Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Issue: Combatting terrorism while protecting Human Rights

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Introduction

Ever since the disastrous 9/11 attacks on the United States of America in 2001, combatting terrorism has become a priority among the international community. This widespread and global effort in fighting terrorism was coined as the War on Terror by former American president George W. Bush, shortly after the twin towers had been devastated. A series of military ramifications soon followed, with the Invasion of Afghanistan led by the United States Armed Forces in the October of 2001. Since then, a colossal total of up to 2 trillion USD has been spent on the war on terror. With inflation in mind, this war against terrorism cost the United States more than it cost to fight the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and World War 1, combined.

Regardless, terrorism and its devastating effects are still more prominent than ever, with hundreds of thousands of individuals and civilians suffering from the aftermath. Excluding the Syrian Civil War, there have been up to 270,000 civilians and humanitarian workers killed in the United States' post 9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Millions more have been displaced, their safety and well-being jeopardized by the conflicts. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), civilians affected are derived from their most fundamental of human rights, including the freedom of expression, the freedom of public assembly, and the right to social security; for example the rights to affordable housing, medicine, education and childcare.

There is an ongoing humanitarian crisis, and yet there are battles to be fought, wars to be won. That is the arduous and convoluted issue the Human Rights Council is presented with, and action must be taken and solutions must be formulated to address this undeniably pressing issue.
Definition of Key Terms

Terrorism

According to the Oxford English dictionary, terrorism is defined as “the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims." Terrorism can take many different forms and sizes, ranging from the 9/11 attacks mentioned above to the relatively recent Sri Lanka bombings. Although their motives may vary, terrorism is usually a method used by radical extremists or misguided ultra-nationalists to bring light upon certain issues. Furthermore, the United Nations’ stance is that “Terrorism is unacceptable in all its forms”.

International Terrorism

Although the International community has reached a consensus on the fact that terrorism is a persistent and highly unpredictable threat, they have not been able to reach a consensus on the definition of international terrorism. Although a dictionary definition exists, world leaders have deemed it too vague to address all the different forms of terrorism. However, the European Parliament seems to have a somewhat accurate definition, defining terrorism as “any act of violence or threat thereof notwithstanding its motives or intentions perpetrated to carry out an individual or collective criminal plan with the aim of terrorising people or threatening to harm them or imperilling their lives, honour, freedoms, security or rights or exposing the environment or any facility or public or private property to hazards or occupying or seizing them, or endangering a national resource, or international facilities, or threatening the stability, territorial integrity, political unity or sovereignty of independent States”. Terrorism is an international threat, and it has long-lasting effects reaching beyond the original location of the disaster.

The War on Terror

Also known as the Global War on Terrorism, the War on Terror is a global military campaign first initiated by the U.S. Government following the September 11 attacks. According to George W. Bush, their main enemy was “a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them." In 2013, former President Barack Obama declared the end of the War on Terror and began pulling troops from Afghanistan in early 2014. However, an unexpected rise of a new Islamic extremist group, known previously as ISIS and ISIL, led to a continuation of a fight against terrorism in the Middle East. Operation Inherent Resolve is the major ongoing international effort against terrorism. The term “The War on Terror” has received a fair share of criticism, with former President Barack Obama deeming that the term was a misnomer. Some argue that this trans-global effort in fighting terrorism was used by participating governments to pursue military or political objectives and
manipulating civil liberties. It has also been commonly criticized for its continuous infringement upon human rights.

**The Human Cost**

The term “The Human Cost” is used to identify the quantitative losses of human life in a certain conflict, accident, or any other incident in which human casualties need to be identified in mass numbers. i.e. the Human Cost of American war efforts in the Middle East total up to 600,000. this accounts for all casualties, including armed forces, civilians, and other individuals killed.

**Background Information**

**The 9/11 attacks and the following ramifications**

On September 11, 2001, 19 members of the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked 4 different aircrafts and proceeded with suicide missions on various targets in the United States. The first attack was around 8:45 am, when a commercial airliner Boeing 767 crashed into the north tower of the New York World Trade Center. The impact instantly killed hundreds of people and trapped hundreds more in upper levels. Initially, this was perceived as a freak accident, but little did the general public know that they were witnessing one of the most morbid and evil moments in international history. Around 18 minutes after the first impact, a second Boeing 767 collided with the south tower, causing tons of debris to be showered over the neighboring blocks. The situation soon took another horrifying turn when the structural integrity of the towers gave way and the north tower came crashing down, instantly killing thousands and seriously injuring up to 10,000.

As horrified Americans watched the events in New York unfold, another commercial airliner crashed into the Pentagon military headquarters. The jet fuel caused a massive inferno killing an approximate 200 individuals, including military officials as well as the airline passengers.

Meanwhile, a fourth plane took off from Newark Liberty International Airport. Because the plane was delayed, passengers were soon warned of the imminent threat they were about to face. Several passengers and flight attendants planned an attack on the extremists, but the chaos in the cockpit resulted in the plane spiraling down and crashing in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Although the exact targets are unknown, it is suspected that the White House, the U.S. Capitol, and several nuclear power plants were among the targets.

All in all, a devastating total of approximately 3,000 people were killed in the 9/11 attacks. Later, a terrorist group called Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attacks, which provoked an almost immediate response from the U.S. Government, with an international military effort to distinguish these extremist organizations.
Military Campaigns

Immediately following the attacks, the United States called for an international strike force that would mark the beginning of the War on Terror. The Authorization For Use of Military Force Against Terrorists (AUMF) was legally introduced on the 14th of September 2001, just 3 days after the attacks. To quote, this authorization allowed for the Bush administration to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or individuals.”

The first segment of the military campaign was Operation Enduring Freedom, also known as the War in Afghanistan. This mission, led by both British and American troops, was mainly deployed to oust the Taliban Government from Afghanistan, and to destroy any Al Qaeda fighters or their affiliates. In 2002, operation anaconda saw the first involvement of NATO troops in the war, with the United States cooperating with both NATO and non-NATO troops to destroy any remaining troops or militants that posed a major threat. In 2014, former President Barack Obama announced an end to this phase of the war, beginning the withdrawal of major offensive units in Afghanistan. The estimated human cost for this phase of the war was 147,124.

The second phase of the War on Terror is a result of an unpredicted rise of a new terrorist group. Officially known as the Islamic State (IS), but more commonly referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the radical Islamic extremist group rose to power in major parts of Iraq and Syria, giving them immense wealth and power to maintain their terrorist regime. A large portion of their actions used to consist of conducting gruesome and invasive attacks on local populations to secure their governmental security, but the terrorist organization has been linked to executing thousands of civilians, U.S. journalists, and governmental employees. They also claim responsibility for attacks in Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, France, Belgium, Turkey, Bangladesh, and many more.

In December of 2018, President Donald Trump falsely claimed that the terrorist group had been defeated; However, the United States Department of Defense identified that the threat was diminishing and thus called for a near complete withdrawal of American troops from the war-torn regions. In March 2019, the last of ISIS’s territory was destroyed, and thus their defeat was promptly declared by the U.S. Government. However, it is evident that a complete defeat of ISIS has not happened. It is speculated that ISIS has been silently regrouping near Suwayda, a region in southern Syria. The fight against ISIS has drastically changed from territorial fights to the allied military forces slowly picking off high-value individuals and key leaders of the terrorist
organization. Although the group is no longer able to hold any territory, it is said that the group has regressed to bombing, executions, and scare tactics to gain social power among the locals. Also, there have resorted to guerrilla warfare, jeopardizing local populations and making complete destruction of the group extremely difficult. The death toll for the fight against ISIS totals up to 480,000 to 507,000 individuals. The battle is continuing.

**Post 9/11 Internal Response**

After the 9/11 attacks, there were several important governmental reformations and security precautions the government took. One of the more significant choices was that President Bush signed the Homeland Security Act of 2002, effectively creating the Department of Homeland Security. Its purpose was to ensure the safety of the American people and to control immigration, customs, border control, and of course terrorism. The U.S. Congress also passed the USA PATRIOT Act, which was mainly introduced to detect and prosecute terrorism.

**Human Rights**

The military campaigns in the Middle East tested the limits of human civility when thousands of individuals were being harmed on both sides. One of the main dilemmas with the conflict in the Middle East was the question of mass civilian deaths as a result of the conflict. Military action, most prominently drone strikes, killed thousands of civilians and jeopardize the safety of many more. Civilians in regions affected were stripped of the most basic of their human rights, most commonly freedom of speech, freedom of privacy, and the right of social security. Thousands of religious, cultural, medicinal, and educational institutions were reduced to rubble, making access to any of these near impossible for local civilians. Despite many humanitarian efforts, there remains a humanitarian crisis in the Middle East.

Another instance in which human rights are questioned is a result of the social stigma created around Muslims after the attacks were linked to radical Islamic extremists. Thousands of Muslim individuals have been neglected or avoided deliberately due to their religion or their appearance. They have faced discrimination by being identified as a threat; they are often denied service, called offensive names, targeted and treated with suspicion, and highly discriminated in general. This is an aspect that is often overlooked when addressing the human rights in question as a result of fighting terrorism. These individuals face constant racism, and in extreme cases, their safety is threatened as a result of the discrimination. Islamophobia, defined as the dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, affects millions of individuals around the globe. According to an anti-prejudice organization called “Council on American-Islamic Relations”, there have been 2599 recorded accounts of harassment due to anti-muslim bias in the United States. Abuse from harassment, customs and border control, hate crimes, the FBI, and employment affects
thousands of Muslim individuals across the world. These violations of Civil liberties are not only widespread but are an infringement upon these individuals’ human rights.

Terrorism in Europe

Although known for its history of terrorism, Europe was completely nonplussed by the sudden rise of terrorism in line with the approach of the 21st century. A large portion of these organized attacks was attributed to the Islamic extremist groups that targeted the regions. With the largest number of victims in Barcelona and Paris, these attacks have killed hundreds. The group mainly responsible is the Islamic State, having claimed responsibility for 4 of the 5 deadliest terrorist attacks in the European Union. Following the year of 2017, the continent saw a rapid decline of mass terrorism, and yet continue their aggressive efforts against terrorism. According to the Deputy Head of Counter-Terrorism at the Council of Europe, Jihadist attacks are only part of the picture and there have been hundreds of foiled attacks that cannot be revealed due to security reasons. Terrorism still remains as a threat in the continent.

Terrorism in Asia

In its peak of mass terrorist attacks, the continent of Asia faced the most amount of casualties among the international community. Disregarding the conflicts in the Middle East, many Asian countries have faced the consequences of radical Islamic terrorism. In the most recent case, a holy day meant for celebration and rebirth was plagued by the attacks in Sri Lanka on the Easter Sunday of April 21st, 2019. A series of bombs detonated in 3 churches as well as 3 luxury hotels, killing 290 individuals and injuring hundreds more. The attacks seemed to target the Christian minority of the island, carried out by jihadist extremists. This is just one of many attacks that alarmed the Asian continent. To this day, there are thousands of anti-terrorism techniques being implemented.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The United States of America

The United States was highly affected during the 9/11 attacks, and thus played a major spearheading role during the military campaigns in the Middle east. They continue to have a large military presence in the Middle East, with nearly 1,000 U.S. troops remaining in Syria to this day.

The Russian Federation

Initially beginning with alliances between the former Soviet Union and countries such as Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt, Soviet influence on the Middle Eastern regions were at an all-time peak in the
1950s and 1960s. The Russian Federation has been known for its infamous support of the Syrian Arab Republic, and also for its many interventions in the middle east.

**The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner**

With the prominence of violent extremism and armed conflict in the Middle East, the OHCHR (The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner) specializes in addressing the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. Its main role is to monitor, report, and initiate the appropriate humanitarian effort.

**The North Atlantic Treaty Organization**

NATO (The North Atlantic Treaty Organization) is a military alliance between states in North America and Europe. Originally founded to provide security against the Soviet Union, NATO continues to safeguard the freedom and security of its member states. Notoriously known for its Article 5, it utilizes collective defense which means “an attack against one ally is an attack against all allies”. Thus, when the United States was attacked, NATO member states actively aided during the military ramifications in the Middle East.

**Timeline of Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 11th, 2001</td>
<td>The 9/11 attacks - hijacked commercial airplanes crash into the world trade center, the Pentagon, and a field in rural Pennsylvania.</td>
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<td>September 13th, 2001</td>
<td>The White House deems that there is sufficient evidence that Osama Bin Laden is the main individual behind the attacks</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 20th, 2001</td>
<td>The Homeland Security Department is introduced. This is the beginning of a new age of security and safety in the U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 7th, 2001</td>
<td>The U.S. begins the bombardment of Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 28th, 2002</td>
<td>The U.S &amp; the U.K. draft a joint-resolution and presents it to the P-5 Nations of the UN Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 22nd, 2002</td>
<td>NATO denies U.S. request for military assistance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 29th, 2003</td>
<td>The U.S. finds weapons of mass destruction as well as biological weapons in Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 19th, 2003</td>
<td>A bomb kills UN representatives at UN Headquarters in Baghdad.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 4th, 2007</td>
<td>Afghan civilians are killed by U.S. armed forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 22nd, 2008</td>
<td>U.S. airstrike accidentally kills 90 Afghan civilians</td>
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September 4th, 2009  NATO planes attack two hijacked tankers, killing 100 Aghan civilians
July 25th, 2010  WikiLeaks releases 90,000 leaked classified files relating to the situation in Afghanistan, revealing many of the civilian victims as a result of airstrikes
May 1st, 2011  Osama Bin Laden, leader and founder of Al-Qaeda is killed by U.S. special forces in Pakistan.
December 30th, 2013  ISIS militants take large territorial portions of Iraq.
August 3rd, 2014  ISIS takes control of the Mosul Dam.
November 13th, 2015  130 people are killed in several attacks throughout Paris
December 19th, 2018  Trump declares the U.S. has won against ISIS, announces that forces will be pulled from Syria.
February 28th, 2019  100% of the ISIS caliphate is defeated.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Measures to eliminate international terrorism, 17 February 1995 (A/RES/49/60)
- Measures to eliminate international terrorism, 16 January 1997 (A/RES/51/210)

These two joint-resolutions were introduced as member states became increasingly alarmed by the sudden rise in radical Jihadist activity in the Middle Eastern regions. They suggested possible safety and protection mechanisms.

- The UN global counter-terrorism strategy, 2 May 2006 (A/RES/60/288)
- The fourth review of the strategy, 24 June 2014 (A/RES/68/276)
- Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Secretary-General report), 12 April 2016 (A/72/840)
- The implementation of the UN global counter-terrorism strategy, 19 July 2016 (A/RES/72/284)
- The sixth review of the strategy, 26 June 2018 (A/RES/72/284)

The most significant action taken by the United Nations upon the issue of terrorism was the UN global counter-terrorism strategy. First introduced in 2006, the strategy included thorough and elaborate plans for international counter-terrorism. The intended effects were for member states to help one another in ensuring national security. This bi-annual meeting continues, with the most recent review of the strategy being in June of 2018.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue
Terrorism can take many shapes and forms, and it has wreaked havoc on the face of the planet for a significant amount of time. However, until the sudden rise of radical Jihadist terrorism in the late 20th century, large-scale action was not needed to address the problem. Following the September 11 attacks, the military ramifications spearheaded by the United States was only the beginning of an aggressive worldwide purge of terrorism.

As mentioned above, a large scale international military effort penetrated the middle east, with the co-belligerents of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the French Republic and the Russian Federation fighting alongside 20 other member states and receiving aid from many more. This effort is ongoing, however because of the success of the campaign, a large portion of the militants have been defeated. A mass withdrawal of troops from the Middle East is imminent, and fighting is likely to resume with smaller guerilla-type warfare, with the intent of eliminating high profile terrorist leaders.

Alarmed by the rising frequency of terrorist attacks worldwide, there have been many precautions governments have been taken to ensure the safety of their citizens. Some examples are the actions taken by the member nations of the European Union to ensure national security. In a 2018 conference, the European Parliament drafted a report on counter-terrorism mechanisms. With these countermeasures in place, officials have been able to foil and uncover thousands of terrorist attacks before they happen, and they now have a better understanding of what has to be done in the case of one. Subsequently, the continent has been witnessing the decline of terrorist attacks in the last five years.

Another example of excellent anti-terrorism mechanisms are those implemented by the government of the Republic of Korea. According to the US Department of State, “The Republic of Korea (ROK) demonstrated excellent law enforcement and intelligence capabilities, and provided terrorism-related training to law enforcement officials from various developing countries.” Subsequently, the nation has become an international pioneer in the counter-terrorism efforts. As South Korea citizens became victims of terror in countries such as Nigeria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, the government decided to broaden its counter-terrorism interests beyond the Penninsula. South Korea also happens to be the only nation to have advanced counter-measures against all forms of cyber-terrorism. With these efforts, the small peninsular nation has been able to maintain its national security.

**Possible Solutions**

Although large quantities of conflict and destruction in the Middle East has diminished, there are still countless threats that humanitarian workers, civilians, and soldiers face to this day. The premise of the situation makes the number of solutions to address this issue both limited and complex.
However, there are still several ways to address the situation at hand. The first would be a continuation of what is already present in the Middle East. As stated previously, on the 28th of February in 2019, ISIS lost what remained of its caliphate; With ISIS no longer having a governing influence on territories, what remains of military action on the allied side is to pursue high ranking ISIS militants utilizing tactics such as guerilla warfare and large scale manhunts. The current military efforts have been highly successful so far, the efforts creating a sense of political instability and further contributing to the destruction of ISIS. President Trump’s plan largely consists of the deployment of special operations forces, specifically trained to take out these high profile individuals. A possible solution would be a continuation or a strengthening of this military campaign, including contributions from other allied states. Reinforcements and deployed task forces would significantly increase the speed of which results could be carried out. This would not only make a complete defeat of ISIS more timely, but it would also promote a sense of unification among allied nations, reinforcing military bonds that were made previously.

To address the second portion of the problem, there must be a complete recognition of the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. Possible solutions would include widespread programs dedicated to addressing and promoting human rights in the region. A more direct and crucial solution would be the establishment of a more advanced, fulfilling humanitarian aid system. Millions of individuals remain without access to education, food, clean water, pharmaceutical supplies, and medical access. This is why a stable social security system is crucial, as it will help individuals affected receive the humanitarian aid that is long overdue. This system could include a more generous portion of taxpayers’ money being directed toward these efforts, as well as collaboration with NGOs and other humanitarian organizations to supply the appropriate humanitarian aid.

Furthermore, it must be further emphasized that there are thousands of civilian casualties, as well as many more individuals becoming displaced, ultimately contributing to the growing refugee crisis. It is crucial that this growing refugee crisis is to be recognized by the international community with all means necessary. Quite recently, President Trump announced the mass withdrawal of American troops from the Middle Eastern regions. The same steps must be taken by allied nations to restore the stability of the nations in the region. However, it must not be mistaken with a complete withdrawal of troops; As stated above, the deployment of specialized forces is crucial in solving this crisis in the Middle East.

Also, it is important to address the social aspects of the humanitarian crisis. As mentioned initially, millions of Muslim individuals are affected by harassment and racial discrimination because of international terrorism and the situation in the middle east. A complete solution would be near impossible to achieve, as this would include changing the mindset of certain individuals. However, recognition and education efforts could decrease the prejudice that exists in society today.
The majority of the battle has been fought, the “terrorists” have been defeated. However, it is crucial that member states continue to follow through with what is left to do, including aid in restoring order, humanitarian efforts, and of course military action. With these solutions in mind, the international community must continue to recognize the severity of the situation in the Middle East, and restore order in the region.

Bibliography


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