

Global Terrorism and the United Nations: Challenges and Responses

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Abstract: Global terrorism remains one of the most pressing challenges confronting the international community today. It transcends borders, ideologies, and methods, making it a complex and elusive threat. Terrorist acts often lack clear motivations or identifiable origins, though they are frequently rooted in socio-economic deprivation, political manipulation, or broader ideological agendas. At its core, terrorism represents an attempt to achieve political or strategic objectives through violence and unlawful means. The United Nations has long been engaged in efforts to combat terrorism and bring perpetrators to justice. Through its specialized agencies, the UN has developed a wide range of conventions, resolutions, and collaborative frameworks aimed at countering terrorism both nationally and internationally. However, despite these efforts, terrorist activities continue to occur across various regions of the world. This persistence highlights the need for the United Nations to adopt a more integrated, coordinated, and proactive approach to counterterrorism, combining security measures with strategies that address the root causes of radicalization and violence.

Keywords: deprivation, global terrorism, perpetrators, specialized agencies, violence, United Nations, counterterrorism

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I. Introduction

One of the biggest problems of the 21st century is the challenges of global terrorism. Spreading terrorism is a strong obstacle to improve international relations. However, it is unfortunate that in many cases, terrorism has been indirectly fueled by the governments of different countries. Different types of terrorism such as Jihadi terrorism, fundamentalist terrorism, ethnic terrorism, cross border terrorism, narco-terrorism etc. have been seen in various part of the world. All of these types of terrorism are part of international terrorism. Terrorists use the force of violence and create fear in various ways, such as bomb blasts, killing of people, and destruction of public property. They use a variety of methods to collect funds, such as hijacking aeroplanes, abductions for ransoms, narcotic smuggling and kidnapping of high-ranking government officials. Terrorists believe that their target can be achieved through terrorisation and violence. Since its inception, the United Nations has been working on countering international terrorism and trying to identify the perpetrators of terrorism. For these purposes, different organs and its specialised agencies carried out various activities and adopted various national and international conventions. Nevertheless, we have seen different types of terrorist activity taking place in different parts of the world.

Development of Global Terrorism

The presence of terrorism can be noticed long ago. With time, the manifestation of terrorism has taken place and is becoming more and more dangerous at the present time. The post-World War II period saw a radical change in the international political system. At this time, the whole world is busy ensuring international peace and security. The main responsibility for maintaining international peace and security rests with the United Nations. But whenever the Cold War broke out with the United States and the former Soviet Union, tensions and uncertainty re-emerged in the international arena.

The Cold War gave rise to various negative aspects of the international arena, such as arms race, nuclear arms race, international alliance politics etc. Different types of ethnic wars, use of violence, local wars, etc. were started for arms supply and to capture the arms sales market. This has resulted in the creation of an international arms trade market and the emergence of international terrorism. Through this arms market, modern weapons easily fall into the hands of terrorist groups and it helps the development of international terrorism.

United Nations' efforts at combating international terrorism

Since its inception, the UN has taken many initiatives to stop all kinds of terrorism. Some of these are discussed below.

Role of the UN General Assembly

UN General Assembly Resolution preventing international terrorism, 1972:

In 1972 UN General Assembly adopted a text in the 2114th plenary meeting. It was prefaced as "Measures to prevent international terrorism which endangers or takes innocent human lives or jeopardizes fundamental freedoms and study of the underlying causes of those forms of terrorism and acts of violence which lie in misery, frustration, grievance and despair and which cause some people to sacrifice human lives, including their own, in an attempt to effect radical changes" The main purpose of the text was to encourage cooperation against terrorism among all the members of UN. Though more than one-third members did not vote in favour of the resolution, as members were influenced by the situation of the Cold War. Nevertheless, it was a remarkable beginning in checking international terrorism by the UN.

General Assembly committees deal with counter-terrorism

I) Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee)

The Third Committee mainly worked on social and human rights issues. It can also address issues like terrorism related to crime prevention grounds.

II) Sixth Committee (Legal Committee)

The Sixth Committee is formed to focus on legal matters. In 1994, the committee made a remarkable declaration against international Terrorism. It defined terrorism as "criminal acts" that are unjustifiable "wherever and by whomever committed".

Ad Hoc Committee

The Ad Hoc Committee was formed by the General Assembly in 1996. It was mainly created to develop a comprehensive convention regarding Nuclear Terrorism, Suppression of Terrorist bombings, Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism etc. Since its formation, the Ad Hoc Committee has been working with Sixth Committee (Legal Committee).

Mandates of UNODC in counter-terrorism, 2002:

In 2002, the General Assembly approved a programme of UNODC's Terrorism Prevention Branch. The programme especially emphasises on legal aspects of counter-terrorism, strengthening the capacity of the national criminal justice procedures, implementation of universal legal instruments against terrorism, provisions of counter-terrorism issues to intergovernmental bodies, counter-terrorism issues for initiatives of the United Nations Secretariat etc. One of the important mandates taken by the General Assembly in 2007 is the Measures to eliminate international terrorism.

United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, 2006:

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is a resolution taken by the UN General Assembly. It emphasises on enhancement of regional, national and international efforts to combat terrorism. For the first time, all members agreed on a common strategic approach to combat terrorism.

It consists of four pillars:

1. Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism
3. Measures to build States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in this regard
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism

Role of UN Security Council:

The Security Council adopted various resolutions and also formed three important Committees to look into and take action regarding terrorism.

(I) 1267 Committee (1999) concerning Al-Qaida and Taliban and associated individuals and entities

(II) The Counter-Terrorism Committee (2001) and its Executive Directorate (2004)

(III) The 1540 Committee (2004) aims to prevent weapons of mass destruction from getting into the hands of non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

Security Council resolution 1456 (2003) reaffirms that States' measures to combat terrorism must comply with international law

Security Council resolution 1566 (2004) considers the possibility of establishing an international fund to compensate victims of terrorist acts

Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) includes soft law elements concerning the fight against terrorism

Role of the UN Secretariat

The Secretary-General can “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”

In July 2005, the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) was created by the former Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. It is an information-sharing body which has played an active role in the area of counter-terrorism. The Task Force has focused on various issues like the use of the internet for terrorist purposes, financing of terrorism, victims of terrorism, etc.

Role of the Terrorism Prevention Branch

The Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) is a part of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It provides technical assistance in the legal aspect of counter-terrorism. Its primary objective is improving the legal regime for responding to terrorism and responding to various mandates.

International conventions and protocols that relate to the prevention and suppression of terrorism

So many international conventions and protocols were adopted that relate to the prevention and suppression of terrorism. Some of these are:

Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed On Board Aircraft, 1963.

Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft, 1970.

Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation, 1971.

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons, 1973.

International Convention against the Taking of Hostages, 1979.

Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, 1980.

Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, 1988.

Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection, 1991.

Protocol to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, 2005.

International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, 1997.

International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, 1999.

International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, 2005.

Significant terrorist incidents in the World and the role of the UN

Since the early 1990's, serious acts of terrorism have been reported in various parts of the world. Countries around the world, especially China, India, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, South Asia and the Algerian part of Africa, have become centres of terrorism. During this time, terrorists were trained, especially in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and various parts of South Africa. Since then, terrorists have been able to carry out their activities in different parts of the world and have emerged as full-fledged international terrorists. India continues to face the menace of cross-border terrorism at that time. Terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba, Harkat-ul-Ansar Talibans of Afghanistan are emerging in a much stronger and more dangerous form and Osama Bin Laden is at the top position of terrorism. At that time, about 50 terrorist groups were active in different parts of the world to fulfil their politico-religious and other narrow interests.

Terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September, 2001 and the UN

The United Nations played a constructive role in countering terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September, 2001. The United Nations Security Council strongly condemned the barbaric attack, saying it was a serious threat to international peace and security. UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1368, on 12 September 2001. The Security Council responded by saying that it was ready to take all necessary steps to combat international terrorism according to its Charter responsibilities. With Resolution 1368, the United Nations appeals to all countries of the world to cooperate in finding and punishing those responsible for organizing this attack.

The Beslan school hostage crisis or the Beslan massacre on 1st September, 2004 and the UN

UNICEF has introduced a Peace Education and Tolerance programme in various regions of the Russian Federation to foster dialogue and tolerance between the children of these troubled Republics. UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura opined that “I am appalled that a school and its pupils are being used for political ends” and further that “Schools are where children learn to live together. The safety of schools must never be threatened. I condemn these actions in the strongest possible terms.”

The Christmas massacres in Haut-Uele District, Democratic Republic of the Congo on 24–27 December 2008

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned this attack on 30 December 2008 and said “the appalling atrocities reportedly committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in recent days” The United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo airlifted Congolese soldiers to Faradje to prevent future attacks.

Camp Speicher Massacre, Iraq, on 12 June 2014 and UN

The UN Human Rights Council has tried to find out the facts and circumstances of such Massacre committed by ISIL and associated armed groups. The Council condemns the terrorist acts as systematic violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law and adopted a resolution on the issue (A/HRC/S-22/L.1).

Ankara bombings in Ankara, the capital city of Turkey on 10 October, 2015

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has denounced the terrorist bombings in Ankara, Turkey on 10 October 2015. President of the UN General Assembly Mogens Lykketoft said “As a representative of all the member states of the United Nations, the President of the UN General Assembly expresses solidarity with the Turkish Government and the Turkish people and reaffirms the UN’s undeterred resolve in the fight against the shared threat of terrorism,”

As-Suwayda attacks, in and around As-Suwayda, Syria on 25 July, 2018

Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said about the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) related to the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons programme. He expressed that Joint Investigative Mechanism was taking on those who wanted to carry out further attacks.

Diyala massacre in rural al-Azim district, Diyala Governorate, Iraq, on Friday, 21 January 2022 and UN

In response of the attack in Diyala province, Iraq, the UN has made a press statement and condemned it with the strongest terms as a cowardly terrorist attack. The UN Security Council expressed their support to Iraq for the democratic process, territorial integrity, sovereignty etc. The UN Security Council also reaffirmed their support for fight against ISIL/Da’esh.

The 2023 Mastung Bombing, on 29 September 2023, Mastung District, Balochistan

On 29 September 2023, during an Eid Milad-ul-Nabi procession near the Madina Mosque, Mastung District, Balochistan, a suicide bomber detonated his device, killing 60 individuals and injuring between 50 and 70 others. Among the dead was Mastung’s Deputy Superintendent of Police, Nawaz Gashkori. Although no group immediately claimed responsibility, Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP) was suspected based on operational patterns.

The bombing led to a provincial state of emergency, international diplomatic condemnation, and a national three-day mourning period in Balochistan. Condemnations came from UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Pakistan’s leadership, and multiple international governments, reflecting the global resonance of the attack.

II. Conclusion:

The main goal of the creation of the UN is to ensure international peace and security and biggest challenge to this goal is the Rise of Global Terrorism. That is why, since the formation of the United Nations, it has been taking all possible actions and measures against global terrorism. All the efforts of the United Nations against international terrorism will be successful only when all the countries of the world take a very active role against terrorism and help the United Nations in all possible ways. We all need to understand that the scourge of terrorism is the enemy of all mankind. So rigorous actions should be taken against those who are supporting and aiding terrorist activities. We must always keep our eyes open so that terrorists do not receive any financial support from us directly or indirectly.

The biggest problem facing the United Nations in countering international terrorist activity is a lack of economic funds. Therefore, the United Nations needs to be more proactive in raising funds, and more transparent and systematic guidelines are needed for the proper use of funds. Another major issue facing the United Nations is the challenge of risk management of the UNHCR. The 9/11 attacks and the Baghdad attacks in 2003 in the US have made the risk management challenge even more serious. However, some critics believe that the role of the United Nations is not the same in all cases. The role of the United Nations is seen to be much more active in the case of the world’s major powers. So, the United Nations needs to be more neutral and bias-free in this regard and needs to take action against terrorism in a much more coherent and constructive manner.

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