

Forum: General Assembly 1
Issue: Preventing the international funding of terrorism by governments
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Introduction

In 2017 over 8,500 terrorist attacks were carried out globally, resulting in the death of just under 19,000 individuals, with almost 20,000 sustaining injuries as a result of such attacks. These staggering statistics reflect the rise of terrorism over the last century to a role of prominence in the theater of international security policy, suggesting the effectiveness of unconventional warfare methods at shaping both public and foreign policy. Additionally, the rise of terrorism as a method of promoting ideological beliefs highlights the paradigm shift in the balance of global power as shifting in favor of those entities both capable of effectively utilizing terrorism, and that is morally unopposed to such actions. As of 2018, the United Nations officially recognized at least 30 different terrorist organizations seeking to capitalize on the apparent effectiveness of terrorism at enabling the pursuit of political aims.

However, while terrorism is, by nature, conducted by independent organizations operating to promote their political agendas, occasionally, the success of terrorism as a means of fostering ideological beliefs or deterring political criticism leads to the involvement of sovereign nations as sponsors for terrorist actions. In recent years, the United States' Department of State has imposed sanctions on four countries identified as sponsors of terrorism: Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria. The US argues that these states have continuously given support to at least one or more terrorist groups involved in inflicting violence for the sake of political gain. As such, these nations can be deemed to violate Clause Two of Resolution 1373 passed by UNSC in 2001, which requires all states to refrain from aiding or assisting any individual or group involved in terrorist activity.

As warfare continues to evolve into new forms, many states will find themselves turning to unconventional methods of ensuring the promoting of state-held ideological beliefs and policies. One such method that has grown in prominence is proxy warfare, particularly in the Middle East, where Russian-backed Shiite Muslim majority nations (notably Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan) are locked in conflict with the United States Saudi Arabia, which possess a Sunni Muslim majority. This has led to increased tension in

the region, occasionally escalating into paramilitary combat (conducted by groups such as the IRGC of Hezbollah), which some nations interpret as terrorism. Additionally, the apparent increase in terrorist activity will, for the foreseeable future, continue to grow, as such, threatening the peace and security of our world.

Thus, it has come to the General Assembly First Committee's attention that the growing issue of state-sponsored terrorism must be addressed.

Definition of Key Terms

Terrorism

Security Council Resolution 1373 defines terrorism as any criminal act conducted with the purpose of causing harm to individuals or society caused by ideological differences, especially those concerning religion, race, ethnicity, and philosophy. However, this definition of terrorism is still quoted vague and fails to recognize the extent to which terrorism could take almost any form, given that there is an intent to promote ideological beliefs.

Sanctions

Sanctions are penalties imposed by nations on other sovereign states, usually for actions that fail to align with a nation's ideological beliefs. On most occasions, such sanctions take the form of economic embargos or other financial penalties.

Ideology

Ideology refers to the specific set of beliefs held by an individual or a group, particularly about the formation of political, social, or economic values. Often, terrorist groups cite their ideologies as justification for their actions.

Sponsor

This term refers to the action of giving support, usually financial or material, to an individual or group due to a shared belief in the cause. In terms of international terrorism, sponsorship refers to the support that governments offer to terrorist groups.

Violent Non-State Actors (VNSAs)

Armed organizations or groups that are independent of the governance of nations and which utilize violence as a means of pursuing their goals.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

An international intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 under the mandate of preventing money laundering, later changed in 2001 to include combatting the funding of terrorism.

Background

Established measures to prevent state sponsorship of terrorism

In recent years, the increasing threat of state-sponsored terrorism has prompted the international community to propose various means to disrupt the financing of a terrorist organization under the presumption that, without access to large pools of funds, the threat of terrorism will be nullified. Such measures include multiple United Nations Resolutions (see Appendix), as well as the creation of the FATF. In addition, many nations have developed their own counter-terrorism forces intended to deter the threat of terrorism and punish those found to be partaking in terroristic activities, but the nature of the issue of state-sponsored terrorism as revolving around finances and national sovereignty makes it highly difficult for individual nations to take action, and international efforts are still mostly inconsequential. However, while these measures have proven to be somewhat successful at curbing the overall international funding of terrorism, they fail to present a clear and effective solution to deterring the state-sponsorship of terrorism.

History of state-sponsored terrorism

Early history

The highly secretive nature of terrorist organizations, as well as those states that choose to sponsor terrorist activities, makes it difficult to trace a clear history of state-sponsored terrorism. Some claim that the first such instances of financial relationships between terrorists and governments were developing at the turn of the 20th century, citing the theorized Serbian support for the radical nationalist group The Black Hand, which contributed towards the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand. While this is no doubt the earliest example of states providing funds or other means of support to terrorist groups (by some definitions the Sons of Liberty during the American Revolution could be considered a terrorist group funded by the state), the relationship between Serbia and The Black Hand is perhaps the first step in the evolution of modern state-sponsored terrorism as it exists today.

Post-World War II

This dynamic between nations and terrorist organizations remained relatively unchanged throughout the first half of the 20th century, likely due to the continued employment of traditionally conventional warfighting methods in notable conflicts such as the two World Wars. However, as warfighting started to develop and spread into less typical environments, this became difficult to

maintain, ultimately leading to a rise in terrorism. This was further contributed to by the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), from which arise the threat of "Mutually Assured Destruction" (MAD). This concept of the possibility for a global nuclear fallout to occur has significantly reduced the amount of internal fighting, resulting in a near stalemate. As such, terrorism as a means of promoting ideologies and combatting the goals of enemy states has become increasingly effective, especially considering that the relatively nomadic nature of terrorist groups (as opposed to the static status of most nations' significant cities) makes it far less feasible to utilize WMDs against a terrorist group than against a foreign government.

One example of post-WW2 state-sponsored terrorism is the Viet Cong (aka The National Liberation Front), a VNSA during the Vietnam War that was supported by the USSR, the Chinese government, and that of North Vietnam. Following the outbreak of conflict between Northern and Southern Vietnam in 1965, the North Vietnamese provided support to sympathetic guerilla warfighters (the Viet Cong) in their Southern counterpart, seemingly fulfilling the definition of state-sponsored terrorism.

Another example of state-sponsored terrorism in post-WW2 society is Iran's frequent sponsorship of various terrorist groups, especially the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). While the IRGC is considered a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces, its strong ties to other terrorist groups such as Hezbollah have earned itself the reputation of a terrorist group. Such relations between Iran and VNSAs has given Iran the title of the largest sponsor of terrorism globally, in turn bringing about sanctions from the United States and many American allies. While these organizations mentioned are not the only examples of terrorist groups financed and supported by national governments, they do provide insight into various styles of state-sponsored terrorism employed across the world today.

State-sponsored terrorism and religion

Perhaps the most common type of terrorist organization in today's society is those whose ideologies are based on religious beliefs (or at least, a perversion/radicalization of mainstream religious ideals). This is no different when discussing those organizations most involved in state-sponsored terrorism, as many theocracies (mainly Islamic governments in the Middle East) justify their involvement in terrorist activities through arguing that the organizations they're sponsoring are merely promoting their religious beliefs (despite the fact that, as repeatedly mentioned in this research report, most religious extremists follow a perverted version of their own religion rather than how the religion is intended to be practiced). Such is the

case with Iran, Pakistan, Iraq, Libya, and other significant hotspots for state-sponsored terrorism. These relationships are usually centered around supporting groups that promote the implementation of strict Islamic law, as well as those that wage a continued war against Israel over claims to the Gaza strip.

However, not all state-sponsored terrorism can be attributed to an alignment of religious ideals. One specific example of this is the Democratic Peoples' Republic of North Korea (DPRK), a very secular state that remains one of the largest sponsors of terrorism globally. Through repeated missile tests and the assassination of Kim-Jong Nam, as well as the provision of weapons to many Middle Eastern terrorist organizations, North Korea seems to only act in a manner that benefits them, lacking an ulterior motive. However, this does not make the DPRK innocent in their behavior; regardless of motives, the sponsorship of terrorism is a serious business and threatens international peace and security.

Major Parties Involved

Islamic Republic of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as aforementioned, is one of the largest sponsors of terrorism in the world due to its involvement with organizations such as Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, and Hamas. As a result of its sponsorship of terrorism, Iran has been placed on the United States' "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list and faces extreme sanctions. Iran continues to be a strong supporter of the above organizations in their fight against enemies of Islam (Iran's national religions).

Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK)

While the DPRK's direct ties to specific VNSAs are far vaguer than those of most other state-sponsors of terrorism, their role in facilitating international terror is still evident. Unlike the other nations on the "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list, most of North Korea's terrorism is conducted by its government instead of going through proxy organizations. Such actions include repeated cyber-attacks on banks and enemy governments, as well as multiple attempted assassinations of any individuals deemed dangerous to the DPRK. In recent years the DPRK had seemed to be entering a phase of rationalization and de-escalation until recent months when peace-talks with the US and other foreign powers crumbled.

Sudan

From 1993 until April of 2019, Sudan was under the rule of President Omar al-Bashir, a dictator accused of fostering relations with a multitude of Islamic terrorist groups. This earned Sudan a spot on the

"State Sponsors of Terrorism" list, but the recent change of power in Sudan has helped ease tensions among the Sudanese government and international peers, and most nations recognize the new regime's legitimacy and lack of ties to terrorism. While it is still on the list, the United States is in the considering beginning the process of removing the African nation, thus opening it up to further financial aid and infrastructural investments.

Syria

The current Syrian regime utilizes inhumane methods of protecting their ideologies, violating the human rights of their citizens. Such methods include the deployment of chemical weapons in civilian areas, thus fulfilling one definition of terrorism. Additionally, Syria allegedly allows organizations, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, to maintain headquarters in Damascus.

Syria is also currently involved in a proxy war for influence in the Middle East, in which the Sunni Muslim majority Saudi Arabia is struggling with the Shia Muslim majority Iran for influence. In this conflict, Syria's government is a strong supporter of Iran, but many Syrian rebels foster pro-Saudi Arabian sentiments. This has led to vast infighting within Syria and has drawn the support of the pro-Iranian Russia and the Pro-Saudi United States.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

The Financial Action Task Force is an international organization that tracks economic interactions and analyzes potential terrorist threats, sharing the collected information with relevant member nations. The FATF also presents their findings and analysis of such findings in regular publications, including suggested policy frameworks for member nations, in turn providing a clearer perspective for legislative proceedings and policy writing of all member nations.

Pakistan

Much like Iran, Pakistan is a semi-theocracy that openly supports, and harbors organizations dedicated to promoting Islamic viewpoints and beliefs. Such groups include the Taliban and Haqqani. Pakistan has not only provided safe-haven and resources but also direct military intelligence resulting in casualties of foreign soldiers combatting religious violence in the Middle East and South Asia.

United States

The United States is quite involved in this topic as one of the major international actors in combatting state-sponsored terrorism. Through designating individual nations as “State Sponsors of Terrorism” the United States State Department pulls on its international influence to encourage a unified international stance against those nations found to be guilty of sponsoring terrorism. Additionally, the United States is also very involved in physically combatting terrorism as well, with over 60,000 troops currently deployed in the Middle East to suppress the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and other major terrorist groups.

Russian Federation

While Russia is not designated by the United States State Department (the de facto list for most nations) as a state sponsor of terrorism, there is some debate over whether they should be. Such controversy arises from their own backing of attempts to assassinate political dissenters (for example, Sergei Skripal), their usage of drone strikes against Syrian civilians, as well as close cooperation and financial support for Iran and Syria. They are heavily involved in the Middle East as part of a proxy war with the United States, in which Russia supports Syria and Iran while the United States supports Iranian rival Saudi Arabia.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As mentioned in the background information provided, the international community has rallied together to offer a wide variety of proposals to combat the financing of terrorism, but few have been highly effective. Over the past three decades, many resolutions have been passed, including:

- Security Council Resolution 2462, 28 March 2019 (S/RES/2462)
- Security Council Resolution 2178, 24 September 2014 (S/RES/2178)
- Security Council Resolution 1373, 28 September 2001 (S/RES/1373)

Additionally, the United Nations has a collective Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which discusses a multifaceted approach to eradicate terrorism and includes sections about preventing the funding of terrorism. Furthermore, the UN hosted the International Convention for the Suppressing of the Financing of Terrorism in 2000, which offered a forum for discussion on combatting state-sponsorship of terrorism. However, these methods have not shown any significant results, as those nations that do finance terrorism are so inextricably tied to the causes they support, and as such, are not easily convinced to change their status quo.

Regarding non-UN organizations, it can be stated that most governments have instituted their strategies to combat the finance of terrorism by nation-states, but these strategies tend to be unilateral and only able to disadvantage those nations involved in sponsoring terrorism superficially.

Possible Solutions

To best prevent the state-sponsorship of terrorism, the United Nations must implement measures that provide even harsher consequences than those currently in place, and each member state must pledge to support any measures taken fully. Additionally, work must be done to separate the ideologies of governments and terrorist groups into two distinct fields, hopefully eradicating the common ground between the two that tends to cause governments to support terrorist organizations. However, the nature of the United Nations General Assembly First Committee as lacking the power to implement or mandate any solutions forcefully makes it challenging to address this problem holistically, and as such creative solutions must be entertained. Such solutions include:

- The creation of a multilateral task force that can not only track the flow of finances being used by terrorist organizations, but that can also act on the data collected to arrest and prosecute both the terrorists involved and those providing the funds.
- The empowerment of the United Nations Security Council such that they are able to freeze the assets of any nation suspected of dealing with terrorist organizations. This would both prevent funding from reaching terrorists, as well as pressure those nations whose assets are frozen to cut ties with such organizations in order to regain access to their resources.
- Suggest the introduction of new international law that makes financing terrorism an equal charge to conducting terrorism and, as such, trying any individual found to be funding terrorism in the ICC.
- Similar to the point mentioned above, ensuring that any nations found guilty of funding terrorism be tried by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- Increasing measures to deradicalize society, especially by stopping the dissemination of violent ideologies, in turn minimizing the number of terrorist organizations existing in the world. This both lowers the amount of violence globally, but also makes it far easier to track those still perpetrating violence (as there are fewer acts of terror to investigate).
- Suggest that those states found to be supporting have sanctions imposed upon them until they can prove that they are no longer supporting violent organizations, as any nation

allowing for hateful violence to be conducted does not align with the mission and vision of the UN.

All in all, while these solutions might not address every single specificity of the topic at hand, they would provide a stable baseline for any GA1 resolutions hoping to combat the financing of terrorism. Once again, however, the problem of posing an effective solution while not impeding international sovereignty, as well as not overstepping the mandate of GA1, will make proposing an effective and holistic solution highly challenging to do.

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