significant costs on other countries and 'spillovers of inaction' make collective action an indispensable response.

Zachary Abuza, one of the leading scholars on terrorism in Southeast Asia (SEA) claims that Southeast Asia has become a major 'center of operations' for Al-Qaida operatives for three primary reasons: the Afghan connection to Middle Eastern Al-Qaida and radical Islam extremists, the growth of Islamic grievances within Southeast Asian states since the 1970s for socioeconomic and political reasons, and, most important, that Southeast Asian states have become 'countries of convenience' for international terrorists.<sup>3</sup> He elaborates this thesis with the following arguments:

One of the aspects that made Southeast Asia so appealing to the Al-Qaida leadership in the first place was the network of Islamic charities, the spread of poorly regulated Islamic banks, business-friendly environments, and economies that already had records of extensive money laundering. Al-Qaida saw the region, first and foremost, as a back office for its activities (especially to set up front companies, fundraise, recruit, forge documents, and purchase weapons), and only later became a theater of operations in its own right as its affiliate organization in Southeast Asia, the Jemaah Islamiyah, developed its own capabilities.<sup>4</sup>

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), an al-Qaeda affiliate, posed the greatest challenge to peace and security in the region. The series of arrests of JI operatives led the International Crisis Group (ICG) to view JI in South East Asia as 'damaged', but 'still dangerous.' JI core members are bound together by 'history, ideology, education, and marriage.' They share a commitment to implementing *salafi* teachings (a return to the pure Islam practiced by the Prophet) and to *jihad*. These bonds are likely to enable the JI network to survive counterterrorist efforts to dismantle it.<sup>5</sup>

ASEAN is committed to eliminating terrorism in SEA, but many scholars feared this commitment exists only on paper. Intergovernmental cooperation is fundamental given the transnational threat posed by JI. Regional governments have shunned a complete and public acknowledgement of the scale and long-term threat of radical Islam. Counterterrorism in ASEAN gatherings is still a secondary issue, economic security and growth is held as key priority considering the fragile state of most economies.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Abuza, *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2003. pp 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p10.

<sup>5</sup> ICG Asia Report N°63, *JI in Southeast Asia: Damaged But Still Dangerous*, 26 August 2003, p 2.

<sup>6</sup> Brek Batley, *The Complexities of Dealing with Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Jemaah Islamiyah*, Strategic and Defense Studies, The Australian National University 2003. p 40.

This paper mainly argues that ASEAN is inflexible and hampered by long history of interstate political animosities and its strict adherence to doctrine of non-interference, and that its tendency to avoid challenging, problematic issues militates against a successful collective action.

## **II     **JI: ITS TRANSNATIONAL NATURE AND STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES****

*Using a combination of radical religious ideology, clandestine recruitment, extensive networking and professional transnational operations, JI has created a formidable challenge for any security or intelligence authority.<sup>7</sup>*

Bret Batley

Ji's long-term objective is transnational. Already regarded as a regional terrorist network, Ji is seeking to establish a *Daulah Islamiyah*, an Islamic state covering Malaysia, Indonesia, the southern Philippines, Singapore and Brunei. 'Using the powerful nature of religion, Ji philosophy has been able to transcend ethnicity and nationality.' Ji network shares a 'freedom fighter ideology' and seeks to unite Southeast Asia's 230 million Muslims in the defense of Allah. Ji believes that establishing an Islamic sovereignty regionally is divinely justified and an obligatory mission of every Muslim.<sup>8</sup> Habib Rizieq, leader of Indonesia's Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), believes:

If defending Allah is a terrorist act,  
If defending the prophet is a terrorist act,  
If defending shariah is a terrorist act,  
Then we say to the world that we are all terrorists.<sup>9</sup>

Brek Batley explains Ji's philosophy in a clear, candid manner:

An injustice against one Muslim is an attack on all Muslims. The Muslims fighting for Islamic interests in Ambon deserve the same recognition and support as their brothers in the southern Philippines and East Timor...The inequality faced by Malay-Muslims in Singapore, the poverty and youth unemployment of Muslims in southern Thailand, the corruption of the ruling secular elite in Jakarta and the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp 3, 5.

<sup>9</sup> This was quoted by Bret Batley in his book, *The Complexities of Dealing with Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Jemaah Islamiyah* . p 3.

various Islamic struggles in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines are equally relevant in a wider Islamic community.<sup>10</sup>

Ji networking efforts started with its formation in 1999 of an informal alliance of jihadists called Rabitatul Mujahideen (Mujahideen Coalition). The alliance, conceived by its spiritual leader Abubakar Bashir and which sought to share resources for training, funding, procurement of arms and terrorist operations, gathered together Philippine's Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Indonesia's Laskar Jundullah, various Acehnese rebel organizations and a number of other groups from Thailand and Burma.<sup>11</sup> There was no compelling evidence to prove that the alliance has fully developed, but it has succinctly demonstrated Ji's capacity and determination to undertake transnational operations. Today, Ji's transnational capacity is crucial to its operational effectiveness. Its core membership is comprised of Indonesians, Malaysians, Filipinos and Singaporeans, many of whom have been involved in planning, training and attacks in countries other than their own. For example, the Bali bombings were funded by radicals in Afghanistan, partly planned in Thailand and perpetrated by mostly Indonesian nationals, some of whom were recruited in Malaysia and trained in the Philippines in Camp Abubakar.<sup>12</sup>

Ji brand of terrorism is difficult to prevent. Firstly, Ji is not seeking political solution/negotiation which provides it freedom of action to inflict harm. Secondly, it has access to suicide bombers who offer distinct advantage against authorities and greater success rates in operations. Thirdly, the number of potential targets is simply enormous, ranging from hard to soft targets and including but not limited to political, diplomatic, military, civilian, economic and 'symbolic targets of a Western, Christian, Chinese, Israeli or secular nature.' Defending or securing these targets is unmistakably impossible.<sup>13</sup> Finally, terrorist attacks are low cost but with huge consequences. Ji attacks did not involve expensive equipment. The Bali bomb, for instance is alleged to have required only six components: dual-use chemicals; filing cabinets; concrete cable; a detonator; a mobile phone; and a van, all of which were easily/promptly available and relatively cheap.<sup>14</sup>

The terrorism adversaries are characterized by asymmetry.<sup>15</sup> Todd Sandler has concisely described this asymmetry and its implications to defeating international terrorism:

---

<sup>10</sup> Bret Batley, p 5.

<sup>11</sup> Singapore White Paper on The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Batley, p 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p 24.

<sup>15</sup> Todd Sandler. *Controlling Transnational Terrorism: Cooperation Dilemma.*, School of International Relations, University of Southern California, Dec 2003.

Terrorists cooperate in networks since the onset of modern-day terrorism in the late 1960s, from which time terrorist groups have shared personnel, intelligence, logistics, training camps, and resource. In contrast, governments detest sacrificing their autonomy over security matters and so severely limit their cooperation. An exigency such as 9/11 fosters more cooperation, but this cooperation fades with time as most countries do not view themselves as the prime target. This cooperation asymmetry not only hampers effective antiterrorism policy, but also provides a significant strategic advantage to terrorist networks that exploit the uncoordinated policies of targeted governments.<sup>16</sup>

Terrorists, Sandler argues, succeed more in forming networks and cooperating than targeted nations for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, although terrorist groups may have different political agenda, they share similar enemies that provide terrorist unity. For example, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas and Jemaah Islamiyah possess similar hate or grievances against Israel and the United States and against other countries that support them. Secondly, terrorist groups also cooperate because of their 'relative weakness compared with the formidable governments' that they strike. Given the enormous risks that terrorists assume, they have little choice but to band together, pool their limited resources and to depend on one another.<sup>17</sup>

Governments in Southeast Asia are confronted with cooperation problems due to a host of reasons including but not limited to diverse threat perceptions, diverse cost-benefit analysis, and diverse national interests. To many ASEAN analysts, ASEAN's perceived lack of determination and unity in confronting radical Islam is likely to persist.

### **III THE LIMITS OF ASEAN WAY: IMPEDIMENTS TO EFFECTIVE COLLECTION ACTION AGAINST TERROR**

*Southeast Asia's greatest vulnerability to transnational threats has been its political under-institutionalization.*<sup>18</sup>

*Sheldon Simon*

#### *ASEAN Actions in Combating Terrorism*

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Sheldon W Simon, *Back to the Future?* in *Confronting Terrorism in the Pursuit of Power*, ed., Ashley J Tellis and Michael Wills, Strategic Asia 2004-05, National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington DC 2004.

ASEAN response to the scourge of transnational terrorism has been principally in the form of statements and declarations. ASEAN's efforts to address terrorism and transnational crime started even before the 9/11. ASEAN adopted the Declaration on Transnational Crime in 1997 and an ASEAN Action Plan to Combat Transnational Crime in 1999 to implement the Declaration. However, it was 9/11 that provided a strong stimulus for the region to come together to fight terrorism and related crimes through cooperation at the multilateral, regional and bilateral levels.<sup>19</sup>

The commitment to fight terrorism as a region was endorsed at the highest level when the Heads of State/Government of the 10 member countries of ASEAN adopted the 2001 ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism at their Seventh ASEAN Summit on 5 November 2001 in Brunei Darussalam.<sup>20</sup> The ASEAN Leaders viewed terrorism as a profound threat to international peace and security and 'a direct challenge to the attainment of peace, progress and prosperity of ASEAN and the realization of ASEAN Vision 2020'. They expressed commitment to combat terrorism in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international laws and relevant UN resolutions. They also stated that 'cooperative efforts in this regard should consider joint practical counter-terrorism measures in line with specific circumstances in the region and in each member country'.

At the Eighth ASEAN Summit on 4 November 2002 in Phnom Penh, the ASEAN Leaders issues a Declaration on Terrorism, condemning the heinous terrorist attacks in Bali, Indonesia and in the cities of Zamboanga and Quezon in the Philippines. They expressed the solidarity of their countries with Indonesia and the Philippines and ASEAN's full support for their determined pursuit of the terrorist elements responsible for the attacks. At the same time they condemned the tendency in some quarters to identify terrorism with particular religions or ethnic groups. The ASEAN leaders resolved to intensify their efforts, collectively and individually, to prevent, counter and suppress the activities of terrorist groups in the region, and reiterated their determination to carry out and develop the specific measures outlined in the 2001 ASEAN Declaration on Joint Action to Counter Terrorism, which are as follows:

Review and strengthen national mechanisms to combat terrorism;

Call for the early signing/ratification of or accession to all relevant anti-terrorist conventions, including the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism;

---

<sup>19</sup> S.Pushpanathan, *ASEAN Efforts To Combat Terrorism*, ASEAN Secretariat Second APEC Counter-Terrorism Task Force Meeting 20 August 2003, Phuket, Thailand.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Deepen cooperation among ASEAN's front-line law enforcement agencies in combating terrorism and sharing 'best practices';

Study relevant international conventions on terrorism with the view to integrating them with ASEAN mechanisms on combating international terrorism;

Enhance information/intelligence exchange to facilitate the flow of information, in particular, on terrorists and terrorist organizations, their movement and funding, and any other information needed to protect lives, property and the security of all modes of travel;

Strengthen existing cooperation and coordination between the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and other relevant ASEAN bodies in countering, preventing and suppressing all forms of terrorist acts. Particular attention would be paid to finding ways to combat terrorist organizations, support infrastructure and funding and bringing the perpetrators to justice;

Develop regional capacity building programs to enhance existing capabilities of ASEAN member countries to investigate, detect, monitor and report on terrorist acts;

Discuss and explore practical ideas and initiatives to increase ASEAN's role in and involvement with the international community including extra-regional partners within existing frameworks such as the ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan and the RoK), the ASEAN

Dialogue Partners and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), to make the fight against terrorism a truly regional and global endeavor; and

Strengthen cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international levels in combating terrorism in a comprehensive manner and affirm that at the international level the United Nations should play a major role in this regard.<sup>21</sup>

The threat of transnational terrorism in Southeast Asia has become a new common ground for cooperation within ASEAN. Critics of ASEAN's informal structure and uncompromising stance of non-interference are pessimistic about whether these declarations and their non-binding recommendations will ever be implemented or simply remain pieces of rhetoric or 'proclamations of good intentions.' The slow, inflexible ASEAN process may hardly give much hope given the urgency of action required to tackle the threat of terrorism in the region.

### *Limits of ASEAN Way*

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

ASEAN scholars have defined the ASEAN way based on the interaction principles dictated by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. ASEAN may be defined as an apparently distinctive and informal process of interaction within the ASEAN framework through which the members relate to each other and reach but also 'avoid common decisions.' It consists of various features that include: 'a high level of informality, the practice of quiet diplomacy, a continuing process of dialogue, a willingness to exercise self-restraint, solidarity, the practice of consensus building and the art of conflict avoidance.' The standard norms include respect for national sovereignty, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states are integrated in this process of interaction.<sup>22</sup> ASEAN's mechanisms had been more predisposed towards 'norm-building and community-building through socialization and networking, assurance rather than deterrence, and informal third party-mediations rather than formal dispute settlement mechanisms.'<sup>23</sup>

ASEAN scholars offer two points of view on ASEAN. The first is consistent with the tenets of ASEAN way. ASEAN forms the basis of a regional community of Southeast Asian states. ASEAN states share a common bond of belonging or a sense of 'we feeling' that has precluded violent conflict between themselves. ASEAN has socialized its member states into a sense of regional identity.<sup>24</sup> ASEAN supporters have attributed the absence of war in the region for decades to the ASEAN way.

The second viewpoint regards ASEAN as an 'instrument of its member states.' The organization is designed to pursue the narrow interests of its member states. Any sense of community within Southeast Asia is misleading. According to Shaun Narine, this second position is slightly closer to reality for a myriad of reasons:<sup>25</sup>

The fundamental beliefs—independence and sovereignty of states—underpinning ASEAN actually mitigate against the creation of a strong regional community... ASEAN has always been a weak institution, more pronounced in the wake of Asian economic crisis and ASEAN's inability to respond effectively to those events... ASEAN members are committed to their own narrow self-interests... ASEAN regional identity does not prevent the ASEAN states from putting narrow national interests above regional interests. In a sense, it even encourages them to do so.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Ralf Emmers, *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF*, 2002. p 22.

<sup>23</sup> Mely Caballero-Anthony, *Regional Security in Southeast Asia; Beyond the ASEAN Way*, ISEAS, 2005. p 285.

<sup>24</sup> Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2002. p 1.

<sup>25</sup> Narine, p 1

<sup>26</sup> Narine, pp 2-4.



The track record of ASEAN in dealing with regional issues was not very impressive. In many occasions, it violated its cherished traditions. For example, ASEAN's actions during the Cambodian conflict characteristically watered down the spirit of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality or ZOPFAN. ZOPFAN asserts ASEAN's vision of 'regional order free of interference of outside powers and managed by ASEAN states.' In dealing with the threat coming from Vietnam and the Soviet Union, ASEAN took sides in a conflict between the great powers, allying itself with the United States and China. 'ASEAN could not manage its security environment on its own terms.'<sup>27</sup>

In similar vein, ASEAN was divided in its response to the Vietnamese invasion. Without any consultation with ASEAN and thinking that Vietnam was no longer a real threat to the region, Thailand reversed its position in 1988, thus crushing the appearance of an 'ASEAN united front.' 'Thailand acted on the basis of its narrow self-defined interests. It ignored ASEAN procedure, gave little thought to the effects of its actions on ASEAN's unity.'<sup>28</sup> Moreover, ASEAN reaction to the Cambodian coup was a direct defiance of non-interference principle as it made Cambodia's entry conditional upon its internal/domestic situation. In 1997, ASEAN delayed the admission of Cambodia into a later date 'due to present circumstances in the country.'<sup>29</sup>

Regional relations have been influenced by 'feelings of suspicion, competition and series of territorial disputes.' In framing members' national security policies and defense procurement programs, other participants are still perceived as potential enemies. This is especially evident in the case of Singapore which apparently considers its neighbors as potential adversaries. Border clashes between Thailand and Myanmar in early 2001 led to an extensive exchange of fire and demonstrated that the 'use of force between member states could not be excluded.'<sup>30</sup>

The Spratly dispute had the same treatment. The Philippine reconnaissance aircraft discovered in 1998 that China had resumed construction on Mischief Reef. The Philippines, calling Chinese action as 'creeping invasion,' pursued a strategy of internationalizing the dispute. ASEAN's apparent refusal to come to the support of the Philippines was lamented by foreign affairs officer Amb. Lauro Baja. Baja described the Philippines as being an 'orphan in its campaign to internationalize the South China Sea... Even some members of our ASEAN friends are either mute, timid or cannot go beyond espousal of general principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and polite words of understanding given the

---

<sup>27</sup> Narine, p 60.

<sup>28</sup> Narine, p 60.

<sup>29</sup> Emmers, p 25.

<sup>30</sup> Emmers, pp 28.

corridors or meeting rooms. Understandably they may have their own agenda to pursue.’<sup>31</sup>

Tobias Nischalke has reviewed 20 of ASEAN’s major foreign policy initiatives encompassing its 30 years of existence:

Of the 20 cases, 7 clearly violated ASEAN’s established methods. Policies that had significant regional consequences were advanced or implemented without consultation with other ASEAN states. Among these were the Thailand-China alliance of 1979, the Kuantan Declaration and Thailand’s policy reversal in 1988 in respect to Vietnam. Three cases were resolved using the ASEAN way of consultation and consensus. However, there are considerable reasons to doubt that these cases reflect a sense of ASEAN identity, that states did not cooperate out of a sense of belonging to ASEAN, but for other reasons. In 6 of 13 cases, consensus emerged without the need for extensive negotiations. In these cases, the issues at stake were either widely accepted ASEAN principles or involved very little cost to individual ASEAN members. In the remaining 7 cases substantial negotiations were necessary to achieve consensus. In these cases, Nischalke notes that ASEAN consensus was the product of external influences, usually external threat. The ASEAN states have usually only consulted each other in cases where ASEAN agreement was necessary to achieve state goals. When it was possible to achieve state objectives through unilateral initiatives, the ASEAN states did so...For the most part, ASEAN was not motivated by sentiments of community or ‘we feeling.’<sup>32</sup>

Amitav Acharya discussed in his 2001 book a painful fact--- the existence of ‘intra-mural polarization and factionalism’ in ASEAN. He wrote that ASEAN is polarized in three different ways:

The first is a liberal-conservative division based on degree of commitment to human rights and democracy, with Thailand and the Philippines in the former camp, and Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore in the other. The second is a classic North-South divide, or the prospect of a two-tier regional system of ASEAN haves and ASEAN have nots, based on uneven levels of present and future development, a polarization between the old and new members, which many believe already happened. Last but not least, ASEAN is facing a divide between a pro-interventionist camp who favor constructive intervention/flexible engagement,<sup>33</sup> such as Thailand and the Philippines, and a pro-sovereignty camp

---

<sup>31</sup> Narine, p 88.

<sup>32</sup> Naurine, pp 198-9.

<sup>33</sup> In the wake of the Asian economic crisis, Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia called for ‘constructive intervention’ within ASEAN. Thailand advanced the concept of flexible engagement that ‘involves publicly commenting on and collectively discussing fellow members’ domestic policies when these have either regional implications or adversely affect the disposition of other ASEAN members. This elicited debates and ASEAN settled for ‘enhanced interaction,’ ASEAN states can only make comments not intervene on neighbor’s domestic activities if those activities affected regional concerns.

of the rest of ASEAN members who keep the grouping firmly wedded to strict non-interference, quiet diplomacy and constructive engagement.. These emerging divisions within ASEAN are especially problematic in view of its traditional commitment to consensus-based agenda setting and decision making.<sup>34</sup>

ASEAN's noticeable disunity contributes to its inability to speak with one voice. Many observers contend that 'ASEAN can no longer practice its principles of nonintervention in a globalized world, one where domestic events can have regional consequences.' They suggest that 'ASEAN needs to be reformed to accommodate this reality...Without the willingness to allow ASEAN to become a more interventionary body, it will fade into irrelevance and will lose its appeal to its members.'<sup>35</sup> A divided ASEAN, therefore, bars a coherent and effective joint response to terrorism.

### *Impediments to Effective Collective Action*

Collective action refers to activities that require the coordination of efforts by two or more individuals. At such, collective action involves group actions intended to further the interests or well-being of the members... Collective action problem arises when the actions of its members are interdependent i.e. one person's reward (outcome) is dependent on the action of others.<sup>36</sup> Combating the scourge of transnational terrorism presents a host of collective action problems for the ASEAN.

This collective action problem has been recognized by many nations. For instance, the United States warned that 'as long as a few States were not acting quickly enough, all remained vulnerable, as the fight against terrorism was only as strong as its weakest link. For Israel, 'zero tolerance was the only moral option in the fight against terrorism...The weakest link in that fight were those regimes, which were able, but unwilling, to take the necessary actions on their own territories.'<sup>37</sup>

The dictum, 'a chain is only as strong as its weakest link,' is undeniably true in the fight against terror. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is accused as the weakest link in the fight against radical Islam.<sup>38</sup> Batley explains Indonesia's dilemma:

---

<sup>34</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London 2001. p 207.

<sup>35</sup> Narine, p 134-5.

<sup>36</sup> Sandler, Todd. *Collective Action: Theory and Applications*, The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> *Fight Against Terrorism Would Be Long With No Short Cuts*, Counter-Terrorism Committee Chairman Tells Security Council, Committee Work Programme Presented, CTC, UN, 24 July 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Batley, p 46.

Indonesia provides the best example of depth of law enforcement problems facing numerous governments in fight against radical Islam. Its security authorities have a history of exploiting tensions for political and financial gain. The August 2002 armed attack on US personnel near Freeport mine in Papua is suspected as the work of TNI's Special Forces, the mining company has paid in excess US\$11 million over the past 2 years to TNI for protection. In 2000, TNI is widely suspected of supporting or at the very least condoning the murder of Christians in Ambon at the hands of Laskar Jihad...The difficult challenge for Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, has been the balancing of secularism political Islam and the need for tighter security.<sup>39</sup>

Regional collective action against terrorism has to cope with a number of obstacles. The varied perception of the severity of the terrorist challenge within ASEAN makes it difficult to craft common responses. For example, prior to the Bali bombing in October 2002, Indonesia repeatedly refused to crack down on elements identified by its neighbors as leaders of Al-Qaeda linked JI. The Bali bombing prompted Jakarta to toughen its stance on terrorism and instituted internal security measures, but the government risks domestic opposition to such measures thus constraining its effective response to terrorism.<sup>40</sup>

Some ASEAN states places counterterrorism as secondary priority in their national agenda. Domestic politics and sensitivities prevent closer cooperation between some regional governments (such as between Singapore and its neighbors) on issues such as extradition of terrorists. Moreover, inter-state disputes have undermined the political climate for cooperation.<sup>41</sup>

Scarcity in resources and institutional capacity also make regional cooperation against terrorism problematic. Consequently, there is considerable dependence on outside powers for counterterrorism efforts. This is particularly evident in the US-ASEAN antiterrorism agreement providing for intelligence sharing and other activities. The regional grouping has avoided 'exclusively Asian' responses and some of the stronger measures against terrorism have been undertaken outside the framework of regional institutions. This includes the trilateral pact between the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. 'Bilateral agreements have once again proved to be more useful than multilateral means.' Significant examples are the US-Philippines joint training (Balikatan exercises) in southern Philippines and the US-Malaysia accord against terrorism.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Batley, p 36-7, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Asian Security After September 11: A View from Southeast Asia*, Paper Prepared for the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada's Roundtable on the Foreign Policy Dialogue and Canada-Asia Relations, Nanyang Technological University and York University, 27 March 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

#### IV CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR REFORMS IN ASEAN

*ASEAN needs to put some flesh on its rhetorical bones of harmony and cooperation.*<sup>43</sup>

*David Martin Jones and Michael Smith*

Acharya hints ASEAN may become a 'sunset' organization if it insists in its twin philosophy of informality and non-interference. To realize ASEAN Free Trade Area or AFTA and Vision 2020, ASEAN has to be more formal and more institutionalized.<sup>44</sup> Narine maintains ASEAN is facing a 'crisis' in view of its inability to effectively manage regional problems e.g. Asian financial crisis, the Indonesian bush fires, and violence in East Timor in 1999.<sup>45</sup> Considering these predicaments, ASEAN is less likely to succeed in its fight against terror. JI, which still can train in sanctuaries in Indonesia and the Philippines, has seemingly benefited from ASEAN's disunity and under- institutionalization. The ASEAN way is perhaps not the way to defeat an enemy like JI.

The cliché, 'the more the merrier,' is not exactly true in the ASEAN setting which is characterized more by divergence than convergence of interests and viewpoints. Consensus and collective action are elusive goals for such an enlarged body (ASEAN 10) which regards sovereignty as sacrosanct, thus controlling transnational terrorism is inevitably difficult.

There are two major prerequisites for ASEAN to significantly prove its relevance and effectiveness in the war on terror. First is the power to bind members. Declarations and proclamations are mere demonstration of intent. They are not binding and do not entail any real commitment on the part of the signatories. In this light, ASEAN states will do what is convenient based on their own calculations, capacities, and interests. As Batley warns 'the more likely catalyst that could transform largely hollow ASEAN rhetoric into firm, effective measures will be more attacks in more member states.'<sup>46</sup>

Second is the need for governments to sacrifice national sovereignty for the sake of regional unity and effectiveness. As previously stated, terrorists have formed networks to address their collection action problem, while governments have not to a certain degree. Governments have placed more importance on their

---

<sup>43</sup> David Martin Jones and Michael Smith, *The Perils of Hyper-Vigilance: The War on Terrorism and the Surveillance State in Southeast Asia*, Intelligence and National Security Vol 17 No.4 2002, pp 31-54.

<sup>44</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, pp 203, 205.

<sup>45</sup> Narine, p 199.

<sup>46</sup> Bratley, p 44.

sovereignty than on their efficacy in defeating a common enemy/threat. A regional security consensus that 'whatever threatens one threatens all' has to be accepted by ASEAN members for them to eliminate the menace of terrorism. Member states must therefore see 'eye to eye' for ASEAN to succeed. The adage 'one for all, all for one' must dominate the strategic calculation of states in confronting a common enemy. Unless this is realized, terrorism will continue to threaten regional peace and security.

### **About the Author:**

*Col Cruz currently serves in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. He started his military career as an intelligence officer in Southern Philippines. He completed his Master in Public Management at the University of the Philippines, and Master in Strategic Studies at Singapore's Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies. He has written several essays, monographs and theses on strategy, terrorism, insurgency, psychological operations and civil-military operations.*

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Abuza, Zachary. *Militant Islam in Southeast Asia: Crucible of Terror*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2003.

Acharya, Amitav. *Asian Security After September 11: A View from Southeast Asia*, Paper Prepared for the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada's Roundtable on the Foreign Policy Dialogue and Canada-Asia Relations, Nanyang Technological University and York University, 27 March 2003.

Acharya, Amitav. *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, Routledge, London 2001.

Batley, Brek. *The Complexities of Dealing with Radical Islam in Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Jemaah Islamiyah*, Strategic and Defense Studies, The Australian National University 2003.

Caballero-Anthony, Mely. *Regional Security in Southeast Asia; Beyond the ASEAN Way*, ISEAS, 2005.

Emmers, Ralf. *Cooperative Security and the Balance of Power in ASEAN and the ARF*, 2002.

*Fight Against Terrorism Would Be Long With No Short Cuts*, Counter-Terrorism Committee Chairman Tells Security Council, Committee Work Programme Presented, CTC, UN. 24 July 2003.

ICG Asia Report N°63, *Ji in Southeast Asia: Damaged But Still Dangerous*, 26 August 2003.

Jones, David Martin and Michael Smith, *The Perils of Hyper-Vigilance: The War on Terrorism and the Surveillance State in Southeast Asia*, Intelligence and National Security Vol 17 No.4 2002.

Narine, Shaun. *Explaining ASEAN*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Colorado, 2002.

Pushpanathan, S. *Asean Efforts To Combat Terrorism*, ASEAN Secretariat Second APEC Counter-Terrorism Task Force Meeting 20 August 2003, Phuket, Thailand.

Raby, Geoff. *The Costs of Terrorism and the Benefits of Cooperating to Combat Terrorism*, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, paper presented to APEC in Senior Officials Meeting on 21 Feb 2003.

Sandler, Todd. *Collective Action: Theory and Applications*, The University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Sandler, Todd. *Controlling Transnational Terrorism: Cooperation Dilemma*, School of International Relations, University of Southern California, Dec 2003.

Simon, Sheldon. *Back to the Future?* in *Confronting Terrorism in the Pursuit of Power*, ed., Ashley J Tellis and Michael Wills, Strategic Asia 2004-05, National Bureau of Asian Research, Washington DC 2004.

Singapore White Paper on The Jemaah Islamiyah Arrests and the Threat of Terrorism, 2003.