Forum: 3rd Committee (Disarmament & Int. Security)

Issue: Measures to Prevent Terrorists from Acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Introduction

The world community is determined to combat terrorism; however, the risk of linkages between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is growing.

The weapons of mass destruction can cause severe damage and harm to the environment and a large number of people as well. If we look back at history, we can see that weapons of mass destruction have been used in a small number of terrorist attacks. However, the acquisition of them remains one of the most important goals of many terrorist groups worldwide. The access to this kind of weapons has become much easier due to the dissemination of relevant information and technologies, so it increases the possibility of terrorist groups obtaining and using weapons of mass destruction. As a result of the facilitation of access to them, the threat of terrorist attacks has increased. That means that the need for international mechanisms that would control the illegal trade of such weapons and prevent terrorist groups from acquiring them is now more imperative than ever.

The link between weapons of mass destruction and terrorism is one of the most feared threats of modern times. In this case all States should cooperate in order to achieve progress in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation for the maintenance of the international peace and security and for contribution in the global efforts of combating terrorism.

Definition of key terms

<u>Terrorism</u>

"Terrorism" is a term which is extremely difficult to define due to the fact that this word is politically and emotionally charged. In addition, various legal systems and government agencies use different definitions of terrorism. Disagreements on this topic made it impossible to establish Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism that incorporates a single, all-encompassing, criminal law definition of terrorism.

We can find different definitions of the term in dictionaries and other sources:

1. The use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes.

2. The unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims

3. A terroristic method of governing or of resisting a government.

4. The use of violent acts to frighten the people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal.

It is quite clear that terrorism has a strong connection with a threat to international peace and security.

In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly has condemned terrorist acts using the following political description of terrorism: "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." For instance, until 1990s, terrorism was widely considered to be a security concern of the second order. After the events of 11 September 2001, this conception of terrorism radically changed.

A weapon of mass destruction

A weapon of mass destruction can be defined as any weapon that is designed or intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a large number of humans through the release, dissemination, or impact of toxic or poisonous chemicals, or their precursors. It can be chemical, biological, or nuclear. However, when we talk about weapons of mass destruction we usually mean nuclear weapons.

There are eight countries that have declared they possess nuclear weapons and are known to have tested a nuclear weapon, only five of which are members of the NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty). The eight are China, France, India, North Korea, Pakistan, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Israel is considered by most experts to have approximately 80 nuclear warheads as well, but maintains an official policy of nuclear ambiguity, neither denying nor confirming its nuclear status. In 2015, the United States confirmed that Israel does indeed have thermonuclear arms, disclosing a decades-long collaboration on weapons technology development.

Nations that are known or believed to possess nuclear weapons are sometimes referred to informally as *the nuclear club*.

A number of multilateral treaties have been established by the UN with the aim of preventing nuclear proliferation and testing, while promoting progress in nuclear disarmament. These include the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests In The Atmosphere, In Outer Space And Under Water, also known as the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was signed in 1996 but has yet to enter into force.

Background information

We cannot definitely say that using weapons of mass destruction in attacks is the phenomenon of XXI century. It dates back to the beginning of XX century, when it was mostly used by the

militaries of different states during several wars (World War I; Russian civil war; World War II; Iran–Iraq War, etc.). What is more, we can see that there were some cases when weapons of mass destruction were used by government forces against rebel areas (for example, Laotian and Vietnamese militaries). However, in the last decades of XX century the number of terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction has increased rapidly. The most well-known ones are: terrorist attack in Turkey (21 Jan 1994), The Philippines (6 Sep 1987), Iraq (Oct 2006 - Jun 2007), Afghanistan (2010, 2012-2013).

Major countries involved

The issue of preventing terrorists from acquiring WMDs is without any doubts global. A lot of countries are involved. The main stakeholders are the USA, Russian Federation, the UK, Pakistan, and France and the countries which are in the unstable political situation and where there are terrorist groups acting.

UN Involvement

UN is deeply concerned by the growing risk of linkages between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in the last 20 years and in particular by the fact that terrorists may seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Combating terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as well is a vital issue that has been discussed several times by the UN General Assembly. A lot of resolutions have been voted in order to finally find the solution to this problem. However, the progress that has been made in order to make real steps to solve this problem is not analogous to the impressive number of passed resolutions. The possible solutions included in the aforementioned resolutions are similar. The provisions included in the aforementioned Resolutions are similar as well.
The General Assembly has repeatedly called upon the nuclear-weapon States to undertake further efforts to reduce and ultimately eliminate all types of nuclear weapons and to implement their nuclear disarmament commitments; urged all Member States to enact national policies and work together at the same time in order to prevent terrorists from acquiring WMDs, as the achievement of this goal depends on their international cooperation and coordinated efforts. The In addition, the Secretary General was asked to monitor national measures taken by the Member States and compile an annual report, in order for the Assembly to be fully informed about their progress at all times.

Possible solutions

It is obvious that the steps mentioned above are not enough. The international community needs to take more serious measures in order to combat the threat of acquiring WMDs by terrorists. The creation of an international monitoring system with the help of Interpol and other international organizations that will eliminate all WMD black markets and terrorist training camps

disseminating WMD technology and information must be taken into serious consideration. It is also important to establish the new detection equipment that will prevent terrorists from transporting and distributing WMD. Already-signed relevant Treaties should be definitely implemented, and all member States (especially the countries of the nuclear club) should adopt stricter legislation towards storage and usage of nuclear weapons. Thus all States should establish the policies on the liquidation of possible consequences connected with WMDs.

Reliable useful links

1) Williamson, Myra (2009). Terrorism, war and international law: the legality of the use of force against Afghanistan in 2001. Ashgate Publishing. p. 38.
2) Schmid, Alex P. (2011). "The Definition of Terrorism". The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research. P. 39
3) United Nations Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism annex to UN General Assembly resolution 49/60 "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism" of December 9, 1994
4) Ben Saul, "Defining 'Terrorism' to Protect Human Rights" in Sydney Law School Legal Studies Research Paper
5) UN Office for Disarmament Affairs
6) W. Seth Carus Defining "Weapons of Mass Destruction"
7) UN Terrorist Bombings Convention
8) General Assembly, 88th plenary meeting,1996 51/210. Measures to eliminate international terrorism
9) Terrorism research. Early history of terrorism
10) Report of the Secretary-General UN General Assembly 2014 , 69th session, A/68/164, 68th session
11) Interpol
12) UN Disarmament yearbook 2014, p. 55
13) UNODA
14) UN
15) Summary of historical attacks using chemical or biological weapons compiled by Wm. Robert Johnston