



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020

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“AS PREPARED”

**UNOCT Virtual Counterterrorism Week 2020: Strategic and Practical Challenges of
Countering Terrorism in a Global Pandemic Environment**

Interactive Closing Discussion

**Member States’ Priorities in the Post COVID-19 Environment – Synergies and
Complementarities between the COVID-19 and the Counter-Terrorism Agendas**

Friday, July 10, 2020

11:30am-1:30pm

7 Minutes for Prepared Remarks

Thank you, Vladimir, and good morning, everyone. I’d like to thank UNOCT for hosting this conference and thank my fellow panelists for their contributions in our shared struggle against terrorism.

In my remarks today, I’m going to discuss top U.S. counterterrorism priorities. I’d like to highlight three in particular: continuing the fight against ISIS outside the core by dismantling its global network of affiliates; countering Iran-backed terrorism; and boosting the capacity of partner states on the front lines, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Let me start with ISIS. After the territorial defeat of the so-called caliphate, we are degrading ISIS’s networks around the world.



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In Africa, ISIS-affiliated groups are active across the continent, including in the Sahel, the Lake Chad region, and East Africa. Groups like ISIS-West Africa, ISIS-Greater Sahara, ISIS-Somalia, ISIS-Sinai, and ISIS-Mozambique have conducted attacks throughout Africa, including in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, among other countries.

In Asia, we saw ISIS-inspired terrorists conduct horrific bombings on Easter Sunday in 2019 in Sri Lanka, where 260 innocent people were killed. In the Philippines, the ISIS-affiliated Abu Sayyaf Group killed 11 Philippine soldiers and wounded 13 others, the deadliest attack since the Jolo Cathedral bombing.

In response, the United States has led an international effort to designate and sanction ISIS-affiliated groups and key ISIS figures around the world, starting with our own domestic sanctions authorities. To date, the U.S. has designated 15 ISIS-affiliated groups worldwide, as well as over 140 key ISIS individuals.

We've also pushed to sanction ISIS affiliates at the UN's 1267 sanctions committee. We welcome the imposition of sanctions on six ISIS-related entities since May 2019, including affiliates in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Indonesia, and West Africa. We look forward to continuing this work in the future.

In addition, we're bringing the resources and expertise of the Global D-ISIS Coalition to bear on this next stage of the fight. As Secretary of State Pompeo reiterated during last month's Coalition small group ministerial, we remain committed to rescheduling a Coalition event on ISIS threats in West Africa as soon as health conditions allow.

Finally, we've made significant investments in building the capacity of partner states on the front lines of the fight against ISIS. I'll come back to this in a moment.



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Let me turn now to Iran. Last month, the State Department released its annual Country Reports on Terrorism, which found that in 2019 Iran remained the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism.

Over the last several years, Iran has continued to plot attacks across the globe. In 2017, it assassinated an opposition figure in the Netherlands, while Danish authorities uncovered a similar plot there in 2018. And in June 2018, authorities disrupted an Iranian plot to bomb a political rally near Paris, arresting several operatives, including an Iranian intelligence official operating under diplomatic cover in Austria.

Iran also continues to back numerous terrorist proxies around the world. In the last year, Iranian-supported terrorists in Iraq, including Kata'ib Hizballah, have launched deadly attacks against U.S. and Iraqi military personnel and facilities. Iran has supplied the Houthi rebels in Yemen with weapons they've used to attack airports, energy infrastructure, and other civilian facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. And Iran continues to work hand in glove with Hizballah, a truly global terrorist threat.

In response, the U.S. has used our sanctions authorities aggressively to cut off the flow of money to Tehran and its terrorist proxies. Last year, we designated Iran's IRGC – including its Qods Force – as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. It was the first time the FTO label has ever been applied to part of a government.

We've also taken decisive action against Hizballah, which has been subject to U.S. terrorism sanctions since the 1990s. Since 2017, the State and Treasury Departments have announced over 100 designations of Hizballah leaders, financiers, and facilitators.

We're encouraged to see more and more countries taking a similar approach. In Europe, the UK and Germany have designated or banned Hizballah in its entirety, rejecting the false distinction between its so-called "political" and "military" wings. So has Kosovo. The



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Netherlands treats all of Hizballah as a terrorist organization. And last month, the Austrian parliament enacted legislation calling for stronger action against the group.

It's a similar story here in the Western Hemisphere, where we've seen Hizballah designations from Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Paraguay.

We're also stepping up law enforcement cooperation to counter Iranian and Hizballah terrorist plotting. Since 2014, we've partnered with Europol to co-host the Law Enforcement Coordination Group, which convenes law enforcement practitioners from nearly 40 countries to counter Hizballah's worldwide terrorist and criminal activities. And to address Iranian terrorism, last September we launched the Countering Transnational Terrorism Forum, convening law enforcement and financial practitioners from more than 25 countries.

I'll close with a few words about our capacity building efforts.

The U.S. has made substantial investments in the capabilities of our partners on the front lines. We want them to be able to defend themselves against ISIS, al-Qa'ida, Hizballah, and any other terrorist threats they face. We want them to be self-sufficient and independent actors that need not rely on others for continued assistance.

The United States has been, and will remain, the security partner of choice. We've proven time and again that we are the indispensable counterterrorism partner, and that we bring capabilities no other country can match.

In Africa, we've worked to build civilian counterterrorism capacity: creating capable crisis response units able to interdict terrorist attacks and collect evidence; improving border and aviation security; and building capacity to arrest, investigate, prosecute, and incarcerate terrorists. In other parts of the world, like Southeast Asia, U.S. assistance has



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had a direct impact in our partners' efforts to hold terrorists accountable for their crimes, and prevent them from getting on planes.

The results speak for themselves. We've seen U.S.-trained law enforcement units disrupt major terrorist incidents around the world, including in Afghanistan, Kenya, Mali, Somalia, and Tunisia. We're also seeing partners successfully prosecute cases and put terrorists in prison in the Balkans, Indonesia, and the Philippines. We're proud of the success that our friends have achieved by working with us.

We're also proud of our track record of fighting terrorism while advancing human rights and the rule of law. Indeed, the two goals go hand in hand. Research has shown that human rights violations can fuel terrorism, conflict, and instability. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2018, "compromising on human rights has proven corrosive to the rule of law and conducive to a climate of impunity, and may undermine the effectiveness of any counter-terrorism measure, and thereby contribute to greater radicalization." In short, counterterrorism approaches that disregard human rights and the rule of law are self-defeating.

Which brings us to Xinjiang. The United States has strongly objected to China's mass detention of Muslim Uyghurs and other minorities, repressive surveillance, and use of coercive population control like forced sterilization and abortion. I'm sure you saw our announcement yesterday that we've imposed sanctions on some of the officials responsible for these abuses. Today, I'll only add that no government should use counterterrorism as a pretext for stifling religious liberty and other fundamental freedoms. Not only is it wrong, it doesn't work.

In closing, the United States will continue to support our partners, as well as valuable fora like UNOCT, in our shared fight against terrorism in all its forms. Thank you.