



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Evolving Threats and their Implications for Security in Europe and Asia

As prepared for delivery by USOSCE
Deputy Permanent Representative Kate Byrnes
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Thank you Deputy Minister Shin.

It is a pleasure to be here today among such distinguished colleagues and subject matter experts to discuss a subject that is, unfortunately, no stranger to any of us in this room: combatting foreign terrorist fighters and countering violent extremism. Given the breadth of this topic and the time allotted, I will focus my remarks on elements necessary for a comprehensive response to the foreign terrorist fighter threat phenomenon and outline ongoing regional initiatives aiming to thwart this trend.

Violent extremism is spreading geographically and numerically, and recent terrorist attacks in France, Denmark, Tunisia, and Libya remind us that every corner of the globe is at risk. Despite the tactical successes of intelligence gathering, military forces, and law enforcement networks, terrorist networks continue to spread and the number of foreign terrorist fighters continues to increase. No region, country, or community is immune to this threat.

Colleagues, allow me to illustrate the extent to which foreign terrorist fighters affect Asia despite its perceived distance from the so-called hotbeds of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa. The ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq attracts foreign fighters from countries throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific. Current assessments indicate approximately 1,300 foreign personnel fighting alongside the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant are from the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Even just a small number of these combat-experienced fighters who return home could enhance the capability of regional extremist networks within the most densely populated areas of the world. Al-Qa'ida's increased rhetoric focused on South Asia and the announcement of a new affiliate, "Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent," suggests Al-Qai'da will focus resources on uniting established terrorist groups to engage in jihad in South Asia.

If we are going to reduce the terrorist threat over the long term, the terrorists will need to be defeated at the strategic level. The very complexity of addressing this evolving set of terrorist threats, and the need to undertake efforts that span the entire range from security to rule of law to efficacy of governance and pushing back on terrorist messaging in order to effectively combat the growth of these emerging violent extremist groups, requires an expanded approach to our counterterrorism engagement.

As we chart a course for our counterterrorism efforts going forward, we should continue to develop a broad approach that addresses three interrelated aspects of the problem: First, counter violent extremism in order to minimize the number of new foreign terrorist fighters and home-grown extremists; Second, ensure implementation and compliance with domestic, regional and international policy and legal frameworks regarding foreign terrorist fighters; and Third, anticipate and address the challenges involved with de-radicalizing the foreign terrorist fighters who inevitably will return from OSCE member states.

UN Security Council Resolution 2178 highlights that countering violent extremism – or CVE – is an essential element to addressing the foreign terrorist fighter problem. Addressing the underlying drivers that fuel the appeal and spread of violent extremism is key. Current research shows that there is no single driver of violent extremism, nor do individuals radicalize from thought to action in a linear fashion. Understanding the interplay of personal, group, community, sociopolitical, and ideological factors that lead to radicalization such as intergenerational tensions, boredom, perceived adventures, longing for peer acceptance, revenge, etc. is key to developing a coherent approach to the foreign terrorist threat fighter phenomenon.

Executing a successful CVE strategy requires a close partnership with local actors – municipal governments, families, neighbors, faith leaders, civil society organizations, youth, and women. Religious leaders and women, in particular can both challenge extremists’ distortion of religion and influence communities to embrace a more tolerant worldview. Any strategy should also promote tolerance and nondiscrimination and reaffirm civil rights protections for all communities, including religious and ethnic minorities as a way to prevent the marginalization that can drive vulnerable communities toward extremism.

A comprehensive response to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon should also include strategic communications and the power of social media to counter corrosive messages of violent extremism via counter narratives.

Countering Violent Extremism serves as a preventative approach to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, yet it requires policymakers and experts to expand the focus from today’s immediate threats and identify communities that may be susceptible to radicalization. This work in “periphery” areas enlarges the coalition of effective interveners such as regional organizations, civil society, private sector, and other actors who are unable to or find it challenging to work in crisis zones.

Ensuring the implementation and compliance with domestic, regional and international policy and legal frameworks regarding foreign terrorist fighters is another key element of a coherent response to counter this threat. UN Security Council Resolution 2178 requires countries to take certain steps to address the foreign terrorist fighter threat, such as preventing suspected foreign terrorist fighters from entering or transiting through their territories as well as implementing legislation to prosecute these individuals.

Even if we redouble our CVE efforts and effectively implement existing foreign terrorist fighter policy and legal frameworks, we still confront a major challenge with how to handle the large volume of fighters who inevitably will return to their home countries or a third party country once the conflicts in Iraq and Syria end. Governments and communities need to develop the ability to assess the risk posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters to determine how best to prosecute or reintegrate them into society. UNSCR 2178 requires states to

implement legislation to prosecute foreign terrorist fighters, and, where appropriate, returnees who pose a threat to their societies should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Once imprisoned, these individuals should be monitored to make sure that they do not have the opportunity to radicalize other inmates. Upon release, returnees should be placed into programs to prevent recidivism. Where it is inappropriate to imprison a FTF returnee, countries need to develop programs to reintegrate them into society effectively. In sum, while the criminal justice and security methodologies described in UNSCR 2178 and other framework documents continue to be essential in addressing the terrorist threat, we need to adopt a broader approach that captures the full spectrum of radicalization: from the front end, where governments and communities attempt to prevent vulnerable populations from being attracted to violent extremist ideologies; to the back end, where governments and communities assess the risks posed by individuals and determine how best to prosecute or reintegrate them into society.

While I have described elements that form part of strategies to counter the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, we need to ask ourselves, what can the international community collectively do to counter this threat? The long game lies in building an international coalition to prevent the rise of foreign terrorist fighters. There is no “one size fits all” approach to counter this global threat. In fact, this strategy is most successful when governments and community groups work in partnership, including at times with the private sector, to support innovative programs that address various underlying drivers of violent extremism. It is only through the continued coordination and cooperation among international partners that we can address the foreign terrorist threat fighter phenomenon.

Various regional and international efforts are already working these issues. The February White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism convened an unprecedented diversity of stakeholders from more than 65 governments, civil society leaders from more than 50 countries, and a dozen private sector institutions to discuss the enablers of violent extremism and outline an ambitious, affirmative action agenda to address violent extremism. Many delegations here have already pledged commitments in support of the White House agenda—including our Asian Partners. Japan announced a \$15.5 million contribution to build capacity in the Middle East and North Africa to counter terrorism and violent extremism, including by strengthening community resilience. The Republic of Korea is engaging IT companies to develop new initiatives to counter violent extremism. And Australia is planning to host a follow-on regional event of the White House Summit next week.

Other regional organizations have tackled this threat head-on: The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and its working groups on Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Countering Violent Extremism have developed a number of good practices based on rule of law with respect for human rights.

The Counter-ISIL coalition, which includes our host country and many Asian Partner states, have set forth five mutually reinforcing lines of effort to degrade and defeat ISIL by providing military support to partners, impeding the flow of foreign fighters, stopping ISIL’s financing, exposing ISIL’s true nature, and addressing humanitarian crises in the region.

ASEAN has also taken a lead on discussing security issues of global importance, such as ISIL.

Let me close by reiterating the very active role this very Organization has done in addressing the foreign terrorist fighter threat phenomenon. While Tom already outlined the numerous initiatives the OSCE has been doing to counter violent extremism, it is my privilege to proudly acknowledge the work of the OSCE in this area. We welcome the recent Security Day on Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism and look forward to its upcoming Counterterrorism Conference.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to brief such distinguished colleagues on a topic that concerns all of us around this table.