

# متحف الفكر

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## SECRETARY-GENERAL MEETS UAE MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENSE AFFAIRS



His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al Bowardi, UAE Minister of State for Defense Affairs, received IMCTC Secretary-General Major-General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Moghedi in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday, February 22, 2022.

The two parties reviewed means of cooperation to further shared visions and promote relations, in order to achieve the goals of the war on terrorism. They also discussed common interests between the UAE and IMCTC, and the latest updates regarding the IMCTC policy, strategic plan, and initiatives in progress. Major-General Al-Moghedi stressed the significance of UAE efforts as an experienced IMCTC Member State in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism.

The meeting was held in the margins of the launch of the UMEX and SimTEX 2022 exhibitions, with the participation of a number of regional and international entities. This visit aimed to conclude strategic partnerships between IMCTC Member States and international organizations, reinforce relations and continued cooperation with all countries of the world, in order to elevate capacities, share the best international counter-terrorism practices, information and expertise, and join the global efforts to maintain international security and peace.

## UK Defense Attaché Visits IMCTC



IMCTC Secretary-General, Major-General Mohammed Saeed Al-Moghedi, received the UK Defense Attaché to Saudi Arabia, Brigadier General Francis Piggott and the accompanying delegation on February 14, 2022.

Brig. Gen. Piggott was provided with a detailed explanation of the IMCTC counter-terrorism efforts across the four domains: ideology, communications, combating terrorist financing, and military, and his contribution to coordinating and reinforcing the efforts of the IMCTC Member States. They further discussed avenues of joint cooperation between IMCTC and the UK.

Major-General Al-Moghedi explained that IMCTC is an integrated system that seeks to support cooperation between the IMCTC Member States, in addition to affirming the value of legitimacy and independence. Brig. Gen. Piggott praised IMCTC efforts to serve the interests of the IMCTC Member States in the fight against extremism and terrorism, and for its prominent achievements in this field.



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## FOURTH MEETING OF ARAB PARLIAMENTARIANS CONDEMNS HOUTHİ TERRORİST ACTS AND CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PUT AN END TO ITS CRİMES



At the conclusion of the fourth conference held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo, 19 February 2022, the Arab Parliament condemned the Houthi terrorist militia's use of a militant drone to target Abha Airport in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, endangering the lives of hundreds of travelers, describing it as an act of sabotage, exacerbating the region's turmoil. The Arab Parliament also stated that these attacks do not only target the Kingdom, but also aim to destabilize the entire region, urging the international community to take immediate and decisive action to hold the terrorist Houthi group accountable for the crimes it commits and for its ongoing violations of the international law.

### Full-Fledged Criminal Offence

Targeting Abha Airport, according to the Arab Parliament, is a full-fledged war crime and an extension of the Houthi group's terrorist operations, which have targeted residential districts, airports, ports, and energy production infrastructure in an attempt to destabilize security and stability in the region. The Arab Parliament emphasized its support for the leadership and people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its trust in the ability to overcome all challenges and crises with determination and success.

The launch of a ballistic missile by the Houthi terrorist group towards the United Arab Emirates, which was successfully intercepted by Emirati defence forces, resulting in no losses, was also condemned by the Parliament. The missile's debris landed outside of inhabited regions. The Parliament confirmed that UAE's security is part and parcel of Arab national security, and that these atrocious deeds will not deter the UAE from giving humanitarian aid to Yemen's brotherly people, or from sustaining peace and stability in the Gulf and Arab regions.

The Arab Parliament held the international community fully accountable for taking firm stances against the ongoing terrorist attacks, holding perpetrators and their supporters with money and weapons accountable, and calling for preventing the coup junta from acquiring advanced weapons, ballistic missiles, and drones, which it uses to carry out terrorist acts against civilians.

### Impending Threat and the Call of The Coast

"The impending danger of extremist ideology and terrorism, which threatens the life of the nation state and its institutions, cannot be

neglected," stated the Speaker of the Arab Parliament Mr. Adel Al-Asoumi in his remarks at the conference. He also warned of the dangers of rising cybercrime, which he said poses a threat to Arab countries' digital economies and critical infrastructure. He noted that the Arab Parliament, in collaboration with a number of Arab and international institutions, will host the first parliamentary conference on "Safeguarding and Strengthening Cyber Security in the Arab World."

In press statements, Al-Soumi emphasized the importance of bolstering Arab cooperation in the fight against extremist ideology and terrorism and praised the Arab Parliament's establishment of the "Arab Centre for Combating Terrorism and Extremist Ideology," citing the urgent need for such a centre in supporting parliamentary efforts in the battle against terrorism, which has afflicted Arab countries more than any other region in the world.

The Sahel region of Africa is home to the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations. Al-Soumi referred to the initiative to combat terrorism in the Sahel and Sahara region which was adopted by the Arab Parliament under the title "The Call of the Sahel" during the first World Summit on Counterterrorism, held in Vienna in September 2021, one of the most important initiatives recently launched by the Arab Parliament.

The project is based on inter-parliamentary collaboration between the Arab Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Mediterranean Parliament, and the Inter-Parliamentary Committee of the Five Sahel States to coordinate and reinforce parliamentary efforts to combat terrorism.

Inasmuch as counter-terrorism efforts in the African Sahel do not require new plans as much as they need to get on the right track, the project adopts a complete legislative plan to combat terrorism in order to make a difference in combating terrorism.

This effort has garnered a lot of positive feedback from all sides and has had a lot of support. The Arab Centre for Combating Terrorism and Extremist Ideology in the Arab Parliament was accepted to be a coordinating centre for this effort during the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference held in Madrid, Spain, last November 2021. Since the commencement of this effort, it has made a significant contribution to combating extremism and terrorism.

## HOUTHIS LISTED AS TERRORIST GROUP BY UNSC WITH INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM



On Monday, February 28, 2022, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2624 under Section VII, which calls for the renewal of the sanctions imposed on Yemen, listing the Houthis (known as Ansarullah) as a terrorist group. Under this resolution, the Houthis shall be entered in the list of sanctions imposed on Yemen, which includes arms embargo, denouncing cross-border attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities. The resolution was widely acclaimed by Arab and international states and praised by regional and Arab organizations.

### Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

On Tuesday, March 1, 2022, the Council of Ministers, under the chairmanship of King Salman bin Abdulaziz, welcomed the Security Council's resolution at its meeting held at Al-Yamamah Palace, and looked forward to this resolution putting an end to acts of terrorism by terrorist groups and their supporters, neutralizing their threat to the Yemeni people and international security and peace. The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement reiterating its support for efforts to reach a comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis and supporting the efforts of the UN Special Envoy to Yemen, based on the Gulf initiative and its executive mechanisms, and the relevant outcomes of the Comprehensive National Dialogue and the resolutions of the UNSC, including Resolution No. (2216).

### United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates celebrated the resolution—Lana Nusseibeh, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, said that the aim of this resolution is to limit the military capacities of the Houthi terrorist group and to prevent its hostile activities. The ambassador renewed the UAE's demands to stop the Houthis' terrorist acts and coastal attacks and return to the negotiating table to begin a serious political process.

### Kingdom of Bahrain

The Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the UNSC resolution is an important step towards undermining the capacities of the Houthi terrorist group and its savage attacks. The Ministry asserted Bahrain's support for KSA efforts to reach a just and comprehensive political solution to the Yemeni crisis.

### Yemen

Yemeni Minister of Information Muammar al-Aryani said that the support of eleven UNSC Member States for the resolution, includ-

ing permanent members, is a firm conviction among the international community to denounce the practices of the Houthi terrorist group, and unanimous consensus on the necessity of backing a political solution based on the three references of UN Security Council Resolution No. (2216): the Gulf initiative, the outcomes of the Yemeni national dialogue, and UNSC resolutions.

### Republic of Egypt

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has expressed its desire that the resolution contributes to ending the sinful Houthi aggression, facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aids to civilians, and pushing forward the political solution to the protracted crisis.

### United Kingdom

Rosie Dyas, UK Government Arabic Spokesperson to the Middle East and North Africa, said that her government welcomes the UNSC resolution, which states for the first time that the Houthis are terrorists, and enlists them under the arms embargo resolution.

### Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

In this context, the OIC expressed the hope that the resolution would curb the Houthi terrorist group's continued crimes, deter its supporters, neutralize its threat, and stop the supply of advanced arms and funds used to target the Yemeni people and threaten international navigation and neighboring countries.

### Gulf Cooperation Council

GCC Secretary-General Nayef Al-Hajraf spelled out that the UN Security Council resolution is a confirmation of the importance that the international community attaches to the Yemeni crisis. Al-Hajraf called on the Houthi group to respond to calls for an immediate ceasefire and positive engagement in political consultations, which aim to achieve security and stability in Yemen.

### Arab League

The Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit stated that the resolution falls in line with international counter-terrorism efforts, and contributes to undermining the Houthi military capacities, halting the military escalation in Yemen, as well as restricting the group's targeting of the security of the region, neighboring countries, and economic and civil facilities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

# NARRATIVES OF THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE: THE IMPACT OF THE PAST ON KEEPING PRESENT IDENTITY



**NARRATIVES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE** (2018) by Dr. Raquel da Silva, Professor of Political Violence at the University of Birmingham, England, provides an in-depth analysis of the life stories of former militants in Portugal. Dr. Silva reveals the impact of narratives on fostering political awareness and political activism at the individual level, highlighting the methods conducive for reconstructing and developing experiences, and the impact of past memories on preserving the identity of the present.

## Overview

**NARRATIVES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE** is the first holistic case study of political violence in Portugal, based on the perspectives of former militants of different political spheres, who became convinced that they could not be mere spectators of the circumstances of their times. For such former militants, the only feasible way to make a difference was through violence.

While writing up her PhD thesis, she conducted in-depth interviews with former militants in Portugal and developed 28 life stories of highly rich descriptions of the experiences of social actors who turned to political violence.

Individuals respond to their respective milieus in such manners that snugly dovetail with their life stories, reflecting the perceptions they have of themselves, others, and their political, social, cultural, economic, and historical backgrounds.

Such perceptions are generated by the narrative resources made available to them, such as personal cultural repertoire, early family narrative environment, and social interactions.

Focal to **NARRATIVES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE** are personal life stories of involvement in politically motivated violence that highlight the social, cultural, political, historical, and human milieus that contextualize life patterns, making the case study more productive and seminal. Such personal life stories cannot be

considered mere representations of reality; they represent their sociocultural experiences, which give individual meaning to their identities.

## Stories and Biographies

In adolescence, a full life story can be possibly formed; individuals express the internal and external contexts of their life stories, integrate memories and self-concept, visualize themselves and others, and develop a biography with a timeline that provides telling explanations for different life events along with impactful sociocultural and historical contexts.

Taken together, social milieu is thus defined through narratives, forming their social identities. As such, life stories influence people and construct their reality, understanding, and course of action. Unless otherwise life stories are retold, our lives would be unimaginable; life stories create a common ground, reframe reality to make it more bearable, and give a fresh breath to our belief that the world is reachable.

Through life stories, individuals produce meaningful episodes stored in their own retentive memories, based on selective remembrance in such a manner as to dovetail the past with the requirements of the present and the future, the episode that sets the stage and tone for the identity may be retold in a completely different manner in different circumstances, leading to the creation of many narrative life stories, and the development of various identities.

Life stories are also closely related to history, depicting historical shifts in culture, establishing collective memories, and linking cultural history with autobiographies. As such, the historical contexts of life stories are key to their understanding. Narratives become a political plan, a creative process develop macro and micro association and an active human medium to build our understanding of the world, while still staying connected and introducing change when a need arises.

## Life Stories and Political Violence

Narratives are deeply rooted where and when they unfold as well as through the social relationships that create, tell and repeat such narratives. Equally important, narratives influence the cognitive and emotional processes that may lead to violence, which violence reinforces with new narratives and life stories. Therefore, resorting to political violence is not automatic; it is linked to actions and reactions, often manifested in a two-way relationship. The aspects driving individuals to political violence are relational and cultural, showing the symbolic nature of political violence and cause roots, manifested in images, stories, experiences and circumstances made available to individuals at specific times. Life stories are collectively shared, and individuals grow along them, using them to justify their actions.

Therefore, the analysis of political violence should go beyond the usual physical and structural factors, while paying attention to the ideologies and insights of political activists. Combine together, the deep impact of life stories and narratives about past and present injustices comes into play, while jostling for the future. Such life stories resonate with others and help them change the material and ideological conditions of their daily lives.

### Interviews Create Considerable Knowledge

Interviews induce close personal interaction; they produce solid knowledge, which makes the ethical framework critically necessary in research, especially interviews that feature sensitive topics. The responsibility for data collection lies with the researcher, who should indicate the social potential uses of the knowledge produced by focused interviews in social sciences, especially the impact on the research participants.

To ensure unerring accuracy, the interviewees received verbatim transcripts of their interviews to verify that their opinions are expressly voiced, smoothing away any inconvenience if publicly disclosed. The interviewees were told that their data would be confidentially used to solely study the subject-matter of the analysis; they were ensured their life stories would be treated as potential models of social reality to avoid being betrayed. The quotations were carefully cited to protect their identities. Some interviewees grew up in destitute, poor areas, where the population depended on agriculture, livestock, and forests. Few people owned lands and contracted with local laborers for a pittance.

Abject poverty and injustice fueled political opposition across such regions, attracting the attention of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which had a strong presence. The PCP presented itself as the only force that cherished some hope to those who had nothing to lose. The daily hardships made people realize the need to fight off the rule for justice.

Against a backdrop of conflict, such people were more inclined to join the PCP, which was the only active opposition party at the time (the Second Republic in Portugal between 1933 and 1968), although it was officially banned and forced to remain covertly.

### Social Narrative Reality

Narrative research is concerned with the theatrical nature of human behavior; social reality is essentially a narrative reality. The method individuals present themselves through the life stories they tell includes their past, present, and future. This also includes the audience they talk to and the life stories they create over the years.

Personal narratives do not only talk about the individual, but they open a small window on the drivers of history and historical change.

Reading narratives depends mostly on two interpretations: the first interpretation reads such narratives as vivid representation of living experiences and seeks to explore their meanings and represent them at a different level of discourse, dialogue, or abstraction. The second interpretation reads such narratives as persuasive and should discover their implicit meanings shrouded in mystery.

### Narratives and Political Awareness

The concept of interconnected lives refers to the interaction between individual social worlds over a lifetime; the social forces in individual lives are responsible for the development of their life cycles. Accordingly, narrative resources contribute to the development of individual personal political awareness and to the choices they make later in their lives, such as supporting the creation of an armed organization to fight a political system deemed unjust. The study based on interviews with former insurgents reveals that their life stories are closely linked to the time in which they lived, their social culture, and the experiences and narratives of their families.

In addition, individual life stories are deeply ingrained in the anecdotal resources of their historical contexts. Some interviewees were born in the final years of the Estado Novo regime (New Statehood), which experienced turmoil that gave way to a stage of enthusiasm and politicization, formed their political awareness, and confirmed that the impact of social change on individuals is partly led by factors related to the stage of their life at a time of change, in which they were ready, and in some cases enthusiastic to embrace social and political ideas and ideals, evince self-esteem, and construct a narrative identity as a product of the revolution and of the political activism that followed.

The inclusion of context in the construction of a life story is a key feature of adolescence, allowing personal narrative to become more coherent with family history, socioeconomic and sociocultural status, and historical situation. In adolescence, people reform their history in such a manner similar to that in which the nation rewrites history at a later time to create a whole host of enduring myths about the glorious past, relevant to that stage in history. In the context of the relationship between political activism and times of social turmoil, the springboard for individuals is always the political narratives they have inherited. This fact is confirmed by how the interviewees developed their political awareness and frame their activities at different times under different political regimes.



# COUNTERTERRORISM IN BANGLADESH THROUGH HARD AND SOFT TACTICS



**During** the late 1990s and early 2000s, after returning from Afghanistan where they fought the Soviets, Bangladesh's violent extremists began a series of coordinated strikes. The revival of violent extremism and the rise of armed groups across the country have been influenced by political polarization.

Two waves of extremism have erupted in Bangladesh over the previous two decades. After returning from war-torn countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bengalis who had fought alongside the Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s led the first generation of young people who went on to disseminate extremism and join local extremist organisations. In 2010, the second wave of extremism began.

## Origins of Terrorist Threat

Bangladesh remains virtually at risk from both local and international terrorist groups. In the past, these groups have been known to attack government and Western interests, including tourists, writers, bloggers, diplomatic missions, and minority groups. This is a list of the most prominent groups:

- ▶ The most well-known of these organisations is the **Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)**, which was founded in 1998 with an armed wing and was active in the early twenty-first century; it recruited, trained, raised funds, ran recruitment programmes, and mobilized members in the northern and southern provinces.
- ▶ **The Al-Qaeda Organization** in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is a terrorist organization based in India. After a two-year attempt to combine the violent extremist factions on the Indian subcontinent, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri claimed in September 2014 that this embryonic organization was formally associated with the central al-Qaeda Organization.
- ▶ **ISIS (ISIS):** When Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared that (the so-called caliphate) was formed in Iraq and Syria in August 2014, a number of anonymous Bangladeshi individuals pledged

allegiance to ISIS in a video clip. In the November 2015 issue of the English-language Dabiq electronic magazine, ISIS formally confirmed its presence in Bangladesh.

## Counterterrorism in Bangladesh

As a result of Bangladesh's efforts to combat terrorism, there were two simultaneous tracks of action: hard efforts, and soft efforts.

### 1) Hard Efforts

Since the 2016 Dhaka attack, Bangladeshi law enforcement officials have raided a number of extremist hideouts in and around the city, as well as in the country's north, murdering a number of people suspected of being involved in terrorist networks.

Rapid Intervention Team

Bangladesh's government has taken a law-and-order strategy in countering terrorism, relying on the power of an elite group known as the Rapid Intervention Team, which was formed in 2004 and consists of elements from the military forces and the police.

### CTTC Unit

Bangladesh is one of the 10 countries in the world with the smallest police force. For every 100,000 residents, there are only 96 police officers. Following the 2016 attack, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counterterrorism and Cross-Border Crime Unit, which was established in 2014, was given authority to lead the fight against terrorism, rather than the Rapid Intervention Brigade, a shift that officials say aims to build specialized expertise in the domain of counterterrorism. Security officials underlined the importance of having a professional police force.

The unit was given forensic equipment and training in cyber investigations and surveillance by Indian agencies and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the cabinet issued an executive order separating the unit from the main police establishment and allowing it to operate across the country without the permission of local authorities. It was given permission to report directly to the

Prime Minister's office and to operate outside of the Bangladeshi police's formal structure.

## 2) Soft Efforts

These intangible efforts are manifested in two ways:

### Legislation and Judiciary

The Anti-Terrorism Act of 2009, as amended in 2012 and 2013, is used by Bangladesh's criminal justice system to combat terrorism, and it includes a number of mechanisms for implementing Security Council Resolution 2396 on dealing with foreign terrorist fighters. Bangladesh has detained suspected foreign terrorist combatants or their associates using this statute because there are no provisions related to foreign terrorist fighters.

The Anti-Terrorism Special Court in Dhaka sentenced seven persons to death in November 2019 for their role in the 2016 "Holy Artisan" incident, in which ISIS-affiliated gunmen killed 20 people, including one American.

### Law Enforcement and Border Security

Bangladesh's law enforcement authorities lack resources, such as equipment and training, restricting their ability to verify immigration and customs entry points as they rely on outdated surveillance and intelligence-gathering technology. Bangladesh and the US have worked together to improve border, land, sea, and air entry restrictions, allowing special teams to identify explosives and police Dhaka International Airport. Bangladesh also exchanges law enforcement data with international law enforcement agencies such as the INTERPOL.

Bangladesh continued to receive counterterrorism assistance from the US Department of State, as well as counterterrorism training for law enforcement officers. In addition, the Bangladesh Ministry of Justice has received training in prosecutorial abilities as well as community assistance for police officers in specific targeted regions of the country. The training of Bengali troops, including the Coast Guard, Special Forces, Navy, Rescue Unit, 1st Commando Battalion, and Frontier Forces, was continued by the US Special Operations Command (SOCPAC).

## Counter-Terrorist Financing

The length of Bangladesh's porous borders with India and Myanmar is one of the country's challenges in combating the flow of illicit funds, some of which may end up financing terrorist operations. Terrorists use the hawala / remittance system (in India), which is an informal method of transferring money both locally and internationally. Half of Bangladeshis working overseas rely on it to send money for legal reasons, yet terrorists can use it to make money and move it in a secure manner. The Bangladesh Central Bank has been successful in gauging and monitoring these transfers and has taken initiatives to make utilizing regular banking channels for remittances more appealing.

Money laundering and terrorist-financing are being combated by the government. Bangladesh joined the Egmont Group and the Asia Pacific Group for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in July 2013. The Bangladesh Bank was given the right to freeze accounts and take other actions to combat illegal activities under the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2009. The Anti-Money Laundering Law of 2012 and 2013 resulted in the growth of the list of money

laundering crimes, the strengthening of international cooperation efforts, and the expansion of legal sanctions.

Bangladesh's accomplishments in this area have been highly appreciated around the world. Bangladesh was removed from the FATF's grey list in February 2014, and an evaluation by the Asia-Pacific Group in October 2016 revealed a considerable improvement in compliance with international standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2017, Bangladesh came in second in the (Basel Index) for combating money laundering in South Asia.



## Combating Violent Extremism

Bangladesh's government continues to combat violent extremism through the Community Support Movement (CSM), which is part of the "Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)," a global fund that supports grassroots efforts to prevent violent extremism.

To raise public awareness towards terrorism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the National Committee for Combat, Resistance, and Prevention collaborate with imams and religious experts. The police engage religious leaders in the fight against violent extremism by assisting in the countering of extremist propaganda that claims to be based on religion. Law enforcement forces collaborate with local universities to decrease radicalization among students, as well as with local research institutions, private think tanks, and public and private universities in conducting research on combating violent extremism.

## International Cooperation

At the regional level, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is often associated with counter-terrorist efforts; concerns about sovereignty and non-interference have limited the association's ability to implement many of its declarations, treaties, and regulations related to counter-terrorist methods of cooperation. This did not stop Bangladesh's government from authorizing a "zero tolerance" policy against terrorism and against using its territory as a safe haven for terrorists.

The Government of Bangladesh sponsored the inaugural National Conference on Countering Violent Extremism in December 2019, in collaboration with the US Embassy, the United Nations, and other partners. The goal of the conference was to build a national strategic plan to combat violent extremism.

# RANSOMWARE

## WAVE OF NEW TERRORISM

A new form of terrorism is now spreading like wildfire, inflicting significant damage to individuals and institutions. However, it does not evoke the same attention as other forms of terrorism. It is Ransomware—a cyber attack blackmailing users into paying money. Attackers used to use ransomware to blackmail individuals, whereas now they are used to blackmail corporates.

In recent years, greater damage has been inflicted to organizations by ransomware attacks, leaving many crippled and important information inaccessible. Institutions across all sectors have fallen victim to such blackmail. However, instead of finding appropriate technical solutions, some paid ransoms demanded by criminal groups to recover their services.

### Scale and Implications of the Problem

In June 2013, McAfee Corp. for cybersecurity services released data showing more than quarter a million ransomware attacks in the first quarter of the same year, which is more than double the number of attacks recorded in the first quarter of the previous year. 181.5 million ransomware attacks were recorded in the first 6 months of 2018, recording an increased rate of 229% more than the first 6 months of 2017.

The industrial sector alone fell victim to 20% of the ransomware attacks, followed by the retail sector, transport, health, finance, law and justice, as well as education and governance. A report, The State of Ransomware 2020, issued by cybersecurity company Sophos, reveals that 51% of organizations were hit by ransomware in 2019; the global average remediation cost of the impacts of one ransomware attack is \$761,106; remediation costs of ransomware

reached more than \$400 million in 2020 and exceeded \$81 million in the first quarter of 2021.

Ransomware damage costs are doubling by a geometric progression of (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, etc.). According to a Cybersecurity Ventures report issued in 2017, global ransomware damage costs reached \$5 billion in 2017, up more than 50X from 2015.

Ransomware damage costs include data destruction or loss, work suspension, poor production, hindered course of action, criminal investigations, data restoration, reputation damage, training personnel on how to directly manage ransomware attacks, as well as ransom payments.

Cybersecurity company Kaspersky Lab reported that in 2017 ransomware hit businesses every 40 seconds after an average of every two minutes in early 2016. To this end, Cybersecurity Ventures reported that businesses fell victim to a ransomware attack every 14 seconds in 2019, and every 11 seconds in 2021. This does not include constant ransomware attacks on individuals, which go beyond those on businesses. The FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) estimated ransomware losses in USA at \$29.1 million in 2020.

Those losses are limited to ransom payments and do not include costs of other cyberattacks. The real costs are definitely many times more than the stated number given that cybercrime reports only record reported crimes.

Despite the success achieved by law-enforcement institutions dismantling many ransomware gangs, these malwares have proven to be a Hydra-like monster— for every head chopped off, more





regrow. A Cybersecurity Ventures report predicted ransomware damage costs to reach an annual \$265 billion by 2031.

Companies that have reported ransomware attacks are 61% of the total number of companies. These attacks resulted in work suspension for six days, and increased damage costs from \$761 thousand per attack in 2019 to \$1.85 million in 2021.

According to a VentureBeat survey, ransomware attacks have increased by 250% in the first half of 2021 alone. Such constant threats prompted two thirds of decision-makers to announced counter-ransomware be accorded the same priority as counter-terrorism. It should be noted that one out of every 10 companies hit by ransomware in 2020 have succumbed to ransom payment.

### Unfortunate Cases of Ransomware Attacks

In early 2012, the infamous REVETON ransomware was active across several European countries. This malware uses cybersecurity police logos, claiming that the infected PC had been used for illegal activity, and thus the victim is instructed to pay a fine using a prepaid voucher card. By August 2012, a new REVETON version spread across the US, demanding \$200 fines to be paid to the FBI office.

In May 2017, the world witnessed the biggest piracy wave generated by WannaCrypt ransomware that crashed more than 150 countries, inflicting 200 thousand victims. Russia was among the most affected states, while the UK had to cancel a number of surgeries post ransomware attacks on some hospitals. This malware also hit 70% of the PCs of the Spanish communications company. In addition, the National Cybersecurity Authority (NCA) of the KSA Ministry of Interior announced that nearly 2000 PCs have been hit in KSA.

In December 31, 2019, a cybergang used REVIL-SODINOKIBI ransomware to hit Travelex, a British exchange company headquartered in London, crippled its network, stole an estimated five gigabytes of its documents, and demanded a ransom in exchange for restoring the company's systems and preventing data leaks online. Travelex paid a ransom of \$2.3 million worth of bitcoin to recover the company's systems. This attack cost the company more than \$33 million that it declared bankruptcy in August 2020, blaming the ransomware attacks and COVID-19 pandemic.

In March 2020, Communications & Power Industries (CPI), a huge electronics company in California that manufactures military equipment and hardware components for the US Department of Defense, was hit by ransomware. CPI was reported to have paid a \$500 thousand ransom to the attackers to restore its data. The following month, ENERGIAS DE PORTUGAL (EDP), an energy powerhouse in Portugal, fell victim to a Ragnar Locker ransomware attack that encrypted the company systems. The attackers demanded a \$10 million ransom.

In June 2020, the infamous Honda Motor Company was hit by Snake, also known as EKANS, ransomware, which targeted their headquarters in USA, Europe, and Japan. Once the attack was detected, Honda shut down production in many locations. The following month, Garmin, a sports and fitness technology company, fell victim to ransomware. The company announced on July 27 that the five-day service suspension starting on July 23 was due to a ransomware attack. Even though Garmin managed to recover

its services, their stock price fell by 10%. That July, the French telecom company Orange, the fourth-largest mobile operator in Europe, was hit too by NEFILIM ransomware. The NEFILIM ransomware actors behind the attack added Orange to the NEFILIM dark website that detailed corporate leaks in a 339MB archive.

The following August, the University of Utah was revealed to have paid a ransomware gang \$457 thousand in order to avoid having hackers leak student information. In May 2021, Colonial Pipeline, that operates the largest petroleum pipeline in the US, completely shut down its systems following a ransomware attack. According to of Colonial Pipeline CEO's testimony in front of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the company, that carries 2.5 million barrels a day of gasoline and other fuels across the 8850KM pipeline route, paid a \$5 million ransom to hackers.

### One Ransom to Another

Payment of ransom is often the last resort for ransomware victims. However, it enables the cycle of ransomware to continue. The most critical problem lies in the fact that the process of paying a ransom to get a decryption tool to recover services directly funds criminal cyberactivity. Paying any ransom creates more incentives, not only on the current ransom operators' part, but also for future ones, that the ransomware industry has become a booming business that yields more than \$100 million annually to infamous criminal groups.

Payment of ransom can be the only applicable option for some companies to keep going. However, frequent ransomware payments and the growing number of organizations that pay ransoms make the idea per se more acceptable. Many companies find ransom payments much less costly than potential damage costs. Consequently, the number of intermediary companies that help victims to negotiate ransoms, payments, and technical recovery, has been on the rise. However, that is probably what increases the ransom amount.

Some companies countering ransomware resort to cyber insurance covering ransomware. Whereas some studies showed that such step leads to overlooking their cybersecurity posture. In addition, organizations that believe cyber insurance would solve the issue and make up for their losses are less likely to invest in risk prevention.

Ransomware operators learn from their own successes and failures and constantly develop innovative toolkits. Every news title that reports a successful ransomware attack and a ransom paid by the victim, who probably had no other choice, feeds into the ransomware market and takes it to a whole new phase. Ransomware attacks used to occur without stealing data, but they now adopt the double extortion practice (encrypting and stealing data) spurred by the successes and increased ransom payments.

The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with remote work has increased ransomware operators' opportunities to access target organizations. All these facts made ransomware a fully-integrated market—there are gangs that hack, companies that provide services to ransomware victims, and institutions that pay money to address the impacts of such criminal activity.

# CYBER COUNTER-TERRORISM

■ Montasir Hamada

The **cyber** confrontation is the most important among all counter-terrorism confrontations given the escalating influence of extremist discourse over the cyber world and social media. It is necessary to raise awareness of the risk of the outcomes of the digital revolution being exploited and harnessed by terrorism to serve their goals, then take action to fight against terrorism in theory and practice.

## Principles and determinants

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon and fighting against it should not take a unilateral route—ideologically, security-wise, or economically—but rather a multilateral complex plan of various measures and domains. This approach was adopted by Arab countries in the last decade, especially the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Morocco. Researchers have described the Moroccan experience as a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach after it has been limited to security, specifically after the Casablanca attacks in 2003.

The digital revolution is not an ideological luxury despite the fact the digital revolution its influence on the perspectives of decision makers and the community in the Arab and Islamic World were considered ideological luxury matters almost two decades ago. Besides, digital updates were perceived as scientific developments that are only found in sci-fi movies. However, the West has been working on digital development and artificial intelligence for a long time now. Therefore, digital confrontation is inevitable and must be evoked when deploying the tools of the never-ending fight against domestic or regional terrorism, given the fact that the region is still at risk of greater chaos and that terrorists exploit cyber spaces to serve their activities.

## Cyberterrorism

Terrorism is not far from the cyber world. In fact, terrorists have worked practically hard in utilizing the digital revolution in their domestic, regional, and international activities. This is evident in

the multitude of digital platforms of terrorist groups with different orientations and beliefs, primarily active terrorist groups. They have gone too far targeting the youth of Muslim communities and minorities in the West, especially European countries, and exploiting them to achieve their terrorist goals. They have also targeted non-Muslim European youth who are likely to revert to Islam, exploiting their psychological, social, or other forms of turmoil, and thereby polarizing them to enroll in terrorist acts.

It has become necessary for decision makers of the Arab World in particular and the Islamic World in general to pay attention to religion in the cyberspace in the context of counter-terrorism in all Arab and Muslim countries. They should reform the religious discourse of the religious institutions, or in Friday sermons, traditional printed media platforms, or modern digital platforms.

The digital discourse reform in many religious institutions of the Arab World uncovers the problem and performance loopholes. For example, even though it has been more than a decade since Moroccan religious institutions launched their project on restructuring the religious field in order to achieve lofty goals, primarily the reform of the religious discourse of religious institutions, it has yielded mediocre outcomes quantitatively and qualitatively compared to the desired outcomes.

## Digital Outputs

Researchers interested in the assessment of the religious digital outputs should first compare the religious discourse of terrorist groups on digital platforms—social-media pages, encyclopedias, publications, or documents—with that of most religious institutions of the Arab World. Then, they should investigate and analyze the impact of the differences between the two on children, adolescents, and young adults. The terrorist discourse does not target middle-aged and elderly people since they got past the adolescence ideological phase, unlike adolescents and young adults who are more curious to look for satisfactory answers to their pressing



■ Moroccan author and researcher.

questions. If they do not find answers in the discourse of official or non-official moderate religious institutions, they will find them in the extremist and violent extremist religious discourse.

In Physics, there is a postulate that nature abhors a vacuum. Accordingly, today's youth of the Arab World have concerns and emerging questions related to religion, identity, sex, and pluralism. If they do not find answers to their questions within the familial or social environments, it is easier to find those answers on digital platforms via mobile phones, with no need for computers or waiting to find them in educational curricula or through pedagogical or religious guidance. The more quantitatively and qualitatively present the religious discourse of religious institutions, who are responsible for preaching and guidance, is on digital platforms, the higher the probability of taking them is. Such dilemma has been exploited by terrorism for their benefit, and it has become hard to measure the consequences and implications.

Another dilemma that is manifested in the awareness of the religious institutions personnel of the importance of the cyber counter-terrorism fight should come to light given the huge responsibility of fighting against the terrorist discourse in cyber space. Counter-terrorism in real life requires prior awareness of the matter. Employees of religious institutions who do not fully comprehend the importance of working on the digital front are not expected to make any significant achievement. And those who are not alert and attentive to the turmoil caused by this multipronged, perpetual digital war that not only threatens state institutions, but rather the whole country, and does not only target adolescents and young adults, are not reliable to either achieve the desired goals or protect the society from terrorist discourse taking over a large number of young people.

### Recommendations and Suggestions

In order to shape proper perspectives and develop practical plans for those in charge of the management of religious institutions,

primarily religious decision makers, we recommend the following:

- Reconsidering the content of the digital religious discourse directed against terrorist discourse, extending the circle of technical and religious consultation, and benefitting from the experiences of other countries in addressing terrorist, extremist, and violent phenomena in the name of religion;
- Utilizing ideological actions that refuted and denounced the terrorist discourse in digital propaganda;
- Taking the psychological aspect of the receiver of religious content presented via cyber space into account, especially that of adolescents and young adults, as well as incorporating aesthetics into the content;
- Fighting terrorist activities through figures of the religious discourse reform project in the region given their expertise and awareness of the nature and concepts of such activities, and their theoretical knowledge that would help to undermine the terrorist discourse;
- Supporting non-official religious digital platforms, preparing them to ideologically confront the terrorist discourse with all its criticisms and refutations, and rooting the true anti-terrorist religious and ideological views via non-official platforms that provide content that protects the state and religion against destructive activities of extremist and violent vandalism;
- Launching open-ended counter-terrorism campaigns that are not only casual or occasional as is so often after many local and regional terrorist incidents.

Lastly, we believe that acting upon these recommendations can actually result in influential outcomes in the digital fight against terrorism. However, what is desired is more than that and beyond planning and implementation. Officials of the ideological, security, and economic fronts should rise up to the occasion and support teamwork on the dangerous cyber front.



## IMCTC Delegation Visits the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology (ETIDAL)



A senior IMCTC delegation, headed by IMCTC Secretary-General Major-General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Moghedi, and delegates of IMCTC Member States, visited the headquarters of the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology (ETIDAL) on Thursday, February 10, 2022, and was received by ETIDAL Secretary-General Dr. Mansour al-Shammari.

The IMCTC delegation was briefed on the Centre's work, and the most important domains in which it is active regarding counter-terrorism and propagation of a culture of moderation. The delegation was also informed of ETIDAL work policies and plans, monitoring and analysis tools, techniques used, and models being developed to dismantle extremist discourse.

Major-General Al-Moghedi praised the work of the Centre and staff and stressed that both IMCTC and ETIDAL are in the same direction; namely, counter-terrorism of all kinds and patterns, unrooting violence and extremism, and disseminating a culture of moderation.

## IMCTC Welcomes Delegates of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



On February 15, 2022, two delegates of the People's Republic of Bangladesh joined the delegates of the IMCTC Member States and began their work at the IMCTC headquarters in Riyadh, bringing the number of Member States that sent their delegates to twenty-seven.

Major-General Mohammed Saeed Al-Moghedi, IMCTC Secretary-General, welcomed the delegates of Bangladesh, wishing them success in their work, and highlighting the significant contribution of Member States delegates that serves the IMCTC interests and initiatives in the fight against terrorism.

## Command and Staff College Delegation Visits IMCTC

On Sunday, February 13, 2022, IMCTC received a delegation from the Master's Program of Military Sciences of the Command and Staff College in IMCTC headquarters in Riyadh. His Excellency Major-General Abdullah Hamid Al-Qurashi, Assistant to IMCTC Military Commander, addressed the occasion and briefed the delegation on the IMCTC efforts in combating extremism and terrorism.



## IMCTC Celebrates Kuwait's and the Gambia's National Day and Congratulates Brunei on Independence Day



On Sunday, February 27, 2022, Kuwait's delegate in IMCTC, Brigadier General Nawaf bin Nasser Al-Jutaili held a ceremony to commemorate Kuwait's national day at IMCTC headquarters in Riyadh. The ceremony was attended by IMCTC Secretary-General, delegates of IMCTC Member States, and IMCTC affiliates.

Earlier on Sunday, February 20, 2022, delegates of the Republic of the Gambia also held a ceremony celebrating the Gambia's Independence Day at IMCTC headquarters in Riyadh, in the presence of delegates of IMCTC Member States and IMCTC affiliates. The Gambia's delegate to IMCTC, Colonel Mamadou Alioui Galoo, addressed the occasion, and a film was presented introducing the Republic of the Gambia. Major-General Al-Moghedi congratulated both countries on their National Day, wishing them continuous progress and prosperity.

IMCTC also congratulated Brunei Darussalam on its Independence Day, which falls on February 23, 2022.