

Forum: General Assembly 1

Issue: Evaluating Multilateral Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism and Enhance Global Security

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Introduction:

International terrorism remains one of the most complex threats to global peace and security. Terrorist groups operate across borders, exploit political instability, use modern technology for recruitment and financing, and target civilians, governments, and critical infrastructure. Because terrorism is transnational, no single country can effectively combat it alone. This makes multilateral cooperation, where multiple states and international organisations work together, essential.

This topic focuses on evaluating how international actors, especially the United Nations (UN), can improve collective measures to prevent terrorism, reduce its financing, strengthen intelligence-sharing, protect human rights, and address the root causes of radicalisation. The debate should not focus only on military responses, but also on prevention, diplomacy, international law, education, development, and post-conflict stabilisation.

Delegates should examine whether current international counterterrorism frameworks are effective, where they fail, and what stronger multilateral mechanisms can be introduced to improve global security while respecting state sovereignty and human rights.

Definition of key terms:

Terrorism: the use or threat of violence, especially against civilians, to create fear and achieve political, ideological, religious, or social goals. There is no single universally accepted legal definition within the UN, which complicates international cooperation.

International Terrorism: terrorist acts that affect more than one country, either through planning, execution, victims, perpetrators, or consequences. It often includes cross-border financing, recruitment, and operations.

Multilateralism: cooperation among three or more states to address shared global challenges through international institutions such as the United Nations, NATO, Interpol, or regional alliances.

Counterterrorism: refers to actions taken to prevent, detect, and respond to terrorism. This includes military operations, sanctions, intelligence sharing, border security, anti-radicalisation programs, and legal prosecution.

Violent Extremism: beliefs and actions that support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious, or political objectives. It is often considered a precursor to terrorism.

Radicalisation: the process through which individuals adopt extremist beliefs that may lead them to support or commit acts of terrorism.

State Sovereignty: State sovereignty refers to the principle that each state has authority over its own territory and domestic affairs without external interference.

Background:

Historical development

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but globalisation has made it far more dangerous. During the late 20th century, terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda expanded their operations internationally. The September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001 marked a major turning point, killing nearly 3,000 people and leading to major global counterterrorism reforms.

Following 9/11, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1373, requiring all states to criminalise terrorism financing, improve border controls, and cooperate internationally. The rise of ISIS (Islamic State) in Iraq and Syria after 2014 demonstrated how terrorist groups could control territory, use social media for global recruitment, and inspire attacks worldwide. This shifted attention toward foreign terrorist fighters, online extremism, and cybersecurity.

Today, terrorism threats include:

- jihadist organisations (ISIS, Al-Qaeda affiliates)
- far-right extremist networks

- lone-wolf attacks
- cyberterrorism
- domestic radicalisation
- attacks on critical infrastructure

Root causes

Terrorism often develops in environments affected by:

- poverty and unemployment
- political exclusion
- weak governance
- armed conflict
- foreign occupation
- discrimination
- lack of education
- human rights abuses

Although these factors do not directly cause terrorism, they can create conditions where extremist groups gain support.

Challenges

Lack of Universal Definition: Because states disagree on what qualifies as terrorism, legal cooperation becomes difficult. Some states distinguish between terrorism and liberation movements, while others do not.

Human Rights Concerns: Some counterterrorism measures, such as mass surveillance, indefinite detention, and military intervention, have been criticised for violating human rights and international humanitarian law. Excessive force can also worsen radicalisation.

Unequal State Capacity: Developing countries often lack the resources to implement strong border security, intelligence systems, or financial monitoring. This weakens global counterterrorism efforts.

Terrorism Financing: Terrorist organisations use informal banking systems, cryptocurrencies, charities, and smuggling networks to fund operations. International financial monitoring remains inconsistent.

Online Radicalisation: Social media platforms allow extremist groups to recruit globally, spread propaganda, and coordinate attacks faster than traditional institutions can respond.

Timeline of Key Events

1945 Creation of the United Nations

1972 Munich Olympic Attack

1998 US Embassy Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania

2001 9/11 Attacks & UNSC Resolution 1373

2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

2014 Rise of ISIS

2015 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism

2017 Creation of UN Office of Counter-Terrorism

Major parties involved:

United Nations Security Council (UNSC): The UNSC is the primary UN body responsible for maintaining international peace and security. It adopts binding resolutions, sanctions terrorist groups, and mandates counterterrorism obligations.

Interest: Prevent global instability and enforce international cooperation.

Actions: Resolution 1373, sanctions committees, Counter-Terrorism Committee.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT): Established in 2017, UNOCT coordinates UN counterterrorism efforts and supports member states in implementing strategies.

Interest: Strengthening global coordination and technical assistance.

Actions: Capacity-building programs, counter-radicalisation support.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF): An intergovernmental organisation focused on preventing money laundering and terrorism financing.

Interest: Financial transparency and blocking terrorist funding.

Actions: Blacklisting high-risk jurisdictions, financial monitoring standards.

INTERPOL: Supports international police cooperation and criminal intelligence sharing.

Interest: Prevent cross-border terrorist operations.

Actions: Databases, arrest coordination, border security cooperation.

United States: A leading actor in global counterterrorism since 2001.

Interest: National security and prevention of global attacks.

Actions: Military interventions, sanctions, intelligence cooperation.

Criticism: Some operations raised concerns regarding sovereignty and civilian harm.

Russia: Strong focus on state security and military counterterrorism.

Interest: Prevent separatist and extremist violence.

Actions: Military campaigns and Security Council influence.

Middle Eastern/South Asian States (Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan): Often directly affected by terrorist activity and military operations.

Interest: Restoring stability, rebuilding institutions, preventing extremist resurgence.

Challenges: Weak governance and post-conflict recovery.

NGOs and Human Rights Organisations: Examples include Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Interest: Ensuring counterterrorism measures respect human rights.

Actions: Monitoring abuses, advocacy, legal reporting.

Relevant UN treaties, resolutions, and reports:

UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001)

Required all states to criminalise terrorism financing, improve border security, and cooperate internationally.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004)

Focused on preventing non-state actors from obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006)

The first comprehensive UN strategy addressing both prevention and response.

UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014)

Addressed foreign terrorist fighters and required stronger international cooperation.

UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015)

Focused on addressing root causes of radicalisation rather than only military responses.

International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (1999)

Established legal obligations to criminalise terrorism financing.

UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Annual Reports

Provide updated assessments and recommendations on implementation.

Previous attempts to solve the issue:

Military Intervention Against Terrorist Groups:

Responsible Actors: US-led coalitions, NATO, regional governments

Description: Military operations targeted Al-Qaeda, Taliban, and ISIS strongholds in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Why It Was Limited: While leadership structures were weakened, military action alone did not eliminate terrorism. Civilian casualties, instability, and failed state institutions often contributed to further radicalisation.

Lesson: Security operations must be combined with long-term governance and development strategies.

Financial Sanctions and FATF Monitoring:

Responsible Actors: UNSC, FATF, national financial regulators

Description: Sanctions froze terrorist assets and restricted access to banking systems.

Why It Was Limited: Terrorist groups adapted through informal economies, smuggling, and cryptocurrency.

Lesson: Financial controls must be modernised and globally enforced.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs:

Responsible Actors: UN, UNESCO, national governments

Description: Education, community engagement, and rehabilitation programs aimed to prevent radicalisation.

Why It Was Limited: Programs were often underfunded, politically sensitive, and difficult to measure.

Lesson: Prevention requires sustained investment and local trust.

International Intelligence Sharing:

Responsible Actors: Interpol, intelligence alliances, national governments

Description: States shared intelligence to detect attacks and monitor suspects.

Why It Was Limited: Lack of trust, political rivalry, and sovereignty concerns reduced effectiveness.

Lesson: Stronger legal frameworks and trust-building mechanisms are necessary.

Possible solutions:

Strengthen a Universal Legal Framework:

Delegates should work toward clearer international legal standards for defining terrorism while protecting legitimate self-determination movements under international law.

Improve Financial Surveillance

Expand FATF cooperation, regulate cryptocurrency transactions, and improve monitoring of informal financial networks used by terrorist groups.

Invest in Prevention

Support education, youth employment, post-conflict reconstruction, and anti-radicalisation programs to reduce recruitment opportunities for extremist groups.

Protect Human Rights

Ensure all counterterrorism operations comply with international law to avoid abuse, discrimination, and further radicalisation.

Expand Intelligence Cooperation

Improve secure intelligence-sharing systems while respecting sovereignty and privacy protections.

Strengthen Cyber Counterterrorism

Work with technology companies to remove extremist content, monitor recruitment networks, and improve international cyber defence cooperation.

Capacity Building for Developing States

Provide funding, training, and institutional support for countries with weak border security and limited counterterrorism infrastructure.

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