

"Innovative ways to deal with violent extremism"
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Fourth session: “Terrorism through the eye of the Arab world”

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Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in human experience; throughout history it has been used by dissidents and had threatened the stability of societies and their peaceful coexistence. Terrorism is not tied to Islam and the wave of terrorism we are witnessing today is not a unique or exceptional case, as political violence has been a significant part of social and political relations since the oldest civilizations.

Amid continued terror attacks, an unprecedented terrorists’ military prowess and a widespread radical indoctrination which ignore age and societal boundaries, we should acknowledge the failure of all counter-terrorism initiatives.

Crafting an effective counter-terrorism Strategy requires following three main steps:

- Reaching consensus over a unified definition of terrorism
- Undertaking a throughout diagnosis of the underlying root causes and factors behind this phenomenon and its persistence
- Developing and implementing a viable and sustainable counter-terrorism strategy

The difficulty in assigning a truly comprehensive definition to terrorism lies in the fact that, not only is it challenging to be specific when motives, targets and methods differ so broadly from case-to-case, but the reigning double standers in viewing this phenomenon. Reaching an international consensus on defining terrorism is vital as a means of fighting the terrorist threat, as well as serving as a guideline forging countering and preventive strategies as well as in the prosecutions of suspected terrorists.

The causes behind terrorism are varied, and can be of psychological, cultural, political, and economic nature. Nonetheless, we can detect local and external causes. As for the local causes we could mention: Tough economic conditions, poverty and social injustice, marginalization, misconception of religious and political ideologies seeing in violence the only means to reach goals, despotism and lack of political participation particularly among young people, lack of political pluralism and alternation of power, in addition to widespread corruption, lack of civil liberties and the systematic violation of human rights.

External causes could be outlined by the following: The foreign occupation, the shock of modernity and cultural alienation as a result of globalization, the ruling zeitgeist and the unequal distribution of global power that dominates the unipolar world-system, in addition to regional conflicts that were catalyst for the emergence of terrorist organizations.

As mentioned above, the lack of a general consensus on the definition of terrorism makes of deterring this phenomenon almost an impossible task. Nevertheless, some principals should be respected while implementing an effective counter-terrorism strategy:

- Fully understanding the root causes of terrorism
- Counter-terrorist policies which are only based on security military measures are unproductive and will breed new generations of more violent radicals.
- Implementing political agendas able to address the upstream causes of terrorism
- Strengthening the role of de-politicized civil society organizations
- Promoting substantive political reform that emphasizes pluralistic governance, as an exclusive rule will very likely foster increased radicalization among disaffected
- Promote dialogue with terrorist organizations through the so-called "persuasive ways."

Finally, terrorism is not a radical religious phenomenon fueled by anti-western culture sentiment, and all initiatives implemented by western powers to mitigate this growing threat were doomed to fail because rather than addressing terrorism root causes they contributed to trigger them. Arab countries should seriously participate in the fight against terrorism by instigating a broader and independent Arab strategy which gives the upper hand to Arab interests.