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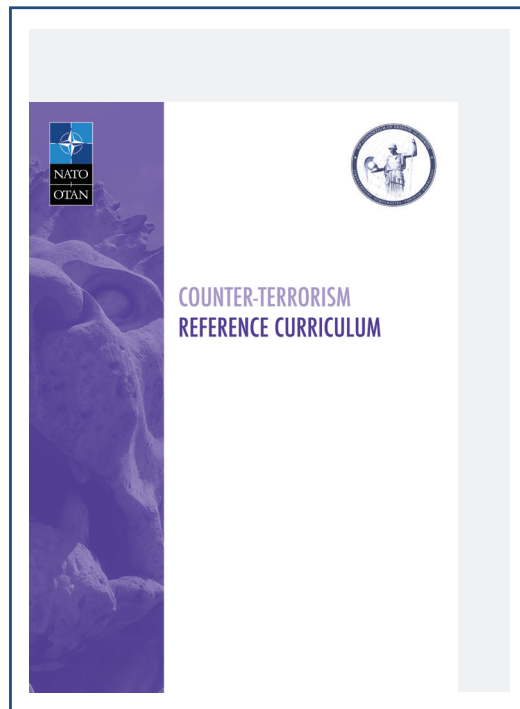
International Reports

Monthly Issue - Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition

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COUNTER-TERRORISM
REFERENCE CURRICULUM

The Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum (CTRC) was launched by NATO on 12 June 2020. It was prepared by the Partnership for Peace Consortium's (PfPC) Combating Terrorism Working Group (CTWG), which is a multinational team of volunteers drawn from Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. The reference consists of two sections: The first section introduces the curriculum, its themes, and the topics of each theme, whereas the second discusses the usefulness of this reference's ideas, themes and reviews.

Goal and Content

The curriculum deals with terrorism and counterterrorism, and aims to produce a nuanced and broad approach to understanding the concepts of terrorism and counterterrorism by looking at past problems. This helps in understanding the current dilemmas with the intention to try and anticipate future challenges to enable all learners in NATO member states and partner countries or organizations to develop a complete picture of the issues and challenges related to national, regional and international security policy and defense policy implications.

The reference curriculum provides a multidisciplinary approach that helps learners develop the knowledge and skills needed to understand terrorism and counter-terrorism in order to successfully anticipate and mitigate potential threats. It provides means of identifying and securing a better understanding of holistic counterterrorism strategies, and can be used to bridge disciplinary and professional boundaries.

The reference provides some thoughts that help in understanding the terrorism phenomenon which are:

- Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, nor does it have one type. It changes according to time and place, but its essence never changes.

- The method of terrorism does not just entail violence but is also an act of ideological communication, as well as psychological warfare against the public morale and state apparatus.

- Terrorism is a global threat that requires shared solutions.

- Terrorism, extremism, radicalism and sectarianism have been experienced by all nations, but these forms of fanaticism are not tied to, or part of, any religion, creed or race of people.

- The very endurance of terrorism as a tactic, strategy, and way of warfare demonstrates that it remains, evolves and spawns new movements that present threats that may not have been previously envisioned.

- Terrorism is a methodologically diverse issue. Its definition is still discussed to suggest the best ways to study and counter it.

- As the COVID-19 pandemic altered virtually every facet of human life globally, it also potentially shapes how terrorists recruit and plot new and evolving targets of opportunity. Terrorists could exploit this as well as other scenarios and situations, such as ensuing regional tensions among nations to set new goals.

Curriculum Themes

The curriculum is not confidential. It is composed of open-source information, and identifies some sources which should be accessed with caution. It does not delve into the granular detail required of tactical prescriptions, instead keeping its perspective broad. It is an output on which researchers can build in the future. It provides its topics in blocks, and each block includes subjects (lectures) in sections which are: Goal, Description, Learning Objectives, Issues for Consideration and Learning Methodology.

In the (Goal) section, the topic is prepared for and the goals to be achieved are mentioned. In the (Description) section, the elements of the topic are mentioned briefly with names and examples. In the (Learning Objectives) section, lessons learned from the topic are included. In the (Issues for Consideration) section, some questions related to the topic are posed in order to brainstorm the trainees' minds and relate the topic with other relevant topics.

In the (Learning Methodology) section, the goals of learning are achieved through reading scholarly articles, taking notes, giving lectures, and having discussions in small groups in the classroom.

The curriculum consists of 146 pages that are divided into four themes which are:

Theme 1: Introduction to Terrorism
It defines terrorism and the various characteristics often used to describe it. It also explores terrorism's past, and explicates its varied types and the varied longevity of terrorist groups and their ability to survive.

Theme2: Understanding Ideologies, Motivations and Methods
It analyses the radicalization processes that provide modern terrorist groups with members and sympathizers. After examining both violent extremist and transnational ideologies, it then explores personal and organizational motivations in pursuing terrorism, as well as the methods by which individuals and groups do so.

Theme 3: Contemporary Challenges & Evolving Threats
It is grounded in the state of terrorism today, beginning with the financial methods groups use to fund attacks and maintain their organizations. It then projects a range of emerging threats, including the potential acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction, the technological innovations exploited by terrorist groups to advance their goals, and the flow of foreign terrorist fighters

Theme 4: Counter-Terrorism: Strategy, Operations & Capacity Building
It focuses on what states can do to combat terrorism threats. It assesses the tools available to states at the international, regional and national levels to best protect their citizens and institutions, designating the use of those tools to the relevant bodies and how they combine to

form a cohesive national strategy. It further focuses on the methods by which states can bolster their capacity to combat terrorism and outlines the use of table-top exercise training to assess vulnerabilities and work toward building the necessary capability to ensure future security.

Appendix

At the end of the reference, a document entitled TTX Guidelines is included. It is what is discussed in Theme 4. It includes TTX Summary, Learning Objectives of TTX, Roles, Expectations, Format, Scenario Development, Outputs and a useful counter-terrorism engagement and capacity-building platform that TTXs provide. The latter includes Operationalization of international/regional/national counter-terrorism strategies, Identification of gaps and eliminating overlaps, Development of doctrine, policies and training requirements, Bolstering international and domestic interagency collaboration, Promotion of train-the-trainer concepts and Moving beyond theory to practice.

Benefit and Criticism of the Reference

It is important to study the benefits gained from the reference which is considered a cognitive and training approach that can be used in the training activities of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC). This can be achieved by examining the content of its themes in details, critiquing it, and discussing what can be adopted, rejected, modified, or added to its content.

Theme 1: **Introduction to Terrorism**

It deals with the definition of terrorism, and discusses the various definitions of terrorism, their characteristics, concerns and the differences between them. It also examines the reasons for a lack of consensus on a definition of terrorism among academics and practitioners.

The reference argues that the reason behind not having a single universally accepted definition of terrorism is the diverging views on what constitutes terrorism, which often results from disagreements surrounding people's right to self-determination, as enshrined in the UN Charter. The Charter does not adjudicate between what would normally be considered crimes and the right to resist tyranny. A significant barrier to definitional unanimity is framed by perspectives, moral judgements, prejudice and geopolitical interests leading to the phrase, 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'.

However, some common principles help formulate some key characteristics of terrorism. Terrorism is violence or the threat of violence perpetrated by non-state actors targeting 'non-combatants' with a goal of achieving psychological impact on an audience beyond the event itself for a political, social, religious, or ideological purpose.

Then, the similarities and differences between insurgents and terrorist organizations are discussed in order to present a clear picture of insurgents or separatist groups, and how they differ from terrorist organizations. Both insurgency and terrorism are types of asymmetric, irregular warfare where the capabilities possessed by combatants result in the use of atypical military operations, often including terror tactics. An insurgency is a struggle for control over a political space (governance and geography) between state and non-state actors, who are characterized by significant support from a portion of the population or national group. A common differentiator between terrorism and insurgency is the frequency in the use of violence as well as the selection of targets. Terrorist violence is fitful and sporadic with a primary focus on non-combatants. Insurgent violence is sustained and often is the precursor to civil war.

Under the heading "History of Terrorism", this theme introduces ancient and modern terrorist groups and events, clarifying terrorism's motivations, changes and tactics in each time period such as the violent acts against certain ruling elites (such as the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C), guerrilla warfare and assassinations (such as the Sicarii, the Order of Assassins), sectarianism and revolution that occur during or after periods of political change (such as the 'Gunpowder Plot' to blow up the British Houses of Parliament on November 5, 1605), anarchism and extreme nationalism that adopted the ideas of individual freedom, secularism and the nation-state (such as the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 by the Narodnaya Volya), and revolutionary, counter-revolutionary and state-sponsored terrorism (such as the Iranian regime, the Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega's 'Dignity Battalions' (1988-1990) and the White Terror in Russia, 1917-1920).

The theme also outlines the key factors that contribute to the spread of terrorism. Terrorism never completely ceases but individual terrorist campaigns and the groups that wage them eventually decline. There are three types of drivers that contribute to radicalization and, by extension, the spread of terrorism: **Push drivers** include "state repression, deprivation, violence, and discrimination", **Pull drivers** include "a sense of 'brotherhood and belonging', material or political gain, or reputation enhancement" and **Personal drivers** include "psychological disorder or traumatic life experience".

This section outlines the life cycle of terrorist organizations, which may be divided into three main stages: emergence, duration and decline. The emergence stage concerns how and why a group is formed, created or otherwise comes into play. The duration stage spans an organization's period of activity and may consist of one or more sub-stages that reflect an organization's evolution. If the organization is unable to adapt, it will enter a stage of decline.

The material of this theme is clear and smooth. It provides the reader, the trainee, and the practicing expert with a full explanation about the lack of a standard definition of terrorism. It presents the history of terrorism and terrorist incidents in a way that helps understand the phenomenon by linking the motives of terrorism in historical precedents with the motives of terrorism in the modern era. It also provides the distinction between terrorism and insurgency by presenting the similarities and differences. It explains to the reader the reasons of the spread of terrorism, and how terrorist organizations emerge and grow, then decline and disappear, in a detail that deals with the life cycle of the terrorist organization.

The subject of the first theme can be an introductory training curriculum to be presented in a series of lectures that provide a facilitated introduction to training courses on terrorism and combating terrorism. These topics can be developed by adding some important points such as the position of religions on terrorism

THEME 2: **Understanding Ideologies, Motivations and Methods**

Theme 2 explores ideologies, motivations and methods. Under the heading "Overview of Radicalization", it analyses the concepts of radicalization, extremism and violent extremism which are tools of warfare used against the foundations of society, which are results of extremist ideas that call for authoritarian solutions, violent methods, ideological motives as well as harnessing democracy and the rule of law to impose a radical change. It also explores the different paths of extremism that lead individuals to join extremist and terrorist groups. It then discusses Violent Extremist Ideologies: The ethno national or religious "such as the Irish Republican Army, Radical Left-Wing Ideologies (Red Brigades of Italy) and Neo-Nazi Supremacist Ideology that is based on white supremacy and hatred of minorities which is something common in the European and Western societies.

The theme also discusses extremist ideologies and doctrines such as al-Qaeda and ISIS and some religious symbols who inspire extremist thought including Sayyid Qutb, Hasan Al-Banna and Abdullah Yusuf Azzam. It also discusses organizational narratives, which is the bridge between abstract extremist beliefs and acts of violence. It is reflected in anti-Western calls for the establishment of the caliphate (such as "Inspire" magazine of Al-Qaeda, and "Dabiq" magazine of ISIS)

After that, the theme outlines the motivations of extremism and terrorism in three modules which are **Push and Pull Factors, Lone Actors, and Group Motivations and Strategic Objectives.** According to the theme, there are 'macro' and 'micro' factors that motivate terrorist groups. On the macro level, TGARM groups are motivated by ideology and the strategic needs of the group. On the micro level, the histories and personalities of members and leaders are strong motivators. Lone actor terrorists are individuals that perpetrate violence without direct interaction, training or support from terrorist groups. They represent unique challenges for security because of the inability to track and predict their activity. "Examples of this are Timothy McVeigh in the USA in 1995, the Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting in 2018, and the Christchurch Mosque Attacks in 2019". Finally, the theme discusses the module of Group Motivations and Strategic Objectives. It explains how group motivations are converted into strategic objectives by terrorist groups, and then turned to be criminal practices. "such as Boko Haram in northern Nigeria".

This theme concludes with a discussion of terrorist methods within various modules which are:

- Terrorist Networks and Organizational Structures such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Understanding terrorist networks' internal and external support structures is critical to countering terrorist threats.

- Command and Control: It is important to understand and determine the command and control chain and how terrorist networks use technology in order to confront the threats of these networks.

- Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs): Terrorist TTPs are often developed through lessons learned from other groups, depending on their relative success and potential transferability across conflicts and environments.

- Global Environment and Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs): Globalization plays an important role in spreading foreign fighters, the concept of "global jihad", and exporting extremist beliefs to the West.

- Recruitment Methods – Physical Engagement: Transnational extremist networks use methods such as physical proximity, personal contact and shared connections to engage, radicalize and recruit new members to their cause. Virtual methods such as social media are also used to recruit fighters.

- Terrorist Insider Threat: Unlawful use of violence by employees or trainees, usually within a position of trust, against the organization they are affiliated with. "Such as the U.S. Army psychiatrist Nidal Malik Hasan in 2009 and the British Airways employee, Rajib Karim.

Although this theme discusses vital and varied topics that benefit the recipient and the practicing expert, it has not succeeded in presenting the dogmatic and belief issues. Some religious figures such as Sheikh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, and the renewed Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, have been mentioned as ideological theorists of extremist thought. Their opinions and fatwas have been presented as a motivation for terrorist groups and interpreted in favor of their extremist and terrorist orientations! This presentation is very superficial and does not properly correspond to the terrorist problem. It directs the accusations towards a specific ideology that the terrorists exploit in a blatant way to support their plans, without respecting the rules. This presentation deludes the reader that what was presented by these venerable religious symbols helps in spreading extremist thought and terrorism, while reality contradicts that.

This theme has adopted some theories that attribute extremism and terrorism and the issue of joining them to push factors such as ideological, religious motivations, the position of the organization, theorists, effectors and other factors. And to attraction factors such as family disintegration, personality disorder, soul-searching, adventure and others. Although there is no scientific consensus or agreement among specialists on this approach of interpretation, the reference presents it as a purely scientific fact, and ignores many important variables such as political changes, intellectual and national legacy of peoples, political congestion, and absence of public freedoms, all of which are strong incentives that lead to the adoption of extremist ideas and then drift towards terrorism. Therefore, it is better to treat this content with great caution and present it as a theoretical attempt to explain the phenomenon, rather than dealing with it as a proven scientific fact.

The theme has succeeded in shedding light on some important topics that many researchers and analysts have overlooked, such as the topic of "the terrorist threat from within." Terrorist organizations often recruit individuals

who work in sensitive security, military, service and other institutions, or they recruit people who have the ability to exploit their jobs to reach areas that are difficult to reach by other members of the organization. Here lies the real danger and threat. Many references and reports indicate that service facilities, infrastructures and border crossings have become the concern of terrorist organizations, and combating this threat requires special efforts of a regular security survey and scrutiny of workers in these institutions. They should be aware of the dangers of their work and the exploitation by terrorist organizations.

Theme 3: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES and EVOLVING THREATS

Theme 3 introduces the contemporary challenges and evolving threats by discussing the issue of terrorist financing and the relationship between terrorism and crimes. It Identifies the financial characteristics and the different business models used by terrorist groups. It also assesses the threat level to the global economy and market systems of terrorism financing. It simply explains the relationship between terrorist activities and the financial resources of terrorist organizations.

The theme also discusses maritime terrorism and piracy. Maritime terrorism is a daunting threat that targets both civilian and naval vessels. The challenge is compounded by the collaboration between criminals and terrorists. Significantly, terrorist groups have evolved with modern navigation technologies and developed innovative tactics to challenge maritime force. It then discusses Natural Resources, Corruption and Conflict, and how terrorist organizations exploit or control over the natural resources in countries that suffer from government failure and corruption. An example of which is the Somali Al-Shabab movement that exploits coal to obtain huge financial resources. Finally, the theme deals with Countering Terrorist Financing, the methods of terrorist organizations in storing and transferring funds, and the national and international measures taken against them.

Then the theme deals with Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear & Explosive Threats (CBRNE). It discusses the nature of each threat and its impact on humanity, environment and people's lifestyle. It then deals with Terrorist Use of Cyber Space and Technology within three modules: The first is Converging Technologies, which refers to a device or platform that integrates various technologies such as smartphones. The second is Terrorist Use of Media, and the different impact of social media on the audiences. The third is Terrorist Use of Cryptocurrency and the new challenges it poses to counter-terrorism.

The conclusion of this theme talks about Challenges Related to Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). It includes five nodules which are: Reasons for Travel, Preventing Terrorist Travel, Impact of the Combat Zone on FTFs, FTF Reverse Flow which refers to the pattern of FTFs returning to their former countries, and FTF Returnee Activities.

This theme has succeeded in selecting vital and contemporary topics that are related to the evolving terrorist threats, and has been able to present them in a logical sequence and attractive manner. Also, the content of this theme provides a rich review for the experts practicing in the field of counter-terrorism. It can be developed to be a separate training package, especially for electronic counterterrorism courses and for the dilemma of foreign fighters. Such topics are at the forefront of the current global interest in the field of terrorism, because it is the most prominent terrorist threat.

The good thing is that this theme allocates space to talk about the relationship between terrorism and criminality, and the relationships between terrorists and criminals in prisons. Prisons have become schools from which extremists and terrorists graduate, especially Western prisons where workers still face problems in understanding extremist beliefs and distinguishing them from correct religious commitment.

THEME 4: COUNTER-TERRORISM: STRATEGY, OPERATIONS & CAPACITY BUILDING

This theme deals with the measures that are taken to reduce the vulnerability of forces, individuals and property to terrorist attacks. CT measures include counter-force activities and containment by military force, intelligence and civil agencies. The regional and international counter-terrorism strategies are discussed. They include the efforts exerted by sovereign states and international and regional organizations active in combating terrorism, such as the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, and NATO. NATO's approach to combating terrorism was discussed in detail.

This theme addresses the Components of a National Strategy which are:

- Rule of Law: It outlines the importance of counter-terrorism laws, the international decisions to combat terrorism, and the need for cooperation of criminal justice agencies to combat terrorist threats in the world.

- Law Enforcement: It examines the role of law enforcement organizations in counter-terrorism and their collaboration with other elements of national security such as military forces.

- Diplomacy: It is the sum of the policies, strategies, programs and efforts taken by national authorities to mobilize international networks of senior political leaders and counter-terrorism professionals in the fight against terrorism

♦ Intelligence: outlines the roles and responsibilities necessary to harness intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination in the fight against terrorism.

♦ Military: It is necessary for the military forces to move away from its conventional operational role to performing a broader set of kinetic and non-kinetic actions in the fight against terrorism.

The theme also discusses Counter-Terrorism Capabilities. They are several useful measures, policies and recommendations to help nations improve their overall capacities in preventing and responding to terrorist threats. It moves on to discuss Exploiting the Vulnerabilities of Terrorist Organizations, which requires a thorough understanding of the internal structure of terrorist organizations, including the varying goals of members, financial streams and resource allocation, the level of centralization in operations and the efficacy of leadership. The theme also talks about Special Operations Forces. The response to increasingly irregular and rapidly evolving terrorist threats is largely tasked to the military because of the contextual complexities and vast area of operations where many terrorist groups find safe-haven.

In the field of Building Counter-Terrorism Capacities, the theme discusses Building Integrity as there are clear links between terrorism, corruption and poor governance. Illicit trade and trafficking of goods and people fuel terrorism with the necessary means to carry out their activity.

In the same field, the theme discusses the need for Capacity Building, whereby nations and organizations build and enhance their set of resources, information, skills, structures and equipment to more competently respond to terrorist threats. The goal of capacity-building in counter-terrorism is to enable partner nations to mitigate government and societal factors that contribute to terrorist recruitment and improve their response capability.

The theme also includes a module for Tabletop Exercise (TTX) Training, which is an exercise where leaders, thinkers, and practitioners across nations and sectors respond to a mock terrorist attack to gain insight into proper response procedures and prevention policies. A guideline for this type of TTX is included in the appendix. The objectives of TTX seminars include: 1) building awareness of terrorist-related challenges among a community of counter-terrorism professionals; 2) developing actionable responses; 3) sharing good practice and 4) identifying further areas for international collaboration. The theme concludes with the Lessons Learned, which include NATO Lessons Learned process and demonstrate its value in building counter-terrorism capacity. By doing so, individuals and the organization can reduce the risk of repeating mistakes and increase the chance of success.

The theme also discusses counter-terrorism topics, and the counter-terrorism strategies at the national, regional and international levels. It suggests some of the basic elements that make up national strategies to combat terrorism, and the factors for capacity-building in the field of combating terrorism. In general, some important modules of this theme need to be expanded, such as the effectiveness of current international strategies in combating terrorism.

It should be expanded in terms of strengths and weaknesses, areas of imbalance, and soft strategies in combating extremism and terrorism. Examples of which are programs for the prevention and immunization of society against extremist ideology that leads to terrorism, reform and rehabilitation programs for former extremists and terrorists, and the contribution of civil society institutions in supporting official efforts to combat extremism and terrorism.

The theme discusses many useful topics within the military field of combating terrorism. One of the most important ideas in this context is related to tabletop or virtual exercises, and their effect on the terrorist crisis. This field is still developing, and there are many successful experiences. However, it is still less than required.

Tabletop exercises achieve the required at a lower cost than field exercises. The repetition of such exercises proves the correct and accurate understanding of duties and responsibilities on the one hand, and mitigates terrorist attacks on the other hand.

The bottom line

This "Counter-Terrorism Reference Approach" is a guideline for professionals and novices in the field of counter-terrorism. It refreshes and develops practitioners' information by modification, addition or deletion. This reference can also be a guide for preparing general and specialized training content for counter-terrorism courses, but it does not provide sufficient material for the prevention and immunization of extremist thought, nor does it pave the way for the participation of civil society institutions, educational and religious institutions and the family.

It should have provided some experiences of member states in the field of preventing extremism implemented by civil society organizations in European societies.

The reference has drawn attention to some emerging modules in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism that deserve to be highlighted, such as the module of terrorism from within, the activities of returning terrorist fighters, capacity building to combat terrorism, negotiation skills in hostage-taking crises, and tabletop exercises to deal with the terrorist crisis. All of which are vital and sustainable topics that need to be deeply examined and researched.

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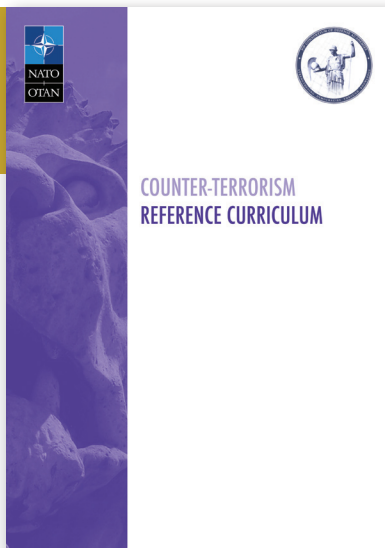
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