Ruben Delissen, Deputy Chair
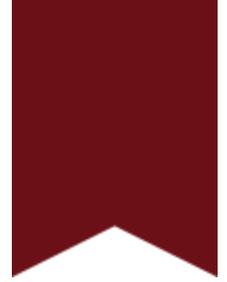*Haganum Model United Nations XVI*
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Combating Global Terrorism

Historical Security Council

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Haganum Model United Nations XVI

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Introduction

Terrorism remains one of the most persistent and destabilizing threats to global security. Although its forms and actors differ across regions, terrorism consistently aims to spread fear, undermine governments, and disrupt societies. Modern terrorist networks—both organized groups and lone-actor extremists—take advantage of globalization, digital communication, and political instability to recruit members, spread propaganda, and coordinate attacks across borders. This makes terrorism not merely a national concern but a truly international issue that no state can combat effectively on its own.

The impact of terrorism extends far beyond the immediate loss of life. Attacks destabilize political systems, strain diplomatic relationships, and can plunge regions into prolonged conflict. Economically, terrorism damages critical infrastructure, discourages investment, and burdens states with increased security costs. Socially, it fuels division, polarization, and mistrust between communities, often contributing to cycles of radicalization and further violence. The psychological effect—fear, uncertainty, and reduced public confidence—can linger long after the physical damage is repaired.

The issue urgently needs to be addressed because terrorism evolves rapidly. New technologies enable extremist groups to recruit globally, finance operations anonymously, and target critical systems such as transportation networks, energy grids, and digital infrastructure. The rise of online radicalization has allowed extremist ideologies to spread faster and more widely than ever before. At the same time, regions with weak governance or ongoing conflict provide safe havens where terrorist organizations can grow, train, and operate with limited interference.

Without coordinated global action, these dynamics will continue to undermine international peace and security. Preventing terrorism is not only about stopping attacks—it is about protecting human rights, fostering social cohesion, ensuring political stability, and safeguarding global development. Combating terrorism effectively requires a comprehensive approach: addressing root causes, strengthening international cooperation, enhancing national capacities, and ensuring that all counterterrorism measures respect the rule of law. Only through such a balanced and collaborative effort can the international community reduce the threat and build long-term resilience against terrorism.

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Definition of key terms

Counter-Terrorism

Counter-terrorism refers to efforts taken to prevent, disrupt, and respond to terrorist activities. It includes intelligence work, law enforcement actions, and protective security measures.

Extremism

Extremism describes beliefs or positions that fall far outside mainstream societal norms. It often rejects democratic values, pluralism, and compromise.

Financing of Terrorism

The financing of terrorism involves providing money, resources, or support that enables terrorist activities. These funds can come from legal or illegal sources and are often concealed to avoid detection.

Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF)

An individual who travels to a state other than their place of residence or nationality with the purpose of participating in terrorist activities, including training or combat.

Ideology

Ideology is a structured set of beliefs or values that explains how society should function. It guides political, social, or religious goals and behaviors.

Radicalization

Radicalization is the process through which individuals adopt extremist beliefs. It may lead them to support or engage in violence to achieve ideological aims.

Terrorism

Terrorism is the use or threat of violence against civilians to achieve political objectives. It aims to create fear, disrupt societies, and influence decision-makers.

Violent Extremism

Violent extremism combines extremist beliefs with the willingness to use violence. It seeks to impose ideological goals through coercion, intimidation, or attacks.

General Overview

Terrorism is a complex global phenomenon shaped by political, ideological, religious, and social factors. While its forms have changed over time, terrorism consistently aims to create fear, disrupt stability, and influence political outcomes. Modern terrorism expanded rapidly with globalization, as faster communication, easier mobility, and interconnected financial systems allowed groups to operate across borders. Although the intensity of attacks varies by region, areas in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa have seen prolonged activity, while Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia have experienced smaller-scale but highly disruptive attacks. This demonstrates that terrorism is not limited to one region or ideology but adapts to different environments.

Radicalization processes underpin much of this activity. Individuals may be influenced by personal grievances, ideological narratives, or social dynamics, and in recent years, digital platforms have significantly changed how extremist ideas spread. Online propaganda, encrypted communication, and digital echo chambers allow groups or individuals to connect without physical contact, broadening recruitment beyond traditional conflict zones.

Terrorist tactics vary widely, ranging from bombings and armed assaults to hostage-taking and attacks using vehicles or improvised devices. More recently, discussions have expanded to include cyber-related threats, where attempts to disrupt infrastructure or essential services have become more plausible. Many groups also rely on illicit financial flows, resource exploitation, or digital currencies to fund operations.

The impact of terrorism is multifaceted. Humanitarian consequences include loss of life, displacement, and long-term psychological trauma. Economically, attacks can damage key infrastructure, reduce foreign investment, and disrupt sectors such as tourism and transport. Estimates from global security reports have shown that countries heavily affected by terrorism may experience measurable declines in economic growth during periods of repeated attacks. Socially, terrorism can deepen mistrust, fuel polarization, and strain relations between communities. These dynamics can, in some cases, influence political attitudes or lead to expanded security measures.

Terrorism also presents cross-border challenges. Differences in national legislation, varying levels of state capacity, and the mobility of individuals and financial resources complicate efforts to address the issue. Regions experiencing conflict may provide operational space for armed groups, while the movement of foreign terrorist fighters creates additional security and legal challenges upon return to their countries of residence.

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Efforts to address terrorism include both preventive and reactive measures. Prevention often focuses on addressing factors that enable radicalization—such as social exclusion, political grievances, or lack of economic opportunity—through education, community engagement, and resilience-building. Capacity-building initiatives aim to strengthen judicial systems, border control, financial oversight, and law enforcement. States adopt differing approaches, ranging from reintegration programs to stringent surveillance and prosecution, depending on their legal frameworks and national priorities.

Recent trends point to increasingly decentralized networks, greater reliance on digital tools, and evolving financial methods. While international cooperation has expanded, disparities in resources and legal approaches mean that states continue to face challenges in responding effectively and consistently. The dynamic nature of terrorism requires continuous adaptation, combining security-based measures with long-term efforts to reduce underlying drivers.

Major parties involved

African Union (AU)

The African Union plays a central role in addressing terrorism due to persistent activity by armed groups in regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Lake Chad Basin. Since its evolution from the Organization of African Unity, the AU has increasingly focused on peace and security, especially as instability and weak governance have allowed armed groups to operate across borders. The AU coordinates regional responses, supports member states with capacity-building, and works with regional organizations to improve intelligence sharing and border control. Its primary interest is reducing regional instability, preventing spillover between states, and supporting long-term security in conflict-affected areas.

European Union (EU)

The European Union became more active in counterterrorism after a series of major attacks in its member states during the 2000s. These incidents highlighted vulnerabilities related to free movement within the Schengen Area and differences in national legislation. The EU now works on improving intelligence-sharing, strengthening external border controls, and harmonizing approaches to terrorism financing and prosecution. It also focuses on preventing radicalization, particularly online, as several attacks were carried out by lone actors. The EU's main interest is protecting internal security while maintaining fundamental rights and freedom of movement.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC is a neutral humanitarian organization that operates in conflict zones, including those where groups labeled as terrorists are active. Counterterrorism laws in some states can complicate the ICRC's work by limiting contact with armed groups or restricting humanitarian access. The organization's position centers on ensuring that all actors respect International Humanitarian Law and that civilians, detainees, and medical workers are protected. Its interest lies in preserving impartial humanitarian space, enabling aid delivery, and maintaining dialogue with all sides while remaining neutral and independent.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has been heavily involved in counterterrorism efforts due to its past experience with domestic extremist attacks and its strategic position in the Middle East. The country developed extensive security measures, tightened financial regulations, and introduced rehabilitation programs for individuals disengaging from extremist activity. Regional instability in areas such as Yemen and Iraq also influences its policies, as these conflicts can create opportunities for armed groups. Saudi Arabia's main interests are maintaining domestic security, safeguarding regional stability, and participating in international initiatives targeting extremist networks and financial flows.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)

UNOCT was created to coordinate and unify counterterrorism efforts across the UN system, which were previously spread over multiple agencies. It supports states through technical assistance, training, and regional programs, while promoting the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. UNOCT works on issues such as border security, judicial processes, and preventing violent extremism, and emphasizes that counterterrorism measures should align with human rights standards. Its primary interest is strengthening global cooperation, assisting states with limited resources, and ensuring a comprehensive approach to both prevention and response.

Timeline of events

Date	Description of event
1990 November 6th	Assassination of Rabbi Meir Kahane in New York.
1990 February 7th	LTTE suicide bombing in Colombo, Sri Lanka.
1993 February 26th	First World Trade Center bombing in New York.
1995 March 20th	A coordinated chemical attack on multiple trains on Tokyo subway lines.
2001 September 11th	The 9/11 attacks take place, prompting a major shift in global counterterrorism priorities.
2002 January 22th	Suicide bombing on Jaffa Road, Jerusalem.
2002 September 5	Car bombing in Afghanistan near the Ministry of Information.
2002 October 6th	Bombing of French oil tanker Limburg in the Gulf of Aden in Yemen.
2002 October 12th	The Bali bombings occur, killing 202 people. leading to increased regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Relevant UN treaties and events

International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings: Establishes a legal framework for prosecuting those involved in bombing attacks targeting public places or state facilities, 15 December 1997.

Terrorist Bombings Convention (1997): Covers bombings in public places, government buildings, and infrastructure. It was a response to the global surge in large-scale bombings in the 1990s.

International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism: Defines and criminalizes the intentional financing of terrorist acts or groups, 9 December 1999.

Financing of Terrorism Convention (1999): Requires states to criminalize terrorism financing and freeze terrorist assets. It became the legal backbone of global counter-terrorism after 9/11.

Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001): Imposes binding obligations on all UN member states to prevent and suppress terrorism, including measures related to financing, border control, and information-sharing, 28 September 2001.

UNSCR 1267 Al-Qaeda/Taliban Sanctions (1999): Creates a global sanctions regime targeting al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It remains one of the most powerful UN counter-terrorism tools.

UNSCR 1373 Post-9/11 Counter-Terrorism Framework (2001): Adopted immediately after 9/11. It obligates all states to criminalize terrorism financing, improve border controls, and share intelligence.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Aviation Security Treaties (1963–1971): Hijackings were out of control in the 1960s–70s, so the UN created treaties to criminalize hijacking, sabotage, and attacks on aircraft. These were the first global counter-terrorism laws. They failed because they only criminalized hijacking without addressing the practical security gaps that made it easy to carry out. States enforced the treaties unevenly, often refusing extradition or lacking capacity, which weakened deterrence. Terrorist groups also adapted quickly, shifting to new tactics the treaties didn't cover.

Diplomat Protection (1973): After a wave of embassy attacks and assassinations, the UN adopted a treaty requiring states to protect diplomats and punish offenders. It was an early attempt to stop politically motivated violence. They failed because the treaty relied on states to enforce protections, but many governments lacked the capacity or political will to do so consistently. It also didn't stop groups that targeted diplomats precisely to gain attention, meaning the legal obligations didn't deter politically motivated attackers.

Hostage-Taking Convention (1979): This treaty forced states to prosecute or extradite hostage-takers. It was a response to the rise of hostage crises in the 1970s. It failed because many states still hesitated to extradite hostage-takers for political reasons, weakening the treaty's impact. It also didn't deter groups that used hostage-taking as a strategic tool to gain publicity or concessions, so the legal obligations alone couldn't stop the practice.

Maritime Security (1988): After the Achille Lauro hijacking, the UN created a treaty to criminalize ship hijacking and attacks at sea. It was the first major attempt to address terrorism outside aviation. It failed because enforcement at sea was extremely difficult, and many states lacked the naval capacity to police their waters effectively. The treaty also didn't deter groups that operated from weak or unstable states, where governments couldn't or wouldn't prosecute offenders, leaving large maritime regions effectively ungoverned.

Bombing Convention (1997): The UN responded to the global surge in large-scale bombings (WTC 1993, Oklahoma City 1995) by creating a treaty that criminalized bombings in public places and government buildings. It failed because it focused on criminalization without improving intelligence sharing or prevention, so it didn't stop groups already willing to die or face arrest. Many states also lacked the capacity to investigate or prosecute complex bombing networks, leaving the treaty far stronger on paper than in practice.

Financing of Terrorism Convention (1999): This was a major breakthrough: it criminalized funding terrorism and required states to freeze terrorist assets. It became the backbone of global counter-terrorism after 9/11. It failed because many groups adapted by shifting to informal cash networks, smuggling, or local fundraising that states couldn't easily track or freeze. Some governments also lacked the capacity or political will to enforce financial controls consistently, leaving major gaps that allowed funding to continue flowing.

UN Security Council Sanctions on al-Qaeda/Taliban (1999): The UN created a sanctions regime targeting al-Qaeda and the Taliban, including travel bans and asset freezes. It was the first attempt to disrupt a global terrorist network. They failed because the sanctions depended on states to enforce them, and many governments either lacked the capacity or quietly ignored the measures. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban also operated through informal networks and safe havens where sanctions had little reach, so travel bans and asset freezes barely disrupted their core activities.

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Possible solutions

Expanding structured channels for real-time exchange of intelligence between states, including biometric data, financial information, and cross-border movements. This could involve creating secure digital platforms operated jointly by regional organizations or UN bodies. To encourage wider participation, states with limited capacity may receive technical assistance or cybersecurity support. This solution addresses the issue of fragmented information, which often enables terrorist groups to exploit borders and jurisdictional gaps.

Developing shared prevention frameworks that target early signs of radicalization, both online and within local communities. Measures could include partnerships with technology companies to detect extremist content, improved community outreach programs, and structured rehabilitation initiatives for individuals at risk. Delegates may debate the balance between these preventative measures and the protection of civil liberties such as privacy and freedom of expression, making this a productive discussion point.

Enhancing international cooperation to track and block financial flows linked to terrorist groups. This includes stricter regulation of money-transfer systems, better oversight of charities and NGOs vulnerable to exploitation, and expanded monitoring of crypto-assets. States with less-developed financial oversight could receive assistance in establishing monitoring mechanisms. This solution addresses the fundamental issue of how terrorist groups sustain their operations and offers ample room for debate on sovereignty and economic transparency.

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