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Barack Obama

United Nations Security Council Address

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I thank His Excellency, the Secretary-General, for his statement. I'll now make a statement in my capacity as President of the United States.

Mr. Secretary-General, heads of state and government distinguished representatives, thank you for being here today.

In the nearly 70 years of the United Nations, this is only the sixth time that the Security Council has met at a level like this. We convene such sessions to address the most urgent threats to peace and security. And I called this meeting because we must come together -- as nations and an international community -- to confront the real and growing threat of foreign terrorist fighters.

As I said earlier today,¹ the tactic of terrorism is not new. So many nations represented here today, including my own, have seen our citizens killed by terrorists who target innocents. And today, the people of the world have been horrified by another brutal murder, of Herve Gourdel, by terrorists in Algeria. President Hollande, we stand with you and the French people not only as you grieve this terrible loss, but as you show resolve against terror and in defense of liberty.



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What brings us together today, what is new is the unprecedented flow of fighters in recent years to and from conflict zones, including Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, Yemen, Libya, and most recently, Syria and Iraq.

Our intelligence agencies estimate that more than 15,000 foreign fighters from more than 80 nations have traveled to Syria in recent years. Many have joined terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda's affiliate, the Nusra Front, and ISIL, which now threatens people across Syria and Iraq. And I want to acknowledge and thank Prime Minister Abadi of Iraq for being here today.

In the Middle East and elsewhere, these terrorists exacerbate conflicts; they pose an immediate threat to people in these regions; and as we've already seen in several cases, they may try to return to their home countries to carry out deadly attacks. In the face of this threat, many of our nations -- working together and through the United Nations -- have increased our cooperation. Around the world, foreign terrorist fighters have been arrested, plots have been disrupted and lives have been saved.

Earlier this year at West Point, I called for a new Partnership to help nations build their capacity to meet the evolving threat of terrorism, including foreign terrorist fighters. And preventing these individuals from reaching Syria and then slipping back across our borders is a critical element of our strategy to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL.

The historic resolution that we just adopted enshrines our commitment to meet this challenge. It is legally binding. It establishes new obligations that nations must meet. Specifically, nations are required to "prevent and suppress the recruiting, organizing, transporting or equipping" of foreign terrorist fighters, as well as the financing of their travel or activities. Nations must "prevent the movement of terrorists or terrorist groups" through their territory, and ensure that their domestic laws allow for the prosecution of those who attempt to do so.

The resolution we passed today calls on nations to help build the capacity of states on the front lines of this fight -- including with the best practices that many of our nations approved yesterday, and which the United States will work to advance through our Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund. This resolution will strengthen cooperation between nations, including sharing more information about the travel and activities of foreign terrorist fighters. And it makes clear that respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law is not optional -- it is an essential part of successful counterterrorism efforts. Indeed, history teaches us that the failure to uphold these rights and freedoms can actually fuel violent extremism.

Finally, this resolution recognizes that there is no military solution to the problem of misguided individuals seeking to join terrorist organizations, and it, therefore, calls on nations to work together to counter the violent extremism that can radicalize, recruit, and mobilize individuals to engage in terrorism.



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Potential recruits must hear the words of former terrorist fighters who have seen the truth -- that groups like ISIL betray Islam by killing innocent men, women and children, the majority of whom are Muslim.

Often it is local communities -- family, friends, neighbors, and faith leaders -- that are best able to identify and help disillusioned individuals before they succumb to extremist ideologies and engage in violence. That's why the United States government is committed to working with communities in America and around the world to build partnerships of trust, respect and cooperation.

Likewise, even as we are unrelenting against terrorists who threaten our people, we must redouble our work to address the conditions -- the repression, the lack of opportunity, too often the hopelessness that can make some individuals more susceptible to appeals to extremism and violence. And this includes continuing to pursue a political solution in Syria that allows all Syrians to live in security, dignity, and peace.

This is the work that we must do as nations. These are the partnerships we must forge as an international community. And these are the standards that we now must meet. Yet even as we're guided by the commitments that we make here today, let me close by stating the obvious. Resolutions alone will not be enough. Promises on paper cannot keep us safe. Lofty rhetoric and good intentions will not stop a single terrorist attack.

The words spoken here today must be matched and translated into action, into deeds -- concrete action, within nations and between them, not just in the days ahead, but for years to come. For if there was ever a challenge in our interconnected world that cannot be met by any one nation alone, it is this: terrorists crossing borders and threatening to unleash unspeakable violence. These terrorists believe our countries will be unable to stop them. The safety of our citizens demand that we do. And I'm here today to say that all of you who are committed to this urgent work will find a strong and steady partner in the United States of America.

I now would like to resume my function as President of the Council. And I will now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

¹ Earlier in the day, President Obama addressed the 69th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. In that address he stated: "Terrorism is not new. Speaking before this Assembly, President Kennedy put it well: 'Terror is not a new weapon,' he said. 'Throughout history it has been used by those who could not prevail, either by persuasion or example.' In the 20th century, terror was used by all manner of groups who failed to come to power through public support. But in this century, we have faced a more lethal and ideological brand of terrorists who have perverted one of the world's great religions. With access to technology that allows small groups to do great harm, they have embraced a nightmarish vision that would divide the world into adherents and infidels -- killing as many innocent civilians as possible, employing the most brutal methods to intimidate people within their communities."