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AT THE 82nd JOINT MEETING OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY
CO-OPERATION AND THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent developments in the operational environment for combating terrorism and other violent manifestations of extremism suggest that, in the short term, there is no trend towards a decrease in terrorist activity in the world. The Middle East has been one of the main sources of the spread of terrorism and extremism in recent years. This is due to years of military confrontation in Syria and other countries of the region, in which the international terrorist organizations Islamic State, Al-Qaida through its Syrian affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra, which morphed into a coalition of Islamist groups called Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, and other affiliated armed groups have taken part and continue to do so as parties to the conflict. Nationals from neighbouring States also fight alongside these organizations. And while the efforts of the counter-terrorism coalition have meant that international terrorism – in the form of the aforementioned terrorist organizations that suffered tangible losses in Syria – has lost much of its potency, it continues to pose a serious threat, both in terms of the expansion of its geographical reach and in terms of participation in various inter-State conflicts.

The desire of international terrorist organizations to take an active part in the conflicts in a number of States is leading to a gradual merging of international and domestic terrorism. An extensive terrorist underground network is continuing to develop, with the aim of ensuring the transit and illegal deployment of fighters from countries with a high level of terrorist activity and also expanding hotbeds of tension and destabilizing the situation in various regions of the world. Furthermore, international terrorist organizations have sought to adapt to contemporary realities by changing their methods, forms and tactics of engaging in criminal activities. To that end, they co-operate closely with one another and establish contacts with cross-border organized crime.

One example of this adaptation has been the shift of international terrorist organizations' financial activity amidst the coronavirus pandemic to various electronic platforms and their increasing use of cryptocurrencies and Bitcoin wallets with secure protocols, which are poorly controlled by States' banking systems and ensure anonymity.

The threat posed by international terrorist organizations trying to gain practical combat experience in various armed conflict zones and then using that experience to carry out terrorist activities has also lost none

of its relevance at the present stage. In particular, alongside the developments in Syria and Iraq, sabotage and terrorist groups have moved into a number of other countries in the region, contributing to the export of terrorist activities, among other things. It should be noted that the mercenaries used for this purpose are fighters from terrorist organizations and groups that have taken part in the hostilities in Syria, Libya and Pakistan and in a number of other local military conflicts.

The previously stable situation in the South Caucasus from the point of view of terrorist threats has undergone dramatic changes as a result of the large-scale military action unleashed against the Republic of Artsakh. Even before the outbreak of hostilities, the recruitment, transfer and stationing in our region by Turkey of over 4,000 foreign mercenaries and terrorists from among the fighters of international terrorist organizations and groups taking part in the hostilities in Syria, Libya and Pakistan, and their use by Azerbaijan against the Republic of Artsakh was recorded. This information has been confirmed not only by the intelligence services and foreign ministers of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries, but also by the intelligence services of other partners and by direct testimonies of captured terrorists themselves. In particular, fighters from the Sultan Murad, Al-Hamza and Suleiman Shah terrorist groups, which are part of the so-called Syrian National Army and regarded as its best trained elite units, were moved into the region.

The process of recruiting and deploying mercenaries also took place during the entire period of hostilities. In the course of the fighting, they were mainly used as the forces of the first line of attack, which was followed by a second and a third line. At the same time, fighters who had undergone special training in northern Syria were widely used in mobile sabotage groups, both on foot and in light armoured vehicles and pickup trucks equipped with large-calibre weapons.

According to the information received, the process of recruiting mercenaries in the northern parts of the Syrian Arab Republic for their subsequent deployment has not stopped. In particular, information has been received about the recruitment and transfer to our region of Turkmen and Uighurs, together with their families, who are meant to be permanently settled along the border with the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh, thereby changing the ethnic composition of the population of these territories.

Esteemed colleagues,

It should be noted that one of the most immediate threats is the widely used tactic by terrorist organizations in recent times of establishing what are known as “sleeper cells” on the territories of various countries. Thus, small independent cells are created instead of the traditionally formed terrorist structures. The formation of a network of terrorist sleeper cells is becoming a new distinctive feature of modern technologies for engaging in terrorist activities, allowing international terrorist organizations to expand their spheres of influence in regions of interest while maintaining their command and control centres far beyond their borders.

The members of these sleeper cells could be persons involved in the activities of international terrorist organizations who have returned to their countries of origin from regions with a high level of terrorist activity having gained the relevant combat experience, or persons who have fallen under the influence of religious extremist ideology, for example Internet users who became “self-radicalized” after being exposed to extremist propaganda material. Leaders of terrorist structures often employ followers with no combat experience, but who are willing to carry out a terrorist act, also as a lone-actor terrorist or a suicide bomber, at short notice if ordered to do so. Cold weapons and firearms, along with improvised explosive devices made with readily available components, may be used to commit terrorist acts.

The recruitment activity of terrorist organizations, including on the Internet, remains high. The population categories targeted by this recruitment tend to be orthodox Muslims, neophytes, and socially disadvantaged, rootless or marginalized segments of society.

Extremist ideological propaganda on various social media and messaging apps also remains a very pressing issue. In particular, information on generally accessible means and methods of committing crimes is disseminated by ideologues, instructions on how to make explosives and explosive devices at home are published, and suicidal behaviour is promoted. It is also noted that the ideologues of terrorism are following modern Internet trends. For example, they have recently started to disseminate photos, videos and other material using online streaming services, video hosting sites, closed chats on various social media and messaging apps, Telegram channels and other such means popular with young people.

In addition, there is a trend towards the creation of relevant thematic websites in a largely uncontrolled part of the Internet space (various virtual private network (VPN) services, Tor networks). At the same time, the creation and development of their own “cyberunits” lead to a growing threat of cyberattacks by terrorist organizations by means that include interference and the introduction of various malicious programs into the control systems of critical facilities and critical infrastructure in order to disable them for a lengthy period of time and trigger large-scale human-caused disasters that could have serious consequences.

Colleagues,

It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has also transformed the way in which terrorist organizations obtain financing and replenish their resources. In particular, the use of various electronic payment systems for fund-raising purposes has increased. Virtual wallet addresses, where funds are accumulated via various electronic platforms, are being employed to that end.

As COVID-19 continues to spread around the world, the leaders of terrorist structures call for propaganda activity on the Internet to be stepped up, presenting it as a means of waging jihad. Meanwhile, with most countries adopting various quarantine measures, restrictions and periodic enforced lockdowns, the use of online propaganda tools by ideologues of terrorism allows them to reach a bigger audience. In particular, a rise in the interest of young people and minors in materials of a terrorist or religious extremist nature has been recorded recently. In that connection, a problem that remains no less serious is young people’s “self-radicalization”, the creation of a climate of hatred among them towards members of other races, religions, nationalities or social groups, and the justification for fighting them using all available means, including violent methods. Moreover, “self-radicalized” persons, showing no outward signs of this, going completely unnoticed by others around them and – most importantly – not coming to the attention of the law enforcement authorities, can within a fairly short period of time be transformed into lone-actor terrorists. This is a matter of concern, including in partner countries for counter-terrorism co-operation, and is highlighted as one of the most likely terrorist threats.

The threat of various high-tech devices and unmanned systems being used in terrorist attacks remains. In particular, there is a trend towards the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for terrorist purposes, both to scout out the targets of terrorist aspirations and to carry out attacks on well-protected and hard-to-reach targets. Moreover, UAVs are a fairly effective tool for carrying out terrorist attacks. They are widely available, not subject to registration, operated anonymously, remote-controlled, have a broad-range coverage capability at low cost and are easy to handle. There have also been cases of massive terrorist attacks carried out with the aid of UAVs against various protected targets, including military objects and critical infrastructure facilities.

Esteemed colleagues,

An analysis of recent terrorist incidents around the world suggests that terrorist organizations are gradually shifting towards the tactic of carrying out isolated acts and localized terrorist attacks in a combined manner, using the entire arsenal at their disposal in the process – suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, UAVs, shootings in crowded areas during mass sporting events and other public occasions, and the use of hazardous chemicals and pathogenic biological agents. In the current unfavourable environment for terrorist organizations, this gives them an opportunity to cause serious damage and demonstrate their persisting capabilities without wasting military resources or incurring casualties of their own.

In this regard, and in line with our commitments in the field of combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and in a spirit of co-operation, we call for closer dialogue and engagement to neutralize terrorist threats. There is a need for the global community to work together to prevent and counter the spread of terrorism and violent extremism both in the OSCE area and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.