

## **Report**

### **Current trends in terrorism: Program on Terrorism and Security Studies held at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany**

On June 6-30, 2023, the four-week "Program on Terrorism and Security Studies (PTSS)" was held at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Germany, with lectures and seminar discussions in separate syndicate groups. The program was attended by 94 participants from 59 countries, which truly testified to the large-scale and global nature of the PTSS program, as almost a third of the world's countries were represented.

Although the global security environment has changed significantly in recent years, terrorism remains a primary security threat for many countries around the world. Here, I would like to briefly outline the current general trends, which are as follows:

1. Africanization of Jihad: Global jihadist terrorist organizations, mainly Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, are moving their infrastructure and, accordingly, their targets from the Middle East to the African continent, the Sahel, and a number of East African states. This trend, named as Africanization of Jihad, was explained by the fact that Middle Eastern countries using the latest technologies have developed their intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities to such an extent that terrorist organizations are no longer capable of acting with high performance.

2. Transfers and payments with cryptocurrencies: Counter-terrorist agencies and services currently face multifaceted threats and challenges. One of the modern features of international terrorism is the use of new forms and ways of financing terrorist organizations: transfers and payments with cryptocurrencies, which are considered a new challenge for the counter-terrorist services of different states. Application of crypto currency financing by terrorist organizations has become more frequent, and it has become much more complicated for the respective authorities to

identify the sources of funding for terrorist organizations, track the course of financial flows, and make accurate observations.

3. Manipulation of the perception of time in Islam: Another trend worth mentioning is how jihadi terrorist organizations, while recruiting, manipulate the perception of time in Islam. The precise and authentic interpretation of time in Islam in the fight against the radicalization of individuals who are included in jihadist terrorist structures is of paramount importance. In Islam, time is considered a precious gift from God to be utilised wisely for fulfilling religious duties, gaining knowledge, and promoting justice. There are two perceptions of time.

- Al-Dahr – The Islamic concept of infinite time that connects individuals to the universe's expanse, the time spent on earth and the actual life of a person are not important.

- Al-Waqt – This way of perceiving time focuses on the present moment, emphasizing the importance of efficient use of time to create personal and societal common good and betterment.

Jihadi terrorist organizations target representatives of different social strata during recruitment and radicalization, and by manipulating these two perceptions of time, they focus on explaining the first way of perceiving time and cause urgent, often violent actions and a disregard for worldly life. Then they try to prove that true Muslims must abandon earthly life and must reach celestial life through jihad, which is more suitable for them<sup>1</sup>.

4. Leaderless Jihad: One of the challenges we face now is the new phenomenon of leaderless jihad, which first and foremost stems from the leadership deficit within terrorist organizations. The deaths of the most compelling leaders led to fierce competition among peers for the leadership of the movements. Most of the time, this competition lasts long enough that movements are managed and organised without any leader, thus changing the traditional structure of the movement. The strangest thing is that while interacting with terrorist movements, states and their

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed Omar, Mosul Eye Blog, Presentation: The Influence of Time in Islam and De-radicalization Methods, 28.06.2023, George Marshall European Center for Security Studies.

respective counter-terrorist authorities will grapple with the problem of identifying the leadership archetypes of the new leaders of the terrorist organizations if there is one, and if there is no leader within the organization, they don't know who to negotiate with or how to communicate with them.

In 2007, during the international conference "Ensuring preparedness in the fight against terrorism" held in Yerevan, the Armenian side announced that, as a result of systematic measures implemented in the Republic of Armenia, no case of terrorist activity or its financing was registered, and from the point of view of terrorist threats, the territory of the republic can be assessed as relatively safe. In the territory of the Republic of Armenia, there are high-risk facilities for life support, transport, and telecommunications; storage sites for radioactive, toxic, and explosive materials; and diplomatic and various international missions that can be targets for both terrorist organizations and sabotage and reconnaissance formations of a possible enemy. In addition, the Armenian nuclear power plant, natural and artificial reservoirs, and hazardous and explosive objects of the chemical industry in the Republic of Armenia can themselves act as a means of mass destruction if global terrorist actions are carried out against them.

During the seminar-discussions, the legal basis of the fight against terrorism by RA, the National Strategy for the Fight against Terrorism in the Republic of Armenia, was presented, as was the fact that Armenia has joined the UN Convention against Terrorist Financing and the Council of Europe Convention against Terrorism. The Republic of Armenia also faced the challenge of terrorists and mercenary groups in 2020 when Azerbaijan started an all-out war against Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). In the course of one specific seminar-discussion devoted to assessing the terrorist threat to our nations, we emphasised that during the 44-day Artsakh war in 2020, the Azerbaijani side unleashed the potential of terrorists and mercenaries recruited in Syria and thus conducted the process of encouraging the infiltration of proxy forces and jihadist militants from the Middle East's various battlegrounds into the South Caucasus. It was highlighted that Turkey, having accumulated the best experience in recruiting and using terrorist and mercenary potential in Libya, Iraq, and Syria,

provided full support to Azerbaijan in this matter, organised the recruitment of mercenary terrorists from different battlegrounds in Syria, and solved the problems of their transfer to Azerbaijan<sup>1</sup>. Turkish involvement in this process was addressed by international media, such as the Voice of America<sup>2</sup>, the BBC<sup>3</sup>, The Guardian<sup>4</sup>, and confirmed by some states, such as Russia and France. Therefore, we emphasized that after the second 44-day Artsakh war provoked by Azerbaijan in 2020, the Republic of Armenia needs to design and develop a new national security strategy and counter-terrorism strategy that will assess and provide acute ways and means to respond to the threat of Azerbaijan using terrorist resources against the Armenian armed forces in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Hovsepyan, Levon. “The Influence of Domestic Factors on Military-Political Behavior of Turkey in the First and 44-Day Artsakh Wars: Comparative Analysis”. *Scientific Artsakh*, 3 (10) 2021.

<sup>2</sup> “Monitor: Turkey Sending Syrian Fighters to Azerbaijan”. *Voice of America*. [https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch\\_monitor-turkey-sending-syrian-fighters-azerbaijan/6196538.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_monitor-turkey-sending-syrian-fighters-azerbaijan/6196538.html). (Accessed 01.06.2023).

<sup>3</sup> “The Syrian mercenaries used as 'cannon fodder' in Nagorno-Karabakh”. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-55238803>. (Accessed 01.06.2023).

<sup>4</sup> “Syrian recruit describes role of foreign fighters in Nagorno-Karabakh”. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/02/syrian-recruit-describes-role-of-foreign-fighters-in-nagorno-karabakh>. (Accessed 01.06.2023).