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BCNMUN 2023

Measures to aim towards disarming religious extremist terrorist groups in the Middle East

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Introduction

Religious extremism in the Middle East has brought to the formation and development of terrorist organizations that have affected nations worldwide. Groups justify their actions with a distorted interpretation of Islam. They are intolerant, devious, dangerous and high in quantity. These establishments originate from various different factors:

Political Context: Extremist ideas have found fertile ground as a result of political unrest, authoritarian control, and poor governance in some areas. In some instances, religious extremist organizations take advantage of political voids or conflicts to seize control and further their objectives.

Religious fanaticism frequently results from a twisted perception of religious principles. Extremist organizations use religious doctrine to defend their positions and gain followers. They might oppose pluralism, push for strict devotion to their interpretation of religious precepts, and work to create a particular state based on their ideology or religion.

Socioeconomic Factors: Inequalities in socioeconomic status, marginalization, and grievances might foster an environment where people are more likely to become radicalized. Frustration and disillusionment can be caused by economic disparity, a lack of

educational possibilities, and restricted social mobility, which extreme groups may use as a recruiting tool.

Historical and geopolitical factors: The growth of extremist ideas has been influenced by historical conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Extremist groups have used the occupation of territory, perceived injustices, and unresolved grievances as a recruiting tool and justification for their acts.

Technology and Globalization: The propagation of extremist beliefs has been aided by developments in communication technology and globalization. Extremist groups have been able to recruit people, disseminate propaganda, and build their infrastructure thanks to the internet and social media platforms.

Terrorist organizations use violence with a purpose in mind. Common objectives include bringing about political change, socioeconomic reform, domination of a certain religion or ideology, igniting conflict, and obtaining visibility and influence. It's crucial to understand that these goals are frequently unattainable, unfair, and harmful to world peace and human rights. Promoting inclusive governance, socioeconomic growth, education, religious tolerance, and peacebuilding initiatives are necessary to combat extremism because they resolve grievances and create environments that encourage stability and understanding.

While over time governments increase their security measures, expand international communication and establish multinational treaties in order to prevent terrorist attacks from occurring, the organizations continue to develop and strike. Some of the major terrorist incidents organized by Middle Eastern extremist groups are: 1998 US embassy bombings, 2001 September 11 attacks (9/11), 2002 Bali bombings, 2015 Sana'a mosque bombings, 2021 Afghanistan Suicide bombing & mass shooting, 2023 Suicide bombing in Pakistan

Definition of Key Terms

Religious Extremism

A radicalized and intolerant viewpoint that typically sanctions the use of violence to promote a defined, religiously motivated political agenda.

Middle East

A geopolitical region encompassing the Arabian Peninsula. It includes Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Kuwait, Syria, Yemen;

Terrorism:

The use of intentional violence and fear to achieve political or ideological aims.

Radicalization:

The action or process of causing someone to adopt radical positions on political or social issues.

Jihadism

A newly invented word or expression which is used in reference to "militant Islamic movements that are perceived as existentially threatening to the West" and "rooted in political Islam."

Extremism:

The holding of extreme political or religious views

Transnational Networks:

Includes those actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.

Background Information

Middle Eastern organizations that advocate extreme religious ideas through terrorism and violence are known as religious extremist groups. These organizations frequently pose as religious authorities in order to impose stringent religious or ideological restrictions in order to construct their own version of a religious state.

In the Middle East, some of the well-known religious extremist terrorist organizations are:

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): Also referred to as Daesh, ISIS first appeared in 2013 and quickly seized control of sizable areas in both Iraq and Syria. They carried out several crimes, founded a self-declared caliphate, and imposed their extreme version of Sunni Islam.

Al-Qaeda: Al-Qaeda was founded in the late 1980s with the intention of establishing a strict Sunni-based pan-Islamic state. They have carried out a number of notoriety-generating strikes across the globe, including the American attacks on September 11.

Taliban: The Taliban, a radical organization that adheres to a hardline interpretation of Sunni Islam, first appeared in Afghanistan in the 1990s. They imposed a strict interpretation of Islamic law and held power over a sizable portion of Afghanistan.

Hezbollah: Founded in the 1980s, Hezbollah is a Shiite Islamist organization that predominantly operates in Lebanon. Although it has a political and military branch, due to its involvement in attacks and armed warfare, it is classified as a terrorist group by many nations.

These groups have things in common such as a rejection of pluralism, intolerance for other religious or sectarian groups, and using violence to get what they want. To instill fear and further their agenda, they frequently attack people, religious minorities, governmental entities, and symbols of authority.

Religious extremist terrorist organizations in the Middle East use a variety of circumstances, including political unrest, social problems, sectarian strife, and historical disputes, to enlist supporters and raise funds. To radicalize people and disseminate their views, they use propaganda, social media, and online forums. They might also rely on transnational networks to fund their operations, buy weapons, and hire foreign troops.

A comprehensive strategy that integrates military action, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism measures, efforts to address underlying issues like political unrest and socioeconomic inequalities, and the promotion of inclusive governance, religious tolerance, and peacebuilding initiatives is needed to address the threat posed by these groups. In order to prevent the influence and operations of religious extremist terrorist groups in the Middle East, international cooperation is essential.

Significant events related to religious extremist terrorist groups in the Middle East have shaped the current landscape and global responses. Here are some notable events:

Rise of Al-Qaeda: Al-Qaeda, founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, rose to prominence as a global extremist organization advocating for a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam. Initially formed to support the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union,

Al-Qaeda evolved into a transnational network, orchestrating significant acts of terrorism. Al-Qaeda's ideology, centered on the establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate and the use of violence to achieve its goals, continues to inspire and influence other extremist groups around the world.

September 11 Attacks: On September 11, 2001, the world witnessed a series of coordinated terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda that shook the global community to its core. Four commercial airplanes were hijacked, resulting in the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York City, damage to the Pentagon in Virginia, and the heroic crash of Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. The attacks led to the loss of thousands of lives and left a lasting impact on international security and counterterrorism efforts. It prompted a paradigm shift in global politics, with the United States initiating the war on terror and launching military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. The event also spurred the creation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the implementation of stringent security measures worldwide.

Death of Osama Bin Laden: The death of Osama bin Laden was a significant event that took place on May 2, 2011. After a nearly decade-long manhunt, U.S. special forces conducted a covert operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan, leading to the killing of the Al-Qaeda leader. Bin Laden was responsible for orchestrating the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States and had been a prime target for intelligence and military efforts. His death marked a major milestone in the fight against terrorism and served as a symbolic victory for the United States and its allies. The operation dealt a blow to Al-Qaeda's leadership and disrupted its operational capabilities, although the group continues to pose a threat through its affiliated networks and ideologies.

Rise of ISIS: The rapid expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 caught global attention. Its capture of large territories, brutal tactics, and establishment of a self-proclaimed caliphate marked a turning point in the fight against religious extremism.

The group's actions, including mass atrocities and the targeting of religious minorities, triggered international outrage and a coordinated response to counter its expansion.

Syrian Civil War: The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, created a complex and volatile environment in which various extremist groups emerged. ISIS took advantage of the chaos to seize territory, while other factions such as Al-Qaeda's affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, also gained influence. The conflict exacerbated regional instability and provided a breeding ground for extremist ideologies.

Global Coalition Against ISIS: In response to the rise of ISIS, an international coalition, led by the United States, was formed in 2014 to combat the group. The coalition consisted of numerous countries and conducted airstrikes, provided training and support to local forces, and worked to disrupt ISIS's financing and propaganda networks.

Battle of Mosul: One of the significant events in the fight against ISIS was the Battle of Mosul in Iraq, which took place from October 2016 to July 2017. It was a crucial operation in liberating the city from ISIS control. The battle involved Iraqi security forces, Kurdish Peshmerga, and international coalition support. It resulted in the eventual defeat and expulsion of ISIS from Mosul.

Liberation of Raqqa: Raqqa, in Syria, served as the self-proclaimed capital of the ISIS caliphate. In October 2017, a coalition of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) supported by the international coalition launched a major offensive to liberate the city. After months of intense fighting, Raqqa was eventually retaken from ISIS control, dealing a significant blow to the group's territorial presence.

Attacks in European Cities: Extremist groups based in the Middle East have inspired or directed terrorist attacks in major European cities. These attacks, such as the November 2015 Paris attacks and the March 2016 Brussels bombings, highlighted the global reach

and threat posed by religious extremist organizations and intensified international efforts to counter their activities.

Resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan: Following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban experienced a resurgence. They swiftly captured territory, culminating in the takeover of Kabul in August 2021. The Taliban's resurgence has raised concerns about the potential for a safe haven for extremist groups and the impact on regional security.

These significant events have influenced counterterrorism strategies, regional dynamics, and global responses to religious extremist terrorist groups in the Middle East. They underscore the ongoing challenges and the need for sustained efforts to address the root causes, prevent radicalization, and promote stability and peace in the region.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States: The United States has been actively involved in counterterrorism efforts on a global scale. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. government significantly intensified its focus on countering terrorism and adopted various measures to combat extremist groups. Here are some key aspects of U.S. counterterrorism involvement;

- **Military Operations:** The United States has conducted military operations against terrorist groups, particularly in Afghanistan, where it targeted the Taliban and Al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks. The U.S. military has also conducted operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, aiming to degrade and dismantle the group.

- **Intelligence Sharing:** The U.S. intelligence community plays a crucial role in gathering and analyzing intelligence related to terrorist activities worldwide. The United States shares intelligence with partner nations to aid in identifying and disrupting terrorist networks.

- **Counterterrorism Legislation:** The U.S. government has enacted legislation to enhance its ability to combat terrorism, such as the USA PATRIOT Act, which grants law enforcement agencies expanded surveillance and investigative powers to prevent terrorist acts.

- **International Cooperation:** The United States collaborates with numerous countries and international organizations in efforts to counter terrorism. It engages in bilateral and multilateral partnerships to share information, coordinate operations, and provide support to partner nations in their own counterterrorism efforts.

- **Financial Measures:** The U.S. government employs various financial measures to disrupt the financing of terrorist organizations. This includes targeting their financial networks, freezing assets, and imposing sanctions on individuals and entities involved in terrorism.

- **Counterterrorism Assistance:** The United States provides training, equipment, and capacity-building assistance to partner nations to strengthen their counterterrorism capabilities. This assistance may include support for law enforcement, border security, intelligence gathering, and judicial reforms.

- **Counterterrorism Strategies:** The U.S. government has developed comprehensive strategies to address terrorism, such as the National Strategy for Counterterrorism. These strategies aim to prevent attacks, disrupt terrorist plots, counter extremist ideologies, and promote international cooperation.

European Union: The European Union member states work together to combat terrorism through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and joint counterterrorism initiatives. Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, facilitates cooperation among member states.

United Kingdom: The UK has a robust counterterrorism strategy and works closely with international partners, particularly through intelligence sharing with Five Eyes (an intelligence alliance comprising the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) and European partners.

France: France is actively involved in counterterrorism efforts, both domestically and internationally. It has engaged in military operations against extremist groups in the Sahel

region of Africa and cooperates with regional partners through initiatives such as the G5 Sahel.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia has taken steps to combat extremist ideology and terrorism financing. It works with international partners to counter terrorist financing and participates in regional efforts, such as the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition.

- **Regional Initiatives:** Several regional initiatives have been established to enhance counterterrorism cooperation. Examples include the Arab Counterterrorism Cooperation Agreement, Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) joint security initiatives, and the African Union's efforts to address terrorism in Africa.

Iraq: Iraq has experienced a significant presence of terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda and its offshoot ISIS. The country has faced numerous deadly attacks, sectarian violence, and insurgency activities.

Syria: The ongoing Syrian civil war has attracted various extremist groups, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates. The conflict has given rise to a complex landscape of terrorism, with multiple factions vying for control and causing widespread devastation.

Afghanistan: While not geographically part of the Middle East, Afghanistan has been a central battleground against terrorism. The country has faced the presence of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other extremist groups involved in insurgency and terrorism.

Yemen: Yemen has been affected by terrorism due to the presence of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The group has carried out attacks within Yemen and has also posed a threat to regional security.

Libya: Since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, Libya has experienced significant instability and the emergence of various armed groups, including extremist factions such as ISIS. The country has become a hub for illicit activities and a source of regional security concerns.

Lebanon: Lebanon has faced terrorist activities perpetrated by groups such as Hezbollah and other Islamist extremist factions. The country has experienced periodic outbreaks of violence and bombings.

Egypt: Egypt has dealt with terrorism primarily in the Sinai Peninsula, where groups like Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (now Wilayat Sinai) have carried out attacks. The country has also faced attacks targeting its security forces and minority communities.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1988	Al-Qaeda originated during the Soviet-Afghan War when Arab volunteers, including Osama bin Laden, came together to support the Afghan mujahideen fighters against the Soviet Union. Over time, al-Qaeda evolved into a transnational extremist group that sought to carry out attacks against perceived enemies of Islam and promote its radical ideology.
11/09/2001	The 9/11 attacks carried out by Al-Qaeda in the United States marked a watershed moment in the global fight against terrorism. The attacks resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and had a profound impact on international security policies.
2001	In response to the 9/11 attacks, the United States and its allies launched Operation Enduring Freedom, invading Afghanistan to dismantle Al-Qaeda and remove the Taliban regime that provided them with safe haven.
2003-2011	The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq aimed to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, but it also led to a power vacuum and an insurgency that was exploited by various extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq (which later became ISIS).
2011-present day	The ongoing conflict in Syria provided a fertile ground for extremist groups, including ISIS and Al-Qaeda-affiliated factions, to gain territory, carry out attacks, and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis.
2014	The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a significant extremist group gained international attention. ISIS proclaimed a self-proclaimed caliphate and conducted widespread acts of terror, including brutal massacres, enslavement, and the destruction of cultural heritage sites.

2015

Coordinated terrorist attacks by ISIS in Paris, targeting multiple locations, including the Bataclan theater, resulted in the deaths of 130 people and injured hundreds. The attacks had a significant impact on European security and counterterrorism efforts.

Relevant UN Treaties and Resolutions

The United Nations have collaborated on the establishment of numerous treaties in order to combat terrorism worldwide. With each treaty, they attempt to encompass a larger scale of terrorism in order to criminalize and ultimately cease terrorism of any kind. Some of the relevant UN treaties in reference to terrorism are:

United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy**:** In 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which provides a comprehensive framework to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, prevent and combat terrorism, and ensure the protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism: Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1999, this convention criminalizes the provision or collection of funds with the intent to finance terrorism. It promotes international cooperation to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorist activities.

International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism: This convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005, criminalizes acts of nuclear terrorism and calls for international cooperation to prevent and suppress such acts.

Security Council Resolutions: The UN Security Council has passed numerous resolutions addressing specific terrorist groups, regions, and measures to combat terrorism. These resolutions impose sanctions on individuals and entities associated with terrorist activities and call on member states to enhance their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorism.

UN Security Council Resolution 1373: Adopted in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, this resolution requires all member states to take measures to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism, enhance border controls, and exchange information to combat terrorism effectively.

International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings: Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1997, this convention criminalizes terrorist bombings and encourages international cooperation in preventing and investigating such attacks.

International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism: This convention, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2005, aims to prevent and suppress acts of chemical and biological terrorism. It emphasizes the importance of international cooperation, exchange of information, and technical assistance.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

While there have been numerous UN resolutions and initiatives to combat terrorism, not all proposals have been successful in gaining unanimous support or passing into formal resolutions. Here are a few notable examples of previous UN resolutions related to counterterrorism that did not pass:

Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism: The Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is a proposed treaty aimed at establishing a universal legal framework to address acts of terrorism. However, reaching a consensus on the convention has been challenging due to differing perspectives on the definition of terrorism. Various countries hold distinct views on what constitutes terrorism, complicating efforts to establish a universally accepted definition. The convention seeks to address prevention, extradition, legal assistance, and asset freezing related to terrorism, aiming to enhance international cooperation and coordination in the fight against terrorism. However, reconciling diverse legal systems, respecting national sovereignty, and ensuring the balance between counterterrorism measures and civil liberties have posed significant hurdles. Despite ongoing discussions, achieving consensus on the comprehensive convention remains a work in progress. Nonetheless, the international community continues to explore avenues for cooperation and dialogue to strengthen legal frameworks and enhance global collaboration in countering terrorism effectively.

Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism: The Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism is an international treaty designed to prevent and combat acts of terrorism involving nuclear materials. It establishes a legal framework for participating states to take necessary measures to prevent and punish such acts. The convention emphasizes international cooperation, information sharing, and the exchange of expertise to enhance the global capacity to detect, respond to, and prevent nuclear

terrorism. It encourages states to strengthen their domestic legislation, enhance physical protection of nuclear facilities and materials, and facilitate extradition and mutual legal assistance. While challenges remain, the convention serves as an important instrument in reinforcing the international legal regime against nuclear terrorism and fostering collaboration among nations to ensure nuclear security. Prior to the adoption of the successful International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism in 2005, there were earlier attempts to reach an agreement on this issue that did not result in a finalized convention.

Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Chemical Terrorism: The Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Chemical Terrorism is an international treaty designed to prevent and suppress acts of terrorism involving chemical substances. It establishes a legal framework for participating states to take necessary measures to prevent, investigate, and prosecute chemical terrorism. The convention emphasizes the criminalization of using toxic chemicals or chemical weapons to cause harm or panic among the population. It calls for international cooperation, including information sharing, mutual legal assistance, and extradition, to effectively address chemical terrorism. The convention also emphasizes the importance of enhancing physical security measures for handling and transporting toxic chemicals. By strengthening global capacity in prevention and response to chemical terrorism, the convention plays a crucial role in reinforcing international commitment to combating the malicious use of chemicals as weapons. Continued efforts and cooperation among states are needed to ensure universal participation and effective implementation of the convention's provisions. Similar to the previous example, efforts were made to establish a convention specifically targeting acts of chemical terrorism, but a consensus was not reached.

Possible Solutions

United States: The United States has emphasized a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism, which includes military action, intelligence cooperation, law enforcement efforts, and initiatives to counter violent extremism. It also promotes building international coalitions and partnerships to combat terrorism globally.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom has focused on a "Four Ps" strategy: Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare. Pursue involves disrupting terrorist plots, investigating and prosecuting terrorists. Prevent aims to prevent people from becoming terrorists by addressing the root causes and supporting community-led interventions. Protect focuses on enhancing security measures to safeguard the public, while Prepare involves strengthening resilience and response capabilities.

France: France has prioritized intelligence sharing, international cooperation, and law enforcement efforts to combat terrorism. It has also emphasized the importance of integration, social cohesion, and addressing radicalization within communities through education, awareness campaigns, and community engagement.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia has implemented a comprehensive approach that combines security measures with rehabilitation and reintegration programs for individuals involved in extremism. It has also focused on promoting moderate interpretations of Islam and countering extremist ideologies through educational and religious initiatives.

Australia: Australia has emphasized a multi-layered approach that includes legislation to enhance counterterrorism capabilities, community engagement programs to prevent radicalization, and intelligence sharing with international partners. It has also invested in

programs to address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that contribute to extremism.

Germany: Germany has prioritized prevention and early intervention through community-based initiatives and social welfare programs. It focuses on identifying and addressing radicalization risks, promoting interfaith dialogue, and fostering integration and inclusion.

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