

HMDC Presents... TERRORISM: Quick Guide

TERRORISM: QUICK GUIDE

Special Session on Terrorism: State Sovereignty and Intervention (Harvard MUN Online, December 5-6, 2026)

WHAT WE ARE DEBATING

Every country has sovereignty, and that means the right to control its own land and choices. Terrorist groups are not countries, so they cross borders and hide where governments are weak. Our committee decides when, if ever, other countries may act inside a country to fight terrorism, and who should make that choice.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

Harvard says December is about sovereignty and when it is fair and necessary for other countries to step in. Our job is a full plan that balances international law and each country's sovereignty, so every idea speaks to both sides. How groups find new members and what they post online belong to the October session, so we use those facts only as background.

FIVE NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

1. **5,582:** Terrorism killed 5,582 people in 2025, the fewest since 2007. (Vision of Humanity, March 19, 2026)
2. **76 percent:** More than 76 percent of terrorist attacks in 2025 happened within 100 kilometres of a border. (Vision of Humanity, March 19, 2026)
3. **Over half:** The border area where Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger meet has over half of the world's terrorism deaths. (Council on Foreign Relations, July 29, 2026)
4. **7 percent:** Of 268 terrorist groups that ended, only 7 percent were ended by military force. (RAND Corporation, June 30, 2008)
5. **71 percent:** Of people who joined extremist groups after one key event, 71 percent named a government action, such as arresting a family member. (United Nations Development Programme, February 7, 2023)

WHAT THE UN HAS ALREADY DONE

1. **S/RES/1373 (2001):** The Security Council told every country to make terrorist acts and terrorist money crimes.
2. **A/RES/60/288 (2006):** The General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which includes human rights.

3. **S/RES/2249 (2015):** The Council asked able countries to take "all necessary measures" against ISIL, but countries disagreed on the legal reason.
4. **S/RES/2690 (2023):** The Council ended the UN mission in Mali because Mali's government asked it to leave.
5. **S/RES/2719 (2023):** The Council agreed that UN money may pay up to 75 percent of African Union-led missions.

THE MAIN SOLUTIONS

1. **Security Council action:** Outside force is allowed only with Security Council approval.
 - Help: It is the clearest legal route.
 - Harm: Any one of the five permanent members can block it alone by voting no.
2. **Self-defence when a neighbour is "unwilling or unable":** An attacked country strikes a terrorist group inside a neighbour that will not or cannot stop it.
 - Help: It lets a country protect its people quickly.
 - Harm: The attacking country decides for itself, so a country can use the rule unfairly.
3. **Intervention by invitation:** Foreign troops come in only when the host government asks for them.
 - Help: It respects sovereignty because the host country chooses.
 - Harm: The host can send partners away suddenly, leaving a security gap.
4. **Regional missions paid for by the UN:** The African Union leads missions, and the UN helps pay.
 - Help: Neighbours understand the conflict and want it to end.
 - Harm: Members disagree on who pays, so missions run short of money.

WHERE THE MAJOR BLOCS STAND

1. **United States:** It wants to break up terrorist networks and asks partner countries to share the work and the cost.
2. **Russian Federation:** It asks countries to work together "without double standards," which means the same rules for every country.
3. **European Union:** It says fighting terrorism must never become an excuse for human rights abuses.
4. **African Group:** It treats sovereignty as a duty that can never be set aside, but it wants UN money for African-led missions.
5. **Non-Aligned Movement:** These developing countries reject force against any member when the excuse is fighting terrorism.

KEY WORDS IN OUR TOPIC

1. **sovereignty:** When we say sovereignty, we mean a country's right to control its own land and choices.
2. **non-intervention:** When we say non-intervention, we mean countries stay out of other countries' inside business.

3. **use of force:** When we say use of force, we mean military action against or inside another country.
4. **self-defence:** When we say self-defence, we mean a country's right to fight back after an armed attack.
5. **non-state actor:** When we say non-state actor, we mean a group that is not a government, such as a terrorist group.
6. **unwilling or unable:** When we say unwilling or unable, we mean a country that will not or cannot stop a group on its land.
7. **intervention by invitation:** When we say intervention by invitation, we mean foreign help that comes because the host government asked.
8. **safe haven:** When we say safe haven, we mean a place where terrorists can train and hide freely.

QUESTIONS WE CAN ASK IN DEBATE

1. Who should decide whether a country is "unwilling or unable" to stop a terrorist group?
2. If a host government invites foreign troops, what rules should protect civilians?
3. Who should pay the 25 percent that Resolution 2719 leaves open for African-led missions?
4. When foreign troops leave, how will our plan stop a security gap from opening?