



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM

13th REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE OSCE PA AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM,

Mr. Reinhold Lopatka

at the

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Agenda Item 8: Reports by the Chairs of Ad Hoc Committees

INTRODUCTION

Madam President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguished Colleagues,

I am honoured to report on behalf of our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT). Before I begin, I am glad to announce that CCT has recently gained new members. Please allow me to warmly welcome **Mr. Marc Veasey** from the US and to congratulate **Mr. Kamil Aydin** from Turkey for his recent appointment to Vice Chair. I am truly looking forward to working with our new members and I am sure that the CCT will benefit greatly from your engagement and experience.

Unfortunately, over the last few months we have “lost” three valuable members: Mr. Hudson (US), Mr. Ryzhak (Russia) and Ms. Jimenez-Becerril (Spain). I would like to wish our former members all possible success in their new and future capacities, as well as thank them for their past engagement in the CCT.

1. OVERVIEW OF MAIN THREATS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Dear colleagues,

2021 has been a challenging year for counterterrorism and has seen many developments worldwide. **New forms of extremism are emerging**, linked to yet another year of difficulties presented by the pandemic, whilst **previous forms of terrorism are adapting and surfacing in new ways**.

Global Terrorism Trends

Throughout 2021, **pandemic-related trends in terrorism and counterterrorism have overlapped**, with terrorists seeking to exploit pandemic-related socio-economic and political tensions, including growing economic inequality, deepening social divisions and government mistrust.¹

Terrorists have taken advantage of circumstances which have caused people worldwide to spend more time online, and **strengthened efforts to spread propaganda, recruit, and radicalize via virtual platforms**.² Increased digital financial activity has also reduced the capabilities of financial institutions to detect anomalies and given terrorist groups new opportunities to abuse funding platforms.³

In non-conflict zones quarantine measures and restrictions on travel have brought challenges to terrorist operational activities, undermining their abilities to carry out attacks.⁴

Heightened restrictions, particularly on freedom of movement and assembly, have been a source of rising social unrest. Pandemic-related conspiracy theories and mis-information continue to fuel societal divisions, a rise in hate speech, anti-democratic movements, and distrust in government authorities.⁵ As restrictions are lifted there is a hope that social tensions are eased. Ongoing recovery efforts will provide the opportunity for states to rebuild social unity, to which upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms should be integral.

There are concerns that **Covid-19 crisis has drawn attention to the impact of biological agents** and may lead to a resurgence of interest in such methods amongst terrorists. Recent scientific advances in the biotechnology sphere and in Artificial Intelligence hold great promise in the fight against biological threats, whether intentional attacks or naturally occurring pandemics. These advances, however, are also facilitating the development of

¹ United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, '[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism](#)', December 2021 (accessed 31 January 2022).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

increasingly sophisticated biological weapons, which are cheaper and increasingly accessible.⁶ Moreover, systems and processes involved in emerging technologies are increasingly digitized or hosted in cloud storage, which makes them more **vulnerable to cyber-attacks and often to internal leaks**.

It is important for parliamentarians in this regard to **generate greater awareness for the need for robust biodefence measures** in national parliaments and in the public and improve expertise in biodefence, as well as to encourage national authorities to **strengthen security of supply arrangements for medical countermeasures**.⁷

The **transition to clean energy could also come with changing terrorism trends**. A transition from energy powered by fossil fuels to renewable energy might help to reduce traditional terrorist attacks on energy resources, and eco-terrorism, for example. Interestingly, studies show that terrorist attacks on countries with less green innovation are more damaging on this sector, **whereas attacks on economies with strong green innovation have a lesser effect**.⁸

Specific forms of terrorism also remain active but are adapting in tactics and ideologies. **Continuance of cross-border and wider transnational links of terror networks** was also observed throughout 2021.⁹ ISIS remains active; however, attack modalities have shifted. In Europe, they are often self-funded, perpetrated by lone actors and carried out by light weaponry.¹⁰ Globally, women, families and youth assumed more important and authoritative roles in terrorist groups linked to ISIS.

We are seeing a **rise in right-wing extremism and male supremacist violence**. Apart from the notable 6 January Capitol Hill riot in Washington DC, large-scale acts of right-wing extremism have remained limited in 2021.¹¹ Arrests and smaller scale acts, however, continued globally, largely fueled by government COVID-19 measures and the spread of mis-information and conspiracy theories.¹²

During the pandemic, **the male supremacist movement has also grown and radicalised**, with increased time online fueling the spread of incel ideology.¹³ Throughout 2020 and 2021 male supremacist activity has moved offline and become more increasingly, and we have recently seen an expansion from North America to Europe.¹⁴ The spread of this ideology is worrying, and global efforts should be made to tackle this online and offline.

⁶ NATO PA Report, *Biological Weapons: Technological Progress and the Spectre of Bioterrorism in the Post-Covid-19 Era*, 2021.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Mingbo Zheng, Gen-Fu Feng, Chyi-Lu Jang, Chun-Ping Chang, '[Terrorism and green innovation in renewable energy](#)' in *Energy Economics*, Vol. 104, 2021 (accessed 25 January 2022).

⁹ S. Rajarathnam School of International Studies, [Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses](#), 2022 (accessed 1 February 2022).

¹⁰ United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, '[Summary Report of the Expert-level meeting "Emerging trends and recent evolution of the threat posed by ISIL/Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe"](#)', June 2021 (accessed 1 February 2022).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Regional Terrorism Trends

2021 also saw **dramatic changes in the security landscape in Afghanistan**. Since the Taliban takeover in August, the internal situation in Afghanistan remains tense, with widespread economic insecurity, political exclusion, and violent crackdowns by Taliban government forces.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Afghanistan is experiencing less large-scale fighting now than during the last years; however, small-scale attacks are frequent and the overall environment has created the **ideal conditions for the rapid rise in internal extremism**.

A key challenge for states and international actors is to **ensure the humanitarian and economic situation in Afghanistan does not completely collapse** – with the country becoming a potential breeding ground for terrorism. Internationally, there are also concerns of a **possible spillover effect**, particularly in neighbouring countries, with **increase in other related criminal activity**, such as trafficking of drugs.

The **African continent has seen an increase in terrorism throughout 2021**, with a spillover from Western Africa, and an increase in activities of **Boko Haram in the west, and Al Shabab in the east**, fueled by IS and Al Qaeda ideologies.¹⁵ In the Horn of Africa, al-Shabaab is gaining strength and has evolved into a regional threat, with the possibility of more global ambitions.¹⁶ In this context, counter-terrorism responses are often over-securitized and lacking in support for victims.¹⁷

Counter terrorism efforts will have to work towards tackling each of these threats on a global scale. We must and continue to **monitor and assess the development of these threats** to our international landscape and respond with **united, whole of society approaches**.

Our responses must be **targeted and human rights compliant**, with a strong international legal framework. As parliamentarians, we must encourage the **adoption of international standards** in our national frameworks.

2. REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Dear colleagues,

Please now let me continue to give you a brief overview of the activities of the past and upcoming CCT plans, since we last spoke.

¹⁵ ORF, [Burgeoning Terrorism in Africa: A Critical Overview](#), 2021 (accessed 9 February 2021).

¹⁶ Foreign Policy Research Institute, [Trends in Terrorism: What's on the Horizon in 2022](#), 2021 (accessed 31 January 2021).

¹⁷ UN Security Council, [CTED discusses ISIL trends and developments in Africa with civil society](#), 2021 (accessed 9 February 2022).

Despite the ongoing challenges presented by the **COVID-19** pandemic, the CCT has continued to be active both regionally and internationally. Moreover, it has worked hard to **strengthen international co-ordination in counter-terrorism matters**, both within and outside the OSCE family.

Notably, in October 2021 the OSCE PA organized a very successful, in-person **Regional Policy Dialogue on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) with Legislators from South-Eastern Europe**, together with the OSCE Secretariat and with the support of OSCE Field Operations in the Western Balkans. This offered a great opportunity to share lessons learned and explore persisting challenges among 30 parliamentarians on a wide range of issues connected to this phenomena, including the return/repatriation of FTFs and their family members.

More recently, the PA CCT attended the **First Counter-Terrorism Co-ordination Meeting of Parliamentary Assemblies**, hosted by the UNOCT.

Considering an increase in requests from parliaments for technical assistance on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, UNOCT established a new co-ordination mechanism among parliamentary assemblies to **better align our efforts, bring increased visibility to our work, and boost the impact of our actions**.

As initiator of this coordination process, founding member of the new mechanism and reliable partner (MoU 2020), the OSCE PA CCT will have the **possibility to Chair it**, on a voluntary and rotating basis, thereby bringing increased visibility to its work.

Whilst in Doha, we also attended **The Role of Parliamentarians in the Implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) for Addressing Terrorism and Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism**, hosted by the UNOCT, where we discussed the latest CT threats stemming from the situation in Afghanistan, with colleagues from Central Asia.

In January, the Committee contributed a webinar on **Parliamentary Responses to Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism**, organized by Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, where we discussed the importance of parliamentary engagement in the field of countering terrorism.

Furthermore, just earlier this month the CCT participated in the **Launch of the Model Legislative Provisions for Victims of Terrorism**, organized by IPU, UNCCT and UNODC. This is the culmination of a consultative process which took several years and to which the CCT has repeatedly contributed through its expertise in order to ensure the rights of victims are promoted and upheld at all levels. Notably, the protection of victims of terrorism features as one of the five thematic priorities of the CCT since its inception in 2017.

On the same day, we also contributed to **Parliamentary Web Dialogue on The Clean Energy Revolution and its Implications for the OSCE region**, discussing the interlinkages between energy and terrorism and how we can move forward to tackle this phenomenon.

Lastly, just a few days ago we **met with my colleagues of the committee to discuss the latest developments in Afghanistan** and consider possible terrorism threats stemming from the region. Several experts joined us and, with their presentations, informed our subsequent debate. Undoubtedly, the situation in Afghanistan is something we will continue to monitor very closely.

In the coming months, the CCT will continue to work hard to further the reach of its parliamentary action. In particular, it will contribute to the **UNOCT Annual Forum of Beneficiaries of Technical Assistance**, along with the **Conference on Legislative Frameworks in Africa**, at the end of March.

Furthermore, we are consulting with the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean** around the possibility of organizing a joint event sometime in May - possibly in Rome/Naples - if the conditions allow.

The CCT will also contribute to the **2022 OSCE Counter Terrorism Conference**, organized by our Polish Chairpersonship, which should take place on the 31 May and 1 June in Poland.

We aim to meet in person with all CCT members in proximity to the **Annual Session in Birmingham**, where we also hope to introduce a **new counter terrorism resolution**, possibly on the issue of victims of terrorism, thereby leveraging on the work we have conducted over the last five years with our partners in this important field.

To further discuss the running of the new Counter-Terrorism Parliamentary Co-ordination mechanism, the Committee will also participate in the **Second Co-ordination Meeting among Parliamentary Assemblies on Counter-Terrorism Matters**, organized by UNOCT, in the summer.

Following high-level bilateral exchanges last September in Vienna, last December in Doha and more recently in New York, the CCT is also considering to further **upgrade its co-operation with UNOCT through a joint work plan** that would envisage several common projects intended to bring a distinct parliamentary contribution, including the:

1. Organization of **targeted joint events** on issues of common interest, such as the **role of victims and FTFs** - specifically we hope to organize a **Regional Policy Dialogue with Parliamentarians from Central Asia** in the fall;
2. **Development of policy guidance** in critical areas, such as **terrorism prevention on-line**; and
3. Promoting the full implementation of the international legal CT framework through timely **oversight initiatives** in areas such as **border security and countering terrorism financing**.

Dear Colleagues,

Before concluding, I would like to commend our President and our Secretary General for their steadfast support, as well as all our fellow CCT members for their outstanding work, despite the challenging circumstances.

I hope that, as parliamentarians, we can work together to emerge as a stronger, more united society.

Thank you!