Towards an International Complementary Effort to Counter Violent Extremism

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In the past two decades, the ideology of extremism and violent behavior emerged as a dangerous problem on the global stage, but it had the strongest impact on Muslim and Arab countries. There are certain factors that have contributed to the emergence, intensity and depth of this problem, including the existence of a conducive environment in the countries that had gone through revolts and internal fighting. And as a result, such conditions had paved the way for extremism and violence to grow over time. In those Arab and Muslim countries, such environment still provides a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism where terrorist activities are carried out and from which extremist ideology spreads. Furthermore, this environment, in addition to the inaction or disregard of the problem by some members of the international community in turning their words into action in fighting terrorism, has contributed to giving further lifeline and flexibility in carrying out its terrorist acts here and there, with ease. And although many countries nowadays, if not the entire international community, talk about extremism, terrorist behavior and its social dangers in terms of human, political and economic aspects, yet the efforts exerted in countering it are not up to the task and not commensurate with the dangers posed by terrorism.

However, no one denies that there are countries that have taken all means and measures to counter terrorist organizations successfully, across all levels, and have gained a deep experience in addressing extremism and violent behavior.

Thus, it is worth stressing that violent extremism threatens the entire world, whether directly through the exercise of terrorist action and behavior or in directly, by threatening or harming interests. Yet, in spite of that, there are countries that directly or indirectly, support, harbor or make use of

terrorism or overlook its activities. Such countries may have a false sense of safety and that terrorism would not backfire at them. Certainly, this is a wrong assumption, since terrorists have an opportunistic mentality of the end justifies the means. And for that reason, terrorists have no qualms about carrying out their terrorist attacks inside the territories of the countries that support them. Hence, countries that offer diverse support of terrorism will bear the brunt of the same terrorism they try to exploit or take advantage of it for their own purposes or in order to inflict damage to other countries or communities. And only time will tell the validity of this prediction.

Violent extremism has become a huge threat to the security and well-being of all people. While many countries continue to adopt robust and comprehensive strategies that have hampered the efforts and activities of extremist groups and disrupted their terrorist networks, yet the psychology of these groups indicates that they do not give up easily. Further, these groups are able to adapt to measures taken against them by some countries. Such groups have a conviction that they are fighting a war against their enemies and that a war can sometimes be won and at other times can be lost, but it has to go on due to their conviction that they are right in their fight against evil, even if it wins some battles. Such trend is reinforced by the availability of modern technology that enables them to attract and recruit elements, receive funding from various sources, broadcast propaganda and justify their terrorist actions.

Over the past years, we saw so many terrorist attacks that took place in many Muslim and non-Muslim countries. We also saw how these groups moved from one area or region to another. And perhaps West Africa today, especially the Sahel region, has the lion share of these groups, thus becoming an open arena for many terrorist factions, such as Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Daesh affiliates spreading like wildfire in many countries. Perhaps these groups have found an opportunity in these countries to restore the luster they lost in other parts and countries, in an attempt to prove that they are still around, relevant and that they will continue their struggle against their enemies, so the international community will not enjoy peace and security and will remain alert and vigilant. Moreover, these groups may have concluded that the Sahel countries provide them safe haven that enable them to readjust their strategies and plans seeking potential high value targets.

It is worth noting that terrorist attacks have had not only targeted Arab and Muslim countries, nor its perpetrators are solely Muslims, as some anti-Muslim individuals like to repeat Islamophobic cliché that terrorism is strictly an Islamic phenomenon, in order to discredit Islam, despite the fact that such individuals understand that Islam has nothing to do with terrorism, even if those who carry out such acts belong to Islam. Thus, we saw the heinous acts that hit France, Germany, USA, Belgium and Japan with different motives and from different faiths, further affirming that terrorism has no faith. Similarly, it is unlikely that such terrorist operations, which are expected to surge and expand in the near future, will decrease, if the global counterterrorism situation remained as it is, countries that support terrorism faced no sanctions and complementary international cooperation remained non-existent or remained at the lowest level.

So, this is a grave situation that necessitates that the international community must act seriously in a complementary fashion in its war on terrorism, in its various domains, starting with an overall intelligence cooperation through gathering integrated information about terrorist organizations, leaders, funding sources, recruitment, attraction methods for followers, supporters, sympathizers, media, propaganda techniques, modes of thinking and the objectives they seek to accomplish. Thus, information sharing is the most important step in countering terrorism, if it is done properly, then comes the rest of other integrated cooperation steps in laws, control measures, as well as paying particular attention to the tracking of funding sources because that will cut off the lifeline of terrorist organizations.

Hence, the international community, faced by terrorism, should take a step forward by carrying out effective measures that curb terror behavior, through an integrated approach in fighting terrorism. This should include a holistic approach and not merely aligning the security and ideology components, but by further adopting a complementary method by all international community of nations. This is because the menace of terrorism is no longer confined to a particular country and will never be so, even if it currently appears as such. In fact, history proves that it is expanding and crossing borders due to various factors, including looking out for interests, disintegration, escape of terrorist groups, or emergence of a new generation in communities that have security vulnerabilities.

Likewise, all countries should adopt a complementary work philosophy in countering violent extremism, at inter-security agencies, out of social responsibility. So, community members and institutions are directly responsible for achieving communal security in collaboration with security and law enforcement agencies. And if we succeed in doing so, we could create a community that rejects violent extremism. Therefore, we have seen such terrorist groups that do not find social incubators will go to vulnerable communities that suffer from social crises and lack social responsibility.

Thus, the complementary approach at the domestic and external levels means taking uniform, and complementary measures with clear and achievable objectives. This entails that all should countries act together in countering terrorism and if a country opt out or hesitate, it will appear suspicious by raising doubts that country is benefiting from the terrorists. And if that is the case, that country should be sanctioned as the case with terrorist organizations. At the same time, the domestic complementary approach should also apply in a coordinated manner among security agencies.

This complementary approach would be better served under the umbrella of the UN by virtue of being an international multilateral organization for all countries that has the moral financial capacity to enforce international obligations regarding counterterrorism. This will give the international community the assurance in standing together in a joint effort to counter terrorism. And it is time to take such action by the UN with the support of all member countries, provided that this support must be practical and impactful, not just with words but with deeds and actions, whether from the viewpoint of actual actions towards terrorist organizations or the financial support to efforts in the fight against terrorist conduct.

Finally, I will conclude by saying that terrorism can't be fought by a single country or with a limited number of countries while being left alone to confront terrorism or to deal with it as a domestic or regional matter. Meanwhile, terrorist violence and extremist ideology can't be tackled with a singular approach or be left to one agency that takes solely security solutions. So, in order to defeat terrorism or mitigate its risks with the least cost in treasure and blood, we need to adopt two-paralleled and coordinated approaches: an integrated action by all members of international community that lays out comprehensive strategies since violent extremism is a joint

international responsibility that requires the highest levels of coordination and cooperation among all countries in order to curb this grave danger that threatens both individuals and communities alike. And since this is a shared responsibly in terms of the preventive and treatment sides, we need the integration of both roles among inter-governmental agencies, at the local level of each country, as well as working in conjunction with civil society institutions with regard to the prevention and treatment aspects.

So, through this integrated approach and collective action we can deprive terrorism of safe havens that allow the terrorists to carry out their local and international terror. This could be done by providing all means, efforts and capabilities that help in achieving this goal.