



HYBRID EU-UNICRI JOINT MEETING “NEW CHALLENGES AND FRONTIERS IN COUNTERING TERRORISM: HOW THE THREAT HAS CHANGED IN EUROPE SINCE 9/11”

Brussels, 29 November 2021, 9:30-12:30
Also broadcasted on Zoom

Rationale

The global threat posed by terrorism has continued to evolve since 9/11. Although that day marked the dawn of a new era where it became crystal clear for the international community that terrorism would have been a constant menace in our lives, much has changed over the last two decades. Indeed, these 20 years have been characterized by, *inter alia*, the gradual transformation of Al-Qaida in a covert network; the rise and fall of Da'esh; a new wave of FTFs; the misuse of social media to incite, radicalize and recruit; the spread of lone wolves; and the ability to conduct “successful” attacks with unsophisticated methods. This already precarious security context has been further exacerbated by the rise of others multifaceted forms of violent extremism linked both to far-right and left-wing terrorism. The COVID-19 pandemic, the gradual lift of restrictions and the current situation in Afghanistan, represent additional challenges, the implications and consequences of which are yet to be seen.

As other regions in the world, Europe has not been immune from the impact of all these scenarios and related threats. For instance, in 2020 – the first year marked by the pandemic – the number of completed jihadist terrorist attacks was more than double that of foiled plots¹. Such attacks mainly occurred in public spaces, sites of worship or other symbolic places. This trend appears to have continued in 2021 as demonstrated by the recent assassination of 5 people in Norway by a radicalized Danish citizen, who allegedly killed some of the casualties inside their homes and the rest outside in the public space. The brutal stabbing of a conservative lawmaker in a church in the UK also showed that the terrorist threat is far from being expired.

Although both cases are still under investigation and law enforcement agencies are yet to determine whether such acts were the consequences of mental disease or terrorism, chances are that easily-mounted attacks in symbolic places will remain the core targets of ISIL/Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe.

Following concerns raised by some Member States, UNICRI launched in April 2021 a research initiative aimed at exploring, assessing and understanding the potential interplay between regular and irregular movements of people and the threat stemming from ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe, including the risk posed by returning and/or relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters. Although not new, the issue has gained new momentum particularly in the aftermath of the spate of attacks occurred throughout 2020. In fact, these events have raised the attention of security services and law enforcement vis-à-vis individuals crossing external borders, either regularly and irregularly, which might pose a threat to national security. They have also contributed to the spread of racially and ethnically motivated terrorism and the rise of movements which continue to fuel social tensions and backlash against diaspora and migrant communities to reinforce their narrative of hatred.

Even though the pandemic and the relative restrictions on travel had an impact on the incoming fluxes, as measures are being gradually lifted, new people are expected to reach European external borders, regularly and irregularly. Figures of the first half of 2021 already confirm this trend: compared to 2020, there was a 70% increase of illegal crossing of EU external borders, most of which through the Central Mediterranean route exploited by migrant smugglers from Libya and Tunisia². Crossings through the Central Mediterranean Sea have increased of almost 160% from last year. Moreover, there is the risk of a new wave of asylum seekers from Afghanistan via the Eastern Mediterranean route. Lastly, the recent development in North-East Europe with groups of migrants being pushed through the Lithuanian and Polish borders, not only revealed the opening of a new, previously unexplored, migrant route but casted also light on the use of migration as a tool for political pressure by state actors against the EU.

As a first step, on 21 and 22 April, UNICRI and the Office of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator held a joint, 2-day expert level meeting which provided the opportunity to take stock of the recent evolution and potentially emerging trends of ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe; to analyse the newly adopted EU Security Union Strategy and the four-pillar Counter-terrorism Agenda; and to discuss challenges facing Member States in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism.

2021 marks important milestones in the CT context, including the 20th anniversary of 9/11; of Security Council resolution 1373; and the recent adoption of the 7th Review of the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy. These landmarks coupled with emerging threats in terms of security and their impact at international and regional level represent the opportunity to reflect upon traditional and new challenges, including those pertaining to advancements in technology, and ways to tackle them.

Objectives

The meeting seeks to take stock of how the terrorist threat in Europe has changed over the last 20 years and to what extent the EU counter-terrorism agenda and other supporting activities have impacted or influenced national prevention responses. It also provides the opportunity to reflect upon recent developments in the international security context and, notably, the crisis in Afghanistan, and to determine what kind of consequences and implications they may have for European countries. In addition, the event will constitute the platform to officially launch UNICRI's report on "Assessing the potential interplay between movements of people and the evolution of the threat stemming from ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe"; to present its main findings, conclusions and recommendations; and to outline a potential way forward, i.e. those programmatic interventions needed to tackle priority gaps and loopholes identified in the analysis.

Within this framework, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), with the support of the Directorate General for Home Affairs and Migration, will hold a joint hybrid meeting where distinguished experts from the UN, EU, academia and selected think tanks will provide an overview/update on:

- ▶ The evolution of the terrorist threat in Europe over the last 20 years;
- ▶ New trends in counter-terrorism;
- ▶ Global conflicts and, notably, the crisis in Afghanistan, with their implications for Europe;
- ▶ The findings and recommendations of UNICRI's report on the impact of regular and irregular movements of people on the threat stemming from ISIL/Al-Qaida inspired terrorism;
- ▶ Initiatives (including research and programmatic activities) undertaken by UNICRI, the EU and other entities to successfully address the identified priority challenges and emerging vulnerabilities.

Hybrid EU-UNICRI Joint Meeting

“New challenges and frontiers in countering terrorism: how the threat has changed in Europe since 9/11”

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09:30-09:35 Opening remarks (video)

Ms. Emanuela Claudia Del Re, EU Special Representative for the Sahel

09:35-09:55 Keynote speeches

Ms. Antonia De Meo, Director, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)

Mr. Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General, in charge of Schengen & Internal Security; European Commission Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, DG HOME

09:55-10:30 Session I:

Looking back and tacking stock of the present: how the threat posed by terrorism and violent extremism has changed in Europe over the last 20 years and implications of ongoing conflicts/crisis for the European security context

Experts will highlight, in particular, the following issues: overview of traditional and emerging threats pertaining to ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism; rise of forms of violent extremism linked to far-right and left-wing terrorism; how ongoing conflicts/crisis, (including the situation in Afghanistan) outside the EU might affect internal security

Moderator: **Mr. Gilles de Kerchove**, former EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

Speakers: **Mr. Thomas Renard**, Director, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT)

Specialist, European Counter-Terrorism Centre, EUROPOL (virtual)

Ms. Christiane Hoehn, Main Adviser to the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

10:30-10:45 Coffee break



10:45-11:20 Session II:

Impact of movements of people and the threat stemming from ISIL/Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe, including the risk posed by returning (and relocating) FTFs

UNICRI will set the tone of the discussion by presenting the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of its report on “Assessing the potential interplay between movements of people and the evolution of the threat stemming from ISIL and Al-Qaida inspired terrorism in Europe”. Invited experts will highlight challenges posed by the infiltration of terrorists into migration flows and the risk posed by returning/relocating Foreign Terrorist Fighters; the importance of timely exchange of information and intelligence on potential suspects

Moderator: **Ms. Seyda Emek**, Adviser to the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

Speakers: **Ms. Giulia Giacomelli**, Consultant, UNICRI

Mr. Matteo Pugliese, Researcher, ISPI

Mr. Holger Fabian Sahl, Strategic Analyst, FRONTEX

11:20-11:55 Session III:

Looking forward: how to support European Member States and neighbouring countries in addressing emerging vulnerabilities

Speakers will present research and programmatic initiatives that are being undertaken (or will be shortly launched) to successfully address the identified priority challenges and emerging threats, including those pertaining to advancements in technology

Moderator: **Mr. Martin Schieffer**, Head of Unit, DG Home, European Commission

Speakers: **Mr. Jesper Pedersen**, Deputy Head of Unit, DG FPI, European Commission

Ms. Nayanka Paquete Perdigao, Programme Associate, GIFCT (virtual)

Mr. Leif Villadsen, Deputy Director, UNICRI

11:55-12:25 Q&A

12:25-12:30 Wrap up and close

Logistics: information on the venue and link to access the Zoom platform will be shared with registered participants.