



Second United Nations
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ON COUNTER-TERRORISM**

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**Second United Nations High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of
Member States**

**SESSION IV: Parallel breakout discussions: Responding to new and evolving counter-terrorism
challenges in the new decade**

29 June 2021, 3 p.m.

Good afternoon. As acting Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, I am honored to participate in this Second UN Counterterrorism High Level Week.

As we discuss the challenges for the decade ahead, it is important to take stock of the progress that we have made together and discuss approaches to confront the ever-evolving terrorist threat.

We have collectively made important progress countering al-Qa'ida and ISIS activities and dismantling their networks, exemplified by our collective success in defeating ISIS's so-called physical caliphate in 2019. Just yesterday, Secretary of State Blinken and Italian Foreign Minister Di Maio co-chaired the Ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, where the 83 Coalition members declared their joint determination to eliminate this global threat and pledged to strengthen cooperation to ensure that ISIS Core in Iraq and Syria, and its affiliates and networks around the world, are unable to reconstitute any territorial enclave or continue to threaten our homelands, people, and interests.

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The ISIS and al-Qa'ida threats continue to metastasize and evolve – with the growing ISIS threat in West and Central Africa and al-Qaida's continued operations in Central Asia or through its proxies in East Africa and Southeast Asia. We must remain vigilant. Our sustained focus on these groups is needed to further disrupt recruitment and plotting.

We must continue our collective efforts to prevent ISIS's resurgence and mitigate the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, FTFs, and their associated family members, who are detained in prisons and displaced persons camps in al-Hol and al-Hasakah. Thousands of FTFs and their family members remain in these locations in northeast Syria.

Repatriation and rehabilitation of FTFs and their family members is the best way to mitigate the burgeoning security and humanitarian crisis in Syria, prevent ISIS's resurgence in the region, and hold fighters accountable for their crimes through prosecution in their countries of origin.

Repatriation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of family members is vital to prevent further radicalization to violence of these individuals, including thousands of children. If we do not address this problem now, we as an international community are setting ourselves up for future failure and risk squandering the 2019 victory at Baghouz that destroyed ISIS's last enclave and foothold in Syria.

We are also working to confront the emerging terrorist threat posed by what we call racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists, or "REMVE." These violent extremists in the United States, particularly those who promote the superiority of the white race, have transnational connections with other violent extremists around the world. We are adapting our existing tools and authorities to meet this new challenge. On June 15, the United States released the National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism. While the focus of this strategy is on the domestic REMVE threat in the United States, we are also focused on the transnational linkages – especially the online connections – between violent extremists in the United States and REMVE actors globally.

REMVE will be a top priority for the United States in the years ahead. We are pleased to host a side event on this topic tomorrow, June 30, with the UNOCT, the Soufan Center, and the United Kingdom, during which we will explore these challenges more closely.

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Through multilateral efforts led by the United Nations, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, or GCTF, and regional organizations such as the OSCE, we can also leverage our respective national tools and capabilities against common foes. To this end, the United States has joined the Christchurch Call to Action to Eliminate Terrorist and Violent Extremist Content Online, pledging with other member governments and technology partners to work together to address terrorist and violent extremist content online, while upholding the freedoms and protections of speech and association afforded by the U.S. Constitution as well as reasonable expectations of privacy.

We must continue to engage with the technology sector to improve our mutual efforts to identify and counter often vague or coded language and symbols in terrorist and violent extremist messaging and propaganda, which are constantly changing to evade detection and mitigation. Enhanced information sharing on terrorist trends and tactics can improve our collective capacity to counter terrorist exploitation of information and communications technology, especially via online gaming platforms, messaging boards, and internet infrastructure, in addition to social media platforms. This can and should be done in ways that protect the fundamental freedom of expression.

The United States will continue to ensure that UN Security Council Resolution 2396 is effectively implemented. We will do this by championing strong international Standards and Recommended Practices at the International Civil Aviation Organization, leading GCTF initiatives together with the UNOCT and its Global Compact Entities on watchlisting and on terrorist travel in the maritime sector, and also by expanding INTERPOL connectivity for many frontline states. These combined approaches will be essential to identify and address new and evolving threats.

The United Nations, NATO, Council of Europe, INTERPOL, and the European Union are all developing new guidelines, protocols or standard operating procedures on the use of battlefield evidence, which has helped countries to identify terrorists, initiate investigations, and conclude successful prosecutions.

We will continue our good work to address evolving terrorist tactics and innovative pursuit of improvised threats beyond the historic scourge of explosive devices. For example, we are seeing increasing use of unmanned aerial systems by terrorists. We continue to work with our partners to address these evolving threats in the GCTF and other fora. We hope the UN Security Council will also address this threat.

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As we look ahead to the next ten years, we face a much more diffuse and dynamic terrorist threat. We must draw on our collective experience and continue to work together through the United Nations and other multilateral fora to confront these challenges to ensure a more stable and peaceful future.

Thank you. I look forward to the rest of today's discussion.

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