

Keynote

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on Counter-Terrorism**

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Prof Reichman, President and Founder of the Interdisciplinary Centre (IDC) in Herzliya,
Prof Ganor, Founder and Executive Director of the IDC,
Chairman of the Board, Mr Shavit,
Honourable Minister Shaked,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the 17th World Summit on Counter-Terrorism.

It is quite symbolic that we meet today on September 11th, a day at which practically anyone in the western world will remember where they were 16 years ago on this day when the biggest terrorist attack on American soil happened.

On this day, I am also humbled to speak before an audience in which there are many who sadly remember and have lived through many other terrorist attacks. Israel is a country that has lived with terror for decades. Decades in which most families have been hurt by violence and terror. Decades in which most families have remembered the losses, the sadness, the fear and the trauma that terror causes.

I speak also as someone who has sadly lived with that phenomena for most of my life. The first car bomb that I experienced was at the age of seven. In Iraq I've lost friends and colleagues. My own country, Bulgaria, has experienced terror.

In the last couple of years, as the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, I can attest to how vastly destructive the impact of terrorism is, not just on human beings but also on the prospects of peace.

Sadly, in this part of the world, extremists have chosen terrorism as their most prominent tool to destroy political processes, to destroy the prospects of peace. That is why standing up firmly to terror must be an integral part of any peace effort, not just in words but also in deeds.

Just as we often speak of the need to promote peace through sustainable development and economic opportunity, so we must insulate efforts to achieve peace in the region from the risks that terror and violence bring.

In the Middle East of today, we face a reality in which terrorist threats are interconnected. To tackle them we need a broad approach that extends well beyond the borders of any one country and go beyond the region as a whole.

Today's reality demands a new international approach on how we deal with the new threats that the Middle East and North Africa face. I would like to briefly speak about three processes that together unfortunately create the perfect storm that we see unfolding right now in the Middle East, before I make some suggestions of how to deal with these challenges.

Firstly, we see a process of collapsing states that lack democratic legitimacy, that lack strong institutions, or the ability to deliver services to their people. In Syria a president stood up against his own people. In Iraq, a collapsed state was replaced by ethnic and sectarian divisions.

When such states are unable to meet the legitimate demands of their people for representation, economic and social development, security or human dignity, they create space for radical groups and extremists.

In late 2013, the Iraqi people in the Anbar province and elsewhere took to the streets demanding jobs, dignity and fair economic and social opportunities. They were not met with dialogue but with guns. Soon their protests that had turned into sit-ins that were infiltrated by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and ISIL and by the spring of 2014. Their agenda was hijacked by radical extremists with a destructive agenda.

Had the government reacted differently, perhaps that would not have happened.

At the same time, we see across the Middle East the implosion of marginalized communities. Groups that are impoverished, or have been disenfranchised, or feel marginalized or discriminated against quickly collapse under the pressure of radical extremists; And become breeding grounds for terror, mass atrocities and violence.

Almost two years before Mosul fell to the hands of ISIL, all the signs were there; and the United Nations had been warning the world. For years the people in Mosul lived in fear of the central government. They felt that their dignity was not respected. They lacked economic opportunities, institutions were corrupt and ineffective. People felt marginalized. In the period before the fall of Mosul to the hands of *DAESH*, practically every single elected representative was killed, maimed, kidnapped or kicked out by the terror organizations.

Terror struck in waves; first it struck elected officials, then it struck civilians, then it struck religious communities, and last but not least, it struck schools.

In the last couple of months before the fall of Mosul, we had a surge of terror attacks in which suicide bombers attacked schools. This destroyed the social structures of society.

As states collapse, as social structures implode, the international community lacks the tools to deal with the trans-border threats that face the region today. Our instruments were designed to deal primarily with state-to-state conflicts. They would have helped us deal with a war between Iraq and Syria, but how do we deal with a war inside Iraq and inside Syria that risks to spread and engulf everyone around them?

These are some of the challenges that today we need to find the answers to and to deal with at an international, regional and national level.

We in the United Nations, together with our many partners around the world, are investing great attention and resources in trying to fix our own approaches so that we have a better understanding of what needs to be done.

We are investing not just in providing humanitarian relief to suffering communities but also working to help still-functioning states and as-yet-unbroken communities in the region protect themselves from the vulnerabilities of what is happening around us.

It is very important that we take the necessary actions to prevent further conflict.

UN Secretary-General Guterres has been very much focused on developing a new vision for the Organization; one which prioritizes prevention over response. As part of his efforts to focus on preventing violence, conflict and mass atrocities, he has also established a UN Office for Counter-Terrorism.

My colleague, Jehangir Khan will speak later more specifically on these developments.

I would like to focus on five objectives related to how we deal with terror in the international community that warrant some discussion.

Firstly, is the moral foundation for our work — zero tolerance for the justification or legitimization of terror. In Israel, this is particularly pertinent discussion. It is however a very valid discussion well beyond the borders of your state.

We must constantly reaffirm and strengthen the clear international consensus against terror. Let me quote a UN General Assembly Resolution (49/60), adopted in 1994: *“Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes are in any circumstance*

unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them”.

So first we need to condemn terror, then secondly we have an obligation to promote inclusive political solutions to conflicts.

Experience in this part of the world has shown us that if you create hope, and then take hope away, most of the time you end up with violence. This is particularly pertinent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Today, we live in a historical period in which the hope for peace and for a solution to the conflict is well beyond the reach of political leaders on all sides.

Terrorism thrives where there is division and suffocates when the core grievances that people have are addressed.

This is one of the reasons why in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important to create the hope for peace by recreating a political horizon to address the final status issues. Such a political process needs to be accompanied by economic and social measures that improve the lives of Palestinians and a regional framework that insulates the process from those who will seek to destroy it.

The third objective that we must focus on is the need to address the political and socio-economic factors that breed violent extremism. Across the region, this means investing in development, upholding human rights and strengthening the resilience of communities against extremism.

Fourthly, we need to focus on the coordinated fight against the drivers and enablers of terrorism at an international level. We need to strengthen the international response to incitement and radical propaganda; focus on illicit weapons smuggling and production; the financial flows to terror groups; the movement of foreign fighters; and the question of accountability for states in upholding their international obligations.

Last but not least, we also have a political objective that I believe is very important and that is to strengthening the forces of moderation in the Middle East. Over the last year or so, we have seen a growing understanding among leaders in some countries of the Arab world of the need to focus on this priority and this a welcome development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are just some of the priorities that I suggest we should look at in our international efforts to address the threat of terrorism, particularly here in the Middle East. Much more can be said and certainly much more can be done.

In closing, let me remind everyone that sadly terrorists have a doubly de-humanizing impact on all. On the one hand, they brand entire populations as legitimate targets. On the other, they stigmatize their own ethnic or religious groups as potential terrorists. We should not allow them to win by caving into this bias. The negative action of one terrorist today still resonates widely, while the actions of many individuals who work every day to prevent violence remain unnoticed.

I hope that this conference will be able to speak to how we challenge this visibility bias and the de-humanizing effect of terror.

But let us also not shy away from the political task that we have before us, the political challenge of our time — how do we strengthen the forces of moderation and how do we increase the residence of communities so that we can together stand against violent extremism and terror.

Hopefully, this forum can contribute to how we formulate a much broader and multidimensional approach to counter-terrorism at an international level.

Thank you.

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