

Misuari Costs MNLF Any Goodwill After Zamboanga Debacle

September 20, 2013 *By Luke Hunt*



The attack on Zamboanga has severely damaged MNLF's reputation with leader Nu Misauri at the helm.

Image credit: Flickr (Keith Bacongco)

By storming the Southern Philippine city of Zamboanga, [veteran fighters](#) of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) tipped popular perceptions upside down. For more than 15 years MNLF had been seen as a moderate group in a land dubbed as the alphabet soup of insurgents.

Among these are the odious [Abu Sayyaf and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters](#), the defunct jihadists [Jemaah Islamiyah](#), the communist [New People's Army](#), and the MNLF splinter group the [Moro Islamic Liberation Front](#) (MILF), which over the last year has hammered out a peace deal with Manila.

That peace deal has caused ructions through a redistribution of power and has upset traditional relations. It was also largely behind the [Sabah insurgency](#) earlier this year which led to more than 70 deaths after a minor Sultan – insisting he be seen as the [Sultan of Sulu](#) – decided to reassert his traditional claims over the neighboring East Malaysian state.

As a prelude to the current violence in Mindanao, the MNLF has [also threatened](#) to reassert its claims over Sabah and Sarawak, on the island of Borneo, along with large swathes of the Southern Philippines. But much of the angst is personal.

Nur Misuari [has led the MNLF](#) with his own personal brand of crusade since he founded the group in 1969 during a quest for an independent homeland for his Bangsamoro people, who are also Muslim.

“I think most people are baffled by Misuari’s sudden reappearance, and the apparent willingness of his fighters to engage on what for many seems to be a near suicidal attack on a major city,” Gavin Greenwood a security analyst with Hong Kong-based Allan & Associates, told *The Diplomat*.

However, a pattern of sorts has emerged. Misuari is widely viewed as incapable of sharing power with any other group in Mindanao. His agreement in 1996 that appeared to decommission the MNLF seems, in his mind, to have been a personal deal between himself and the Philippine state.

“His reward was extensive political power and a degree of autonomy in as governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) between 1996 and 2001 and he was removed from office in an internal coup following accusations of mismanagement and other offences,” Greenwood said.

His personal relationship with power in the troubled south took another hit in May this year when Mujiv Hataman – an ally of President Benigno Aquino – was proclaimed winner of a gubernatorial election in the ARMM, effectively defeating Misuari.

But importantly, the kidnappings and firefights in Zamboanga, which cost more than 100 lives, failed to inspire other rebels to lend a hand – the MILF the particular. Even the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which has close links with Misuari, accused the MNLF of engaging in politico-military adventurism designed to protect Misuari’s fiefdom.

It also said his position was threatened by a rearrangement of resources and political power which has been forged between President Benigno Aquino, his administration, and MILF.

Misuari and those of his cohorts who survived the bloody attacks will probably spend the rest of their lives behind bars, an ignoble end for man who risked all, including the lives of many thousands he had once sought to protect.

Luke Hunt can be followed on Twitter at [@lukeanthonyhunt](#).

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