



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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**“POST 9/11: TWENTY YEARS OF MULTILATERAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COOPERATION”
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Saturday marks the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. This is a time for remembrance and tribute – to the victims, survivors, first responders and all of those who fight for a world free of terrorism. But it is also a **time for reflection** about the international response to terrorism.

As we grapple to understand what the current situation in **Afghanistan** means for our collective counter-terrorism efforts, we need to assess what we have learnt and what we should be doing differently.

To help put things in perspective, let me start with a **brief, and admittedly somewhat simplistic, overview of modern terrorism and how the United Nations has evolved over the last decades to address it.**

Let’s rewind to the **‘60s and ‘70s** for a moment. While the world had already seen primarily post-WWII insurgent groups use terrorist tactics as part of their campaigns, modern “terrorism” and “terrorists” were generally associated with small radical groups. With no social media to amplify their message, small groups of zealots would struggle to gain the public attention they sought for their cause and for leverage against governments and societies they opposed. However, being the golden age of television and wire services, they could do something spectacular to grab the headlines, like hijack or blow up a plane, or take hostages, or conduct brazen assassinations of government officials. Indiscriminate mass killing was rarely the point of such terrorism, rather it was the psychology of the act itself and the attention it gained that was the point, or a more acute goal such as the release of prisoners.

Into the 1960s and 1970s, many such terrorist acts were handled by national security forces and/or those of a ruling colonial power. International responses, if any, were limited, or marked by bilateral frictions between states in which terrorist attacks happened or who lost victims, and those which may have harbored the attackers. However, truly international responses to terrorism began to emerge when such attacks started targeting either people entitled to a special protection in a foreign state—so-called “internationally protected persons”—or conveyances and activities that are regulated by international bodies, such as transnational flights, and later airports and ships. International responses of the period were typically prompted by some specific terrorist act or acts which attracted widespread condemnation led to the adoption of international conventions and protocols. The first of these related to the prevention of hijacking of aircraft and the use of explosives against aircraft, but were soon followed by the 1973 convention on the prevention and punishment of crimes against

internationally protected persons and the even more specific 1979 convention against the taking of hostages, both of which resonated with the horror of the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre.

Things really started to change in the early '90s, with the emergence of Al-Qaida from the insurgency against the Soviet-backed regime in the 1980s. In August 1998 the group used truck bombs in near simultaneous detonations—in what would be an Al-Qaida signature in future attacks—against the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 244 and wounding nearly 4,500 more. This marked a serious shift from the more calculated and targeted terrorism of the 60s, 70s and 80s, into the era of mass casualty attacks in which the psychology of the act, indeed the very purpose of an attack, was to kill and maim the largest number of people possible. The embassy bombings prompted the Security Council to adopt resolution 1267 the following year to create an international sanctions regime against Al-Qaida and the Taliban, who harbored the group in Afghanistan.

In terms of numbers, then, the mass atrocity of 9/11 that we commemorate today, took nearly 3000 lives in a little more than an hour and wounded and sickened many more from more than 90 countries. It was not only the biggest single terrorist attack, but it made clear that despite whatever twisted philosophy lay behind it, mass casualties and sheer savagery had become the point of 21st century terrorism, led first by Al-Qaida and then its Da'esh offshoot. Even the UN itself became a target: starting with UN compounds in Baghdad in 2003, Algiers in 2007, Pakistan in 2009, Abuja in 2011 ...and more recently peacekeepers in Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to name a few.

Only a few days after the 9/11 attacks, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1373 obliging all Member States to criminalize terrorist activity, including financial support for the harboring of such activities. Shortly thereafter, the Security Council formed the Counter-Terrorism Committee, to help it assess Member State's compliance with Security Council resolutions, with the support of an Executive Directorate, or CTED. (Incidentally, the Council will hold a session to mark the 20th anniversary this coming Monday.)

The Security Council has since gone on to adopt a whole series of counter-terrorism resolutions by consensus, finding unity on the issue of terrorism even when it could not agree on how to address the conflicts in which Al-Qaida and Da'esh have thrive. For example, Al-Qaida's known interest in weapons of mass destruction led the Council to adopt resolution 1540 in 2004, which obliges all Member States to adopt legislation and other measures to prevent non-state actors from acquiring and using chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear material, and established another Security Council committee to monitor its implementation.

The General Assembly was also spurred to action after 9/11. As the fifth anniversary of the attacks approached in 2006, it adopted, by consensus of all Member States, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy—an important development considering it still can't agree on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. Member States themselves are primarily responsible for implementing the GCTS, but the UN organization also has a role in helping provide technical assistance and capacity-building to states requesting help to implement its provisions on addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, combating terrorism, and upholding human rights and the rule of law. The Secretary-General created a Counter-Terrorism Implementation

Task Force (CTITF) to coordinate the work of relevant UN entities involved in implementing the strategy and other related resolutions.

Five years later, the General Assembly welcomed the establishment of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, entrusted with promoting international counter-terrorism cooperation and to support Member States in implementing the GCTS. Established within the Department of Political Affairs along with the CTITF office, UNCCT was given two foundational contributions from the Government of Saudi Arabia, which have allowed the Centre to launch capacity-building programmes with seed funds, which other donors augment or fund separate programmes.

In light of what has happened in Afghanistan, I think it's worth mentioning as a footnote that also in 2011, after Osama Bin Laden was killed, the Security Council decided to hive off the Taliban from the 1267 sanctions regime, keeping the original one on Al-Qaida, but adopting a separate one, 1988 (2011), for the Taliban, including provisions related for de-listing sanctioned individuals who met certain criteria indicating a renunciation of violence and commitment to the political processes set forth in the 2010 Kabul conference and consultative peace jirga. As we have seen, a number of these listed individuals now form part of the new Taliban cabinet.

Back to the Security Council and 2014, when we see the adoption of resolution 2178 in response to Da'esh's seizure of Mosul and an unprecedented foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon in which more than 40,000 fighters from nearly 100 countries traveled to Syria and Iraq to join Da'esh and other groups. This consensus Chapter VII resolution obliges all Member States to criminalize offenses related to the preparation, travel and other acts undertaken for the purpose of committing terrorist offenses. As Member States moved to implement its provisions, it contributed to staunching the flow of foreign terrorist fighters to the region. But the phenomenon remains a massive problem even after the territorial defeat of the so-called "caliphate" in March 2019, as thousands still remain in the region along with tens of thousands of associated family members, including many children born during the conflict. [–relocation and return of former FTFs, and in particular the urgent need to protect and repatriate tens of thousands of affiliated women and children currently stranded in camps across northern Syria.] The Council adopted a number of other resolutions related to Da'esh as well, including 2199 on the preventing the sale of looted antiquities and oil, and 2396, which requires all Member States to adopt and use passenger data systems in combination with biometrics and INTERPOL and other watchlists to screen for known and suspected terrorists, especially relocating FTFs.

The UN also needed to adapt to the evolving methodologies of these groups. As example, the extraordinary rise of global connectivity through social media platforms **from the early 2010s onwards** saw a concurrent increase in sophistication and reach of terrorist use of internet for recruitment – particularly to reach otherwise marginalized communities – while also glorifying its so-called successes. The emergence of such narratives in a large part contributed to efforts on the prevention of violent extremism – particularly the UN system-wide Plan of Action on the same, addressing the role of social media and terrorists narratives, closely followed by Security Council resolution 2354 addressing the critical importance of counter-narratives and the role of the media in preventing and countering violent extremism. Similarly, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, particularly UNSCR 2242, has addressed the evolving understanding of the terrorist threat, by examining the gendered nature of terrorism and extremism while seeking to ensure the leadership and participation of women in national level plans for the prevention of violent extremism.

Check against delivery

By 2016 it was clear that Member States' needs to implement UN provisions to counter Da'esh's social media fueled global reach and the FTF phenomenon quickly exceeded the limits of UNCCT and CTITF as small parts of the Department of Political Affairs.

Incoming Secretary-General Guterres and Member States saw the need to lift UNCCT and CTITF out of DPA (today the Department of Political and Peacekeeping Affairs) and place it into a separate, dedicated entity within the UN Secretariat. In 2017, **the General Assembly agreed by consensus to the Secretary-General's proposal to establish the UN Office of Counter Terrorism headed by its own Under-Secretary-General.**

UNOCT was established to bring strategic leadership and coherence to counter-terrorism policy. We help coordinate the United Nations system in its wide-ranging efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

Additionally, in December 2018, the Secretary-General set up the **Global Counter Terrorism Coordination Compact to replace the old CTITF.** It is now the biggest coordination framework in the UN and includes 43 UN and other entities and organizations, such as INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization. Each entity brings its own expertise to various problem sets, and that allows us to coordinate activities across the United Nations' human rights, peace and security, and development pillars, in a truly holistic way. Actors like the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Women, the UN Development Programme, and the UN Office of Drugs and Crime all ensure a true "*One-UN*" approach to counter- terrorism, aligned with the Secretary General's vision.

For its own part, UNOCT has added to UNCCT's dynamic capacity-building work a portfolio of globally applied programmes tailored for Member States' specific needs. We are almost entirely funded by voluntary contributions from donor states, principally Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but also an increasing proportion comes from some 30 other donors, including the United States, Russia, China, Japan, the European Union, and a number of its member states.

Our Budapest-based **Counter Terrorism Travel Programme (CTTP)** is a good example of one of our global programmes. Working with CTED, UNODC, ICAO and UN's Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT), CTTP interweaves human rights compliance with advanced technology with a multi-agency team that helps Member States comply with UNSCRs 2396 (2017) and 2482 (2019). These require states to use advance passenger information and passenger name record data in combination with biometrics and access to INTERPOL and other international and national watchlists. The programme provides states the legislative assistance, technical training, and software needed to detect and interdict the travel of known and suspected terrorists and other serious criminals in a way that respects human rights with data and related privacy protections. It represents the best example of a practical and effective multilateral response to a real terrorist threat that leverages Member State sovereignty and territorial integrity while contributing to a network intended to defeat terrorist networks. It also demonstrates the strength of a cohesive, coordinated UN response.

Another example is our **Global Programme on Countering the Financing of Terrorism**, launched in 2020. Together with CTED and UNODC, we assist Member States to increase their

national and regional capacities to counter the financing of terrorism in accordance with UNSCR 2462 and Financial Action Task Force recommendations. It includes new software being developed to help financial intelligence units deal with all sorts of terrorism financing, including on the dark web and with cryptocurrencies.

A third signature programme is our global **Victims of Terrorism Support Programme**. Promoting and protecting the voices and rights of victims of terrorism is a critical human rights priority for us and our partners. We work closely with victims' associations around the world, of course, but we also have worked with UNODC and the Inter-Parliamentary Union to develop model legal provisions states can use to implement General Assembly recommendations on protecting and upholding the rights of victims. On September 20th we will have a joint event with the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to commemorate the victims from more than 90 countries who perished in the 2001 attacks. And next year we will hold the first-ever Global Congress for Victims of Terrorism, to provide a platform for victims' voices, but also for governments to learn about their special needs and challenges.

But let's go back to the "bigger picture" - have we been successful? Are we better off now than 20 years ago? Three weeks ago I would have said that globally, terrorist attacks and casualties are down compared to several years ago--although this in no way is meant to diminish the suffering that still goes on in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, nor does it ignore Da'esh metastasizing in Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, and Mozambique. Moreover, the post-9/11 trend of authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies using counter-terrorism laws and provisions to oppress political rivals and opponents has only increased during the pandemic. Such actions not only violate political and civil rights, they also sow the seeds for future conflict and, as some studies have shown, can be the tipping point that pushes someone to adopt violence, including terrorism.

Today, however, any answer to the question is overshadowed by the recent developments in Afghanistan. Not only do they have dire consequences for the safety, security and freedom of the people of Afghanistan – and of considerable concern, the lives and livelihoods of women, but they may well result in terrorist attacks projected from or through Afghanistan. The terrorist threat that we have seen growing in other conflict zones, particularly in Africa, may well only become more acute as they seek to emulate the Taliban's takeover. We also have to remain particularly alert about the situation at the border with Afghanistan's neighbors.

The situation in Afghanistan has made it tragically clear that we need to do better to tailor our efforts to the special needs and contexts of each country to ensure national ownership and sustainability of our efforts. Like map overlays that are used to plan a military campaign, when Member States and their partners design counter-terrorism campaigns they must also think comprehensively of a country's or region's culture, cyberspace, demographics, economy, history, language, religion, gender dynamics and other factors as their own forms of "terrain" which must be understood in order to "maneuver" effectively.

We need to learn from the past and ensure that our efforts truly have a **sustainable, long-lasting impact**. Let me offer a few thoughts on what the next decade of multilateral counter-terrorism should focus on.

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First, the international community must achieve more than just tactical wins against networked terrorist archipelagoes that fester and grow in areas of chronic conflict. We must play the long game, with strategic responses driving toward durable political solutions. That is because while military action is often necessary against terrorist insurgencies—or as in the case of the French intervention in Mali, vital to stopping a terrorist takeover of a state—it has proven insufficient to defeating them. At best it can achieve tactical victories or contain a problem for a certain period of time. International and partner forces can help keep terrorists off balance in conflict zones like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, but they do not in themselves generate the sort of political will or popular allegiance a government needs to make a country inhospitable to terrorist insurgencies. We need to go beyond this approach and address the underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, using all the political, developmental and humanitarian tools at our disposal—peacebuilding in order to prevent violent extremism and terrorism.

My personal opinion is that greater unity of effort is needed by international security forces that are helping host countries battle terrorist insurgencies. Both the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin are cases in point. Despite numerous international, regional and bilateral interventions and deployments, the situation has gotten worse, not better. Is it really the best thing to have so many forces operating separately from each other and without any clear connection to a political strategy?

Second, more needs to be done to help terrorist-affected countries build relevant, high-impact capacity to address the threats they face. That is why we are starting to establish **field-based programme offices** to deliver capacity-building assistance that is closer to the beneficiaries so that it is both more impactful and sustainable. One example is our innovative Behavioral Insights Hub in **Doha** which is based an advanced approach on prevention. Another example is our training center in **Rabat**, which will directly support requesting countries in Africa with the necessary level of specialization on counter terrorism. And that is why we are currently setting up a programme office in **Nairobi** for East Africa for sustainable capacity building support on border security management.

Third, and most important, is that we must make the most of multilateral mechanisms to fight terror. Modern terrorists are learning and adaptive groups that exacerbate and exploit conflict and communal tensions. They are not only not constrained by borders, they use modern technology to reach global audiences whenever they want to. But whether they physically or virtually cross borders or send money, weapons or messages from one country to another, that is precisely where sovereign Member States, acting in concert can be most effective. As General McChrystal once observed, “it takes a network to defeat a network.” That is why our CT Travel, CFT, Border Security and Management, and Strategic Communications programmes are effective and play to a state’s strengths with its own networks, but also by linking to bilateral, regional and international networks. It is why international legal cooperation on things such as battlefield evidence gathered by Anti-Da’esh coalition partners and shared through INTERPOL can be game changers if they are used properly and in concert.

I mentioned earlier the 7th review of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. The negotiations on this Strategy were a delicate and sensitive political process as priorities between 193 Member States differ widely. This year’s was the **most forward-looking review**

since the Strategy was first adopted in 2006. It includes 53 new paragraphs, addressing today's most pressing issues on terrorism and violent extremism.

For the first time, the Strategy sets the ground to address “the rise in terrorist attacks on the **basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief.**” **Yes, neo-Nazis and white supremacists are back. They have learned from Da’esh and have international linkages with multiple nodes.** Reaching consensus on this will prove to be essential for the adaptability and credibility of international counter-terrorism efforts.

With this resolution, the General Assembly also tackles the crucial need to counter the **use of new technologies for terrorist purposes** such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing and drones, and the emerging use of new social media platforms – including gaming technologies – for recruitment. It makes a strong call for cooperative measures to stop the spread of terrorist content and hate speech online.

There is also the delicate issue of **repatriation of children with links to foreign terrorist fighters stranded in camps in Iraq and Syria**, that is now included, on a case-by-case basis, with the consent of requesting Governments and parties.

The protection of human rights and the rule of law has always been a key tenet of the Strategy, but this review has gone a step further with **meaningful advances on human rights, including gender equality, the rights of the child and victims of terrorism, civil society and humanitarian action.** It also includes ground-breaking language to ensure compliance with human rights and the rule of law.

And this is probably the most important lesson from 20 years of counter-terrorism: the failure to protect and promote human rights, especially human rights abuses committed by security forces, give terrorists recruitment tools for free.

To conclude, the work of the United Nations is now more important than ever. As the terrorist threat has evolved, so have we. And we must continue to do so. The Security Council needs to speak and act with one strong, united voice –and use all tools at its disposal. The situation in Afghanistan requires the International Community to further step up its work. Such work must be based on understanding of cultural ethos and ground realities. The protection of innocent civilians and saving human lives must be our key priority, and humanitarian access must be guaranteed.

Thank you.