



ASWAN FORUM

Expert Workshop Concept Note Terrorism in the Shadow of the Pandemic

Background

Terrorism continues to be a major threat to international peace and security. The COVID19 coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the terrorist threat, by compounding grievances that leave communities and individuals vulnerable to extremism leading to terrorism on one hand, and offering terrorist organizations and other non-state actors new opportunities to enhance or regain momentum on the other.¹

During the last few months, terrorist groups have been stepping up their efforts to fill the governance void in communities where the state is either weak or nonexistent. These have included the provision of medical services and humanitarian aid.² Based on a belief that the pandemic provides them with an opportunity to “strike harder and operate more freely”³, terrorist organizations have capitalized on the diversion of states’ resources to mitigation and recovery efforts.⁴ Coupled with the back-tracking from international and regional counter-terrorism efforts,⁵ such as the pulling of Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS troops from Iraq, this will enable terrorist organizations to expand their operations and gain new territorial footholds.

Equally troubling is the likely impact of the devastating socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic in providing a breeding ground for extremism leading to terrorism. Only five months into this crisis, it has already pushed

¹ “Secretary-General’s Remarks to the Security Council on the COVID-19 Pandemic [as Delivered],” United Nations Secretary-General, April 9, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-04-09/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-covid-19-pandemic-delivered>.

² Colin P. Clarke, “Yesterday’s Terrorists Are Today’s Public Health Providers,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed June 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/08/terrorists-nonstate-ungoverned-health-providers-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

³ Mina al-Lami, “Jihadists See COVID-19 as an Opportunity,” *GNET* (blog), accessed June 14, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/06/01/jihadists-see-covid-19-as-an-opportunity/>.

⁴ “Extremist Groups Stepping up Operations during the Covid-19 Outbreak in Sub-Saharan Africa | Center for Strategic and International Studies,” accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/extremist-groups-stepping-operations-during-covid-19-outbreak-sub-saharan-africa>.

⁵ “Contending with ISIS in the Time of Coronavirus,” Crisis Group, March 31, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/contending-isis-time-coronavirus>.



millions of people out of work, exacerbated inequality, and increased the vulnerability of communities and individuals to extremism.

Additionally, preventive measures applied by governments to curb the spread of the virus, such as lockdowns, social distancing and curfews have encouraged people to move to digital platforms where they become targets for online recruitment.⁶ Widespread feelings of depression, uncertainty and isolation have also rendered individuals more susceptible to radical ideologies. While global⁷, regional⁸ and national actors have called for unity and solidarity to combat the pandemic, terrorist organizations have been disseminating messages of division and fear through misinformation, hate speech and fake news, and propagating narratives of mistrust in government institutions.

The Expert Workshop

Acting in its capacity as the Secretariat of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA) is hosting a two-hour expert workshop titled:

Terrorism in the Shadow of a Pandemic

The workshop will bring together leading experts and practitioners from Africa and around the world to explore the multifaceted impact of the COVID19 Coronavirus pandemic on terrorism and extremism in Africa. It will:

- Take stock of the worsening security, socioeconomic and political implications of the COVID-19 crisis and their impact in exacerbating existing grievances;
- Review the evidence of how terrorist organizations across Africa are strategically and operationally capitalizing on the pandemic to increase their operations, enhance their territorial gains, and augment their recruitment efforts;
- Produce forward-looking, action-oriented recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

⁶ Nikita Malik, "Self-Isolation Might Stop Coronavirus, but It Will Speed the Spread of Extremism," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed June 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/26/self-isolation-might-stop-coronavirus-but-spread-extremism/>.

⁷ "UN Chief Calls for 'Solidarity, Unity and Hope' in Battling COVID-19 Pandemic," UN News, April 30, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062972>.

⁸ "Remarks of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, at the Virtual Summit of the Non Aligned Movement | African Union," accessed June 14, 2020, <https://au.int/en/speeches/20200504/remarks-chairperson-african-union-commission-he-moussa-faki-mahamat-virtual-summit/>.