



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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**"Combating Terrorism: A Review of 2021 and Future Outlook for 2022"
Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies**

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

I am very pleased to join you for this discussion and I thank the Inter-University Center for Terrorist Studies for the invitation.

Last year we marked the somber twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and opened what many feels is a new chapter in the fight against terrorism. A fight that we will have to take forward in a very different strategic, geopolitical and technological environment impacted by climate change, pandemics and inter-state competition in a fragmented world.

The fight against terrorism has seen significant successes in the past two decades. Hundreds of terrorist attacks were foiled – many unbeknownst to the public. Terrorist leaders were neutralized, including the founders of Al-Qaida and Da'esh. Cells were disrupted and their operational space squeezed through unprecedented international action spurred by the Security Council. We confronted the largest wave of foreign terrorist fighters and eventually defeated Da'esh in Iraq and Syria.

Yet, despite these successes, thousands more lives have been lost to terrorism and too many are still at risk. Besides physical destruction, terrorism has sown division, fear and trauma in our societies. Sometimes the pursuit of security has resulted in disproportionate and even unnecessary restrictions being placed on fundamental freedoms and human rights.

So we should be approaching the new decade not just with continued determination but also humility and a desire to do better.

2021 has shown that the terrorism threat landscape has become geographically more diffuse, ideologically more diverse, and tactically more varied. And it is set to evolve further under the impact of transformative technologies as we discussed during the Second Counter-Terrorism Week organized by UNOCT in June.

Da'esh and Al-Qaida remained the top global threats – from guerilla campaigns in and near conflict zones, to the potential for lone individuals inspired online, acting with varying degrees of planning and sophistication.

The groups' expansion in many subregions of Africa continued— spreading from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea; taking further hold in Central and Southern Africa, including Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and now threatening Uganda; all the while Al-Shabaab continued to pose a protracted threat to Somalia and its neighbors.

The Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in August has been widely perceived as a moral boost for terrorists and violent extremists. Some even see it as a vindication of strategic patience in the face of national authorities whose will and capacity to fight is undermined by corruption and waning popular support, while international partners re-think their approaches.

Despite their assurances, there is no sign that the Taliban are taking action to sever their links with Al-Qaida or that they can effectively let alone durably counter the kind of terrorist insurgency they themselves waged for years. ISIL-Khorasan Province, the local Da'esh affiliate, has already doubled in size in the country and has pinned its hope on further chaos and disaffection, including among Taliban fighters.

From these unpredictable situations arise a short to mid-term risk for neighboring countries – which UNOCT supports through regional capacity-building programmes, for instance in Central Asia. But there is a significant risk also that terrorists could gain safe havens to resume external operations.

This will compound the immediate threat posed by online terrorist radicalization, home-grown terrorism, and recidivism outside conflict zones, where COVID-19 related restrictions have continued, for now, to keep a lid on terrorist operations. Member States, therefore, must stand united and committed to supporting each other's as the threat can quickly spread far beyond any given national border.

So, as we start 2022 and a new decade of counter-terrorism, let me highlight a few key trends and related policy priorities to adjust our responses and collaboration at the international, regional and domestic levels.

The seventh—and most forward-looking—review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted last June provides important guidance in this regard – and a clear roadmap for UNOCT and our Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact of 42 UN and partner entities to support Member States.

First, growing discontent and polarization, and the spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech, have widened the pool of individuals susceptible to being mobilized for violence. Sometimes, government measures have played into these dynamics by violating human rights and the rule of law, including in the name of counter-terrorism.

This trend preceded the pandemic but fractures in society have widened and become glaring. Millions of people have lost livelihoods, hope and support; millions, especially youth, spend more time online, increasingly exposed to predators and harmful content.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has warned we are facing a breakdown of truth, trust and values. The fabric of societies needs to be mended and the social contract between people and their governments needs to be renewed.

Peacebuilding, or “winning hearts and minds” of populations targeted by terrorist insurgencies, is essential to build resilience to terrorism.

This imperative was already established with the General Assembly’s adoption by consensus of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006 which called for addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and expanded on through the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism of December 2015.

General Assembly negotiations for the seventh Strategy review reflected growing ownership of the prevention agenda and the outcome language underlines the need to build inclusive and accountable institutions; to promote pluralism, tolerance and interreligious and intercultural dialogue; and to address hate speech and to counter incitement to hostility, hatred, and violence.

It is clear that these issues are much larger than terrorism and should be addressed in their own right – and many of our UN partners such as UNDP, UNESCO or the Alliance of Civilizations may often have the primary role.

But terrorism is a reminder of what can happen when inclusivity and accountability are ignored and UNOCT will continue to engage and offer support to Member States under its Global PCVE Programme, including for policy development, strategic communications and youth empowerment.

Similar dynamics have been at play in fueling the appeal and replenishing the ranks of Al-Qaida and Da’esh, but also in driving the rise in terrorist attacks on the basis of “xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief”, better known as REMVE in the United States.

UNOCT is preparing a report of the Secretary-General to be issued in September on this growing concern for many Member States, especially in North America, Europe and Oceania, and its transnational dimensions.

Our programmes are designed to address terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, consistent with the international legal and policy framework against terrorism, so we are looking at how we can tailor our efforts to support Member States requesting assistance against this scourge.

Second, the growing interplay between terrorism, weak governance, armed conflict, and organized crime adds complexity to an already difficult challenge. Terrorists exploit and actively instigate the power vacuum that state fragility creates, undermining state legitimacy further. They cause humanitarian crises, hamper humanitarian assistance, and can be spoilers in peace efforts.

The reality on the ground is increasingly blurred. This growing entanglement destroys the rule of law, suppresses human rights, entrenches corruption and impedes sustainable development. Yet, we cannot simply conflate these challenges. They each require appropriate instruments, the right amount of attention, and counter-terrorism needs to be *integrated* as part of sophisticated and comprehensive responses.

Last September, Secretary-General Guterres issued his landmark report on “Our Common Agenda” suggesting a way forward to implement the Political Declaration adopted by Member States for the UN’s seventy-fifth anniversary. He called for the development of a *New Agenda for Peace*, noting that protracted conflicts are often associated with terrorism, which is one of the strategic risks facing the international community.

Fragile and conflict-affected Member States need comprehensive packages of advice and support – including counter-terrorism as but one element – to build in a sustainable fashion their own capacities to deliver security and other basic services for their people.

In this vein, UNOCT has continued to strengthen its presence in the field to be closer to its beneficiaries and its partners from peace operations, UN Country Teams and regional organizations. Last year, we opened a regional programme office in Rabat, Morocco, and we will soon open one in Nairobi, Kenya.

Third, new and emerging technologies are rapidly impacting terrorism and counter-terrorism. They create new threat vectors and new vulnerabilities to cyber-crime and attacks. All the while it is becoming increasingly easier for terrorist groups to access these skills and capacities. Member States are all challenged to keep up, let alone proactively anticipate and prevent the use of new technologies for terrorist and other criminal purposes.

Cooperation, including with the private sector and civil society, is a prerequisite to maximize the benefits of new technologies, ensure they are harnessed responsibly, and prevent their criminal misuse.

UNOCT is prioritizing technology in its own operations and in our support to Member States. We are working with our partners, including UNODC, CTED, INTERPOL and others, on building state capacity to conduct online investigations, to respond to terrorist attack against critical infrastructure, to use API/PNR to counter terrorist travel, to use biometrics responsibly, to counter the threat from drones to vulnerable targets, or to prevent and respond to terrorist use of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials.

This year, we are looking to strengthen our focus on the use of virtual assets and crypto currencies for terrorism financing, and following a first excellent expert roundtable in December, to address the intersection of violent extremism with digital gaming spaces and their adjacent platforms.

Fourth, we need to anchor counter-terrorism back into the rule of law and human rights. The reason is simple – disregarding the rule of law fosters impunity and failure to protect and

promote human rights, especially human rights violations committed by security forces, gives terrorists recruitment tools for free.

The seventh Strategy review resulted in significant advances on human rights, including gender equality, the rights of the child and victims of terrorism, and mitigating the impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society and principled humanitarian action.

Applying a gender lens is key as terrorists strategically manipulate gender stereotypes to recruit. Misogyny permeates terrorist ideologies and tactics and terrorism and counter-terrorism alike impact women and girls differently, and often disproportionately.

UNOCT has taken these priorities to heart since its establishment and we have now established a dedicated Human Rights and Gender Equality Section reporting directly to me.

This year we will organize with Spain a high-level conference to follow-up on the virtual dialogue we held with human rights and civil society partners in the run-up to the Strategy review, and we will convene the first Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism later this year.

Urging Member States to repatriate their nationals in camps and detention facilities in northeast Syria will remain a key priority in 2022 for the UN system, at the intersection of counter-terrorism, humanitarian action and human rights.

The pace of repatriation remains slow. Leaving them stranded brings neither security or accountability, nor does it respect the rights of thousands of children who should not be punished for their parents' crimes.

In 2022, we will continue rolling out with our partners coordinated support to requesting Member States, including through a Global Framework that we launched in September under the auspices of the Secretary-General.

Helping Member States overcome screening and prosecutorial challenges will help address security concerns and public reluctance and should be a priority. I want to pay tribute to the excellent work of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh – UNITAD, which is currently engaged with a dozen Member States.

We also welcome the new language adopted by the Security Council on “battlefield evidence” in its resolution 2167 in December, which encouraged CTED to facilitate the provision of assistance by relevant entities, including UNODC, to develop related strategies.

Dear Colleagues,

We have learnt the hard way over the past two decades that there are no quick fixes and counter-terrorism is a long game, in which we cannot afford leaving any country – or our principles – behind.

In 2022, we have an opportunity to start a course correction to live up to the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the UN Charter.

You can count on the UN system, and UNOCT in particular, to continue bringing Member States together, facilitating dialogue and providing tailored support.

Thank you.