Security Council

Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat

I. Introduction

1.   In adopting its resolution 2253 (2015), the Security Council expressed its determination to address the threat posed to international peace and security by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) and associated individuals and groups. In paragraph 97 of the resolution, the Council requested that I provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution 2368 (2017), the Council requested that I continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the threat, as well as the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2.   This is my eighth report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security.[1] The report was prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,[2] in close collaboration with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, other United Nations entities and international organizations.

3.   The report highlights that, while ISIL has transformed into a covert network, including in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, it remains a threat as a global organization with centralized leadership. This threat is increased by returning, relocating or released foreign terrorist fighters. The United Nations has continued to support Member States so as to address this evolving threat.

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[1] See S/2016/92, S/2016/501, S/2016/830, S/2017/97, S/2017/467, S/2018/80 and S/2018/770.

[2] The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to Security Council resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities.

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II. Threat assessment

A. Overview of threat

4.   ISIL is still led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,[3] but its senior leadership has been reduced to a dispersed group, the few members of which each struggle to execute a number of essential tasks, without which the ISIL network could not survive, such as finance, logistics, military, intelligence, security, doctrine and media.[4]

5.   ISIL has substantially evolved into a covert network in Iraq, where it prioritizes local operations. It is in a phase of transition, adaptation and consolidation. It is organizing cells at the provincial level, replicating the key leadership functions. Provincial networks are expected to develop financial self-sufficiency, although limited funding is still disbursed from the centre.[5]

6.   The network in Iraq is receiving some reinforcement via a net flow of ISIL fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian network is expected by some Member States to evolve in its turn to resemble that in Iraq. In both countries, ISIL shows signs of wishing to stoke sectarian tension and pose as the standard-bearer for marginalized communities. One document obtained by a Member State describes the objectives of ISIL for the post-caliphate period: to undermine stabilization and reconstruction activities, target infrastructure rebuilding efforts and in general thwart economic progress. Its centre of gravity is expected to remain in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

7.   Globally, far fewer attacks associated with ISIL took place in 2018 than in 2017. Successful internationally directed attacks have fallen dramatically from 2015–2016, when ISIL external operational activity was at its height. Nevertheless, Member States remain concerned at the continued explicit intent of ISIL leadership to generate attacks, and the haphazard nature of inspired attacks, which makes defending against them difficult.

8.   The fall in international attacks and plots has also been caused by attrition of key ISIL personnel. Damage to the ISIL brand may be another way in which its progressive military defeat has reduced its capacity to project an international threat. Nevertheless, ISIL remains by far the most ambitious international terrorist group, and the one most likely to conduct a large-scale, complex attack in the near future. It retains an interest in attacking aviation and in the use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials.[6]

9.   ISIL remains a global organization with centralized leadership. It will continue to resource and instruct its affiliates to the extent of its reduced ability because of its overriding wish to demonstrate relevance and stake its claim to leadership of a "global caliphate". If ISIL regains access to permissive space and reinvests in external operational planning, a resurgence of directed attacks should be anticipated.[7]

10.   Meanwhile, foreign terrorist fighters leaving the conflict zone, or prior returnees becoming active again on release from prison or for other reasons, will increase the threat. The handling of dependants is particularly challenging. Radicalized women and traumatized minors may also pose a serious threat.

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[3] Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).
[4] Information provided by a Member State.
[5] Information provided by a Member State.
[6] Information provided by a Member State.
[7] Information provided by a Member State.

11.   Regarding relocators from the core conflict zone, relatively few have become active in other theatres of conflict. Most of the comparatively small numbers of foreign terrorist fighters who join regional affiliates come from within that region. Some "frustrated travellers", who have failed to reach the core conflict zone, have been redirected elsewhere by ISIL or gone at their own initiative, sometimes after lying low for some time in a transit location. Member States expect ISIL foreign terrorist fighters and other terrorists to show flexibility in moving between groups, which may reinforce Al-Qaida affiliates or generate new combinations or brands. [8]

12.   ISIL is reported by some Member States to still have access to financial reserves of between $50 million and $300 million. Although its territorial losses have removed some sources of revenue, it has correspondingly fewer liabilities and is expected to be able to sustain its operations.

13.   ISIL is assessed to have bulk-stored cash in its core area and smuggled some into neighbouring countries for safekeeping. It is also reported to have invested some of its reserves in legitimate businesses. ISIL no longer has reliable access to oil-producing areas in the eastern Syrian Arab Republic for direct extraction; it earns more revenue by extorting oil cargos extracted by others. It has been reported that ISIL financial assets have largely been concealed, with a strategic view to funding larger-scale attacks once the opportunity arises again.

14.   ISIL cells are expected to be self-financing and to support themselves through a variety of activities, including extortion, kidnapping for ransom or other criminal activity. There are reports that the group retains intelligence on local communities that could be used in future efforts to extort or otherwise extract financing from areas previously under its control.

15.   ISIL is assessed to retain financial and information technology expertise that can be exploited to advance the group's aims. Unregistered money-service businesses remain the primary means of transferring funds by ISIL, while gold exchanges are also reported to be a source of illicit financial flows to the group.

16.   Several Member States highlighted ISIL statements encouraging the use of new financial technologies, including cryptocurrencies. Such currencies are not yet assessed by Member States to be a significant source of revenue for ISIL. [9]

B. Regional trends

1. Middle East

17.   Military losses have forced ISIL to relinquish the idea of ruling a geographical "caliphate" for now, but the group retains that long-term aspiration and continues to proclaim it online. ISIL is reported still to control between 14,000 and 18,000 militants in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, including up to 3,000 foreign terrorist fighters. There are believed to be about 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters of various, sometimes undetermined, nationalities under arrest in Iraq. A growing number, currently nearly 1,000, plus more than 500 dependants, are detained in the northeast of the Syrian Arab Republic.

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[8] Information provided by a Member State.
[9] The United States Department of Justice announced on 26 November 2018 the guilty plea of a woman who had purchased $62,000 in bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, and initiated wire transfers to shell companies that were fronts for ISIS. (Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "New York Woman Pleads Guilty to Providing Material Support to ISIS", 26 November 2018.)

18. It has been reported that approximately 3,000 armed ISIL fighters are currently active in Iraq, although some reports provide higher estimates. The residual threat in Iraq is reported to emanate from both local ISIL remnants and fighters crossing the border from the Syrian Arab Republic to desert safe havens in Anbar and Ninawa. In mid-2018, ISIL successfully operated checkpoints in northern Iraq, from which it ambushed locally deployed Iraqi forces. In Diyala and Salah al-Din provinces, small groups of ISIL fighters are reported to be conducting surveillance activities.

19. ISIL cells in Iraq appear to be planning activities that undermine government authority, create an atmosphere of lawlessness, sabotage societal reconciliation and increase the cost of reconstruction and counter-terrorism.[10] These activities include kidnapping for ransom, targeted assassinations of local leaders and attacks against State utilities and services.

20. Other concerns with regards to radicalization include the large number of internally displaced persons. ISIL cells have been observed seeking access to camps for internally displaced persons for indoctrination and recruitment purposes, concentrating on people displaced from Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninawa. Iraqi prisons and holding facilities, severely overcrowded with detainees, are assessed to be another potential source of radicalization.

21. In Iraq, 13,000 minors up to the age of 12 are believed to lack established nationality because their papers are unavailable, or their birth was never registered. Some may be of Iraqi parentage, others may have one foreign parent, or two.[11] Member States regard this as a generational challenge, whereby a failure to integrate such persons into society could give rise to new threats at any time over the next 20 years. Some Member States continue to assert that countries of origin and nationality are still not shouldering their fair share of responsibility for helping countries who hold detainees to move them on according to due process.

22. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the only remaining ISIL territorial holding is around the town of Hajin in the Middle Euphrates River valley, near the Iraqi border. Three thousand or more fighters, most of them Iraqis, are estimated to be holding out there. Under sustained military pressure, some of the remaining foreign terrorist fighters have attempted to flee north, but many are intercepted and detained before reaching the border. Some of the Iraqi contingent are crossing in small parties into Iraq and regrouping there.

23. Member States have continued to highlight the threat posed by unarmed aircraft systems within the conflict zone and, globally, by ISIL-inspired weaponization of commercial off-the-shelf drones. The ISIL core also reportedly continues to procure such drones through a layered network of purchasers organized in small cells and spread across several countries. One such network, involved in shipping drones from Western Europe through Turkey to Iraq, was disrupted in September 2018.[12]

24. The ISIL core remains well equipped with weaponry from the time of the so-called "caliphate".[13] Supply lines still exist which sustain terrorist groups in the conflict zone, including with automatic rifles produced under expired licences. Cases of arms shipments from Eastern European countries to the Middle East and North Africa have been reported, including diversion of arms marked for legitimate end users. Additionally, Member States continue to highlight the threat from improvised explosive devices manufactured from diverted detonators and commercially available

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[10] Information provided by a Member State.
[11] Information provided by a Member State.
[12] Information provided by a Member State.
[13] Information provided by a Member State.

chemical precursors. Most attacks in Iraq involving such devices during the period under review employed such precursors, rather than military ordnance.

25.   Despite a mutual non-interference understanding which had existed between Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (QDe.129) and ISIL in Yemen since 2014, local conflict broke out in July 2018 in Bayda' governorate. This resulted in the expulsion of ISIL from most of its strongholds in Bayda'. Some local tactical coordination continues, however, between ISIL and other armed groups in Yemen.

26.   ISIL now has only a few mobile training camps and a dwindling number of fighters in the whole of Yemen, concentrated in the Zhahrah area of Jawf governorate. It is also struggling to keep a foothold on the Qayfah front in Bayda'. ISIL activities in Bayda' now consist mainly of protecting the group's leaders and their family members. Relatively few foreign terrorist fighters are making their way to Yemen to join ISIL or other terrorist groups. ISIL in Yemen is reportedly dependent upon external support to finance its operations.

2.   Africa

27.   In Libya, ISIL continues to pose a threat. While their overall number may have decreased, ISIL fighters maintain an expanded area of operations in the country that extends along the coast between Ajdabiya and Tripoli, and southwards towards the governorates of Sabha and Kufrah.[14] ISIL frequently raids and holds inner-town police stations in shows of strength, and to secure arms. This tactic has been repeated in several urban locations.[15]

28.   ISIL carried out major attacks against the National Oil Corporation headquarters in Tripoli in September and against the Mabruk oil field in November 2018, signifying that oil facilities will remain a potential target for the group.[16] Kidnapping of local notables in exchange for ransom is also a growing source of income for ISIL. In addition, it offered, at least once, to exchange abductees for the release of some of its captured cadres.[17]

29.   Elsewhere in North Africa, there may still be a relatively inactive group of approximately 30 ISIL-affiliated fighters in the mountains of western Tunisia. Military operations in Sinai continued against Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, which pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in November 2014. Member States assess no significant change in the number of fighters affiliated to the group in Sinai since early 2018 (see S/2018/705, para. 33)

30.   The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) represents a lower threat in the Sahel region than the Al-Qaida affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam Wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159). With an estimated 100 to 200 fighters in Ménaka, Ansongo, Gourma and Tillabéri, ISGS operates under the leadership of Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui (QDi.415).[18] It has combined its efforts with JNIM in some recent attacks. ISGS is connected to transnational crime, including at least the smuggling of automobile spare parts and illegal mining.[19] Sultan Ould Bady, who surrendered in Algeria in August 2018, was involved in such revenue-generating activities for ISGS.[20]

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[14] Information provided by a Member State.
[15] Information provided by a Member State.
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[20] Information provided by a Member State.

31. Abu Musab al-Barnawi leads the 1,500 to 3,500 fighters of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the tri-border area of the Lake Chad basin.[21] ISWAP developed strong operational capacity and demonstrated a high level of aggression, mounting many attacks on military bases and towns. Between July and December 2018, more than 700 Nigerian troops were killed and their equipment seized by ISWAP.[22] The group did not suffer any significant reverse in 2018, and improved its financial position. ISWAP was also able to develop a drone capability, increase the quantity and quality of its propaganda materials, further recruit from the local population and even attract a very small number of foreign terrorist fighters.[23] Nonetheless, ISWAP faces some tension within its leadership, and two significant senior figures, Mamman Nur and Ali Gaga, were killed by other ISWAP militants.

32. The local ISIL affiliate and Al-Shabaab continue to coexist in parts of Somalia where Al-Shabaab maintains dominance. In mid-2018, Al-Shabaab freed all imprisoned foreign terrorist fighters sympathetic to ISIL and allowed them to stay in areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. Member States observed that by mid-2018 ISIL had conducted several small-scale attacks and assassinations of government officials and businessmen. In Mogadishu, ISIL enhanced its activities and established cells in the Bakaara market and the Elasha Biyaha areas. Member states also noted the presence of ISIL operatives in Afgooye and south-central Somalia (see S/2018/705, para. 51).[24]

33. In Puntland, Member States assess that ISIL fighters are distributed in locations within Qandala and Boosaaso and have established a training and weapon storage base in the Iskushuban area for weapons sourced mainly from Yemen. In 2018, the regional media platform of ISIL based in Puntland became more proactive as it enhanced broadcasts of propaganda and coverage of its activities and local news. Despite its continued activities, some Member States assess that ISIL in Somalia faces challenges, including diminishing membership owing to defections and deaths of its operatives during attacks.

3. Europe

34. The number of returnees who reached Europe during the reporting period was relatively low. The major terrorist attack plan foiled in the Netherlands in September 2018 demonstrated that "frustrated travellers" remain a problem. Member States report the revival of links between individuals in various European countries and the ISIL core, which could re-establish an element of command and control.

35. During the reporting period, direct propaganda from ISIL decreased, while recycled material, online messaging and implausible claims of responsibility for attacks increased. ISIL tutorials remain available online. The 11 December 2018 Strasbourg attack demonstrates that radicalization of criminals within the prison system remains a significant challenge (see S/2017/573, para. 10).[25]

36. Western Balkan Member States assess that the overall threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and violent extremism in their region is medium to low. Member States highlight that aspects of several disrupted attacks inspired by ISIL in the region were amateur in nature. This may reflect the broader trend of the ISIL core focusing on inspiring attacks by local actors who in some cases may lack the training of fighters in the core.

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[21] Information provided by a Member State.
[22] Information provided by a Member State.
[23] Information provided by a Member State.
[24] Information provided by a Member State.
[25] Information provided by a Member State.

37. Since the announcement of the so-called "caliphate", approximately 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters have travelled from the western Balkans to the conflict zone in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Of those, 100 have been reported killed and 300 returned, with the remainder unaccounted for.[26] All departures to the conflict zone have been registered with national authorities, and often shared with regional partners. Judging from the disillusionment expressed by some returnees during interrogation, their initial radicalization had failed to instil strong ideological commitment to ISIL.[27]

4. Central and South Asia

38. At present, ISIL strongholds in Afghanistan are in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The total strength of ISIL in Afghanistan is estimated at between 2,500 and 4,000 militants.[28] ISIL is also reported to control some training camps in Afghanistan, and to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, including Kabul. The local ISIL leadership maintains close contacts with the group's core in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Important personnel appointments are made through the central leadership, and the publication of propaganda videos is coordinated. Following the killing of ISIL leader Abu Sayed Bajauri on 14 July 2018, the leadership council of ISIL in Afghanistan appointed Mawlawi Ziya ul-Haq (aka Abu Omar Al-Khorasani) as the fourth "emir" of the group since its establishment.

39. Throughout 2018, ISIL is assessed to have carried out 38 terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, many of them high profile, including some in Kabul.[29] ISIL targets have included Afghan security forces, the Taliban, North Atlantic Treaty Organization military personnel, diplomats, employees of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, journalists and medical institutions, as well as religious minorities viewed by ISIL as soft targets.

40. ISIL suffered a severe setback in northern Afghanistan during the reporting period. In July 2018, 1,000 Taliban attacked ISIL positions in Jowzjan province, killing 200 ISIL fighters, while 254 ISIL fighters surrendered to government forces and 25 foreign terrorist fighters surrendered to the Taliban. One Member State assesses that the ISIL presence in Jowzjan has been eliminated while, elsewhere in the north, a minority of Taliban – approximately 170 fighters in Faryab, 100 in Sari Pul and 50 in Balkh – retain sympathies for ISIL.[30]

41. ISIL is seeking to expand its area of activity in Central Asia and has called for terrorist attacks targeting public gatherings, primarily in the Ferghana Valley of the Central Asian region. On 30 July 2018, ISIL claimed responsibility for the killing of four foreign cyclists in Tajikistan. In November, ISIL stated that one of its fighters was responsible for the attack that had sparked the riot in a high-security prison in Khujand, Tajikistan.

42. ISIL killed 24 and injured 60 people in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 22 September 2018 Ahvaz attack.[31]

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[26] Information provided by a Member State.
[27] Information provided by a Member State.
[28] Information provided by a Member State.
[29] Information provided by a Member State.
[30] Information provided by a Member State.
[31] Information provided by a Member State.

5. **South-East Asia**

43. Notwithstanding a relatively quiet period, Member States remain concerned about the ongoing terrorist threat from groups affiliated to ISIL. They note that efforts to disrupt attacks in their early stages are having some success.

44. Member States expressed concern about the challenge of providing ongoing monitoring or detention of returned foreign terrorist fighters. The repatriation of fighters currently in detention in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is a complex process and there are issues related to repatriating the family members of detained or deceased fighters, some of whom may require monitoring and extensive social services upon their return.

45. Member States have expressed concerns regarding "frustrated travellers", those unable to reach Iraq or the Syrian Arab Republic, who return home intending to commit acts of violence and to reinforce messaging that ISIL remains a viable, global force. Some returnees from the conflict zone are reported to have significant sums of cash with which they seek to establish new identities and business ventures. There are also reported cases of foreign terrorist fighters from other regions who travel to South-East Asia as a means of avoiding detention in their countries of origin.

46. An investigation by Indonesian authorities into a series of attacks by members of the ISIL-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah raised concerns that such attacks could reflect a new model for suicide bombings and noted that a "frustrated traveller" to the caliphate had provided some of the inspiration for the attacks.

The role of young people and women in terrorist operations in the region appears to be changing. ISIL initially discouraged the involvement of women, but more recently has welcomed their direct participation such as in the Surabaya attacks in May 2018.[32] Member States have noted that young people are vulnerable to recruitment and have been found to be involved in planning attacks and manufacturing improvised explosive devices during the period under review.

III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat

A. Overview

47. Since my previous report (S/2018/770), the United Nations, Member States and international, regional and subregional organizations have continued to strengthen, refine and promote the effective use of tools and measures to address the evolving threat posed by ISIL, including its affiliates and supporters, and returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters.

48. I welcome the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate in reviewing the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (the Madrid Guiding Principles) of 2015 in the light of the evolution of the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon, including the organization of the special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, held in New York on 13 December 2018. The addendum to the guiding principles,[33] adopted by the Committee on 27 December 2018, provides valuable guidance for Member States in addressing the challenge of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, including their accompanying family members, as well as guidance in the areas addressed in the present report.

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[32] Information provided by a Member State.
[33] S/2018/1177.

49.   In developing the addendum, the Committee and the Executive Directorate drew on their ongoing dialogue with Member States and their engagement with the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, United Nations offices and human rights mechanisms, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and the Executive Directorate's Global Counter-Terrorism Research Network. This dialogue included a dedicated workshop with members of the Network, during a forum on returning foreign fighters held in Doha in October 2018, and an interactive civil society briefing in New York in November 2018. I also welcome the Counter-Terrorism Committee's efforts to continue such engagement with all stakeholders and interlocutors aimed at practical application of the addendum.

50.   Continued efforts have been made to strengthen the coherence, coordination and effectiveness of United Nations counter-terrorism work. On 6 December 2018, in the presence of the heads of the relevant United Nations entities, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization, I launched the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact as a new coordination framework to strengthen common action in the counter-terrorism work of the United Nations system. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Task Force has replaced the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. The launch of the Coordination Compact and its corresponding Task Force, with the support of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, will also help strengthen the impact of United Nations counter-terrorism work in the field, in support of Member States, including through joint monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilization for these efforts.

51.   On 20 August 2018, the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) officially commenced its work. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), UNITAD is mandated to support domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable for its crimes by collecting, preserving and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that might amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, in accordance with its terms of reference, which were approved by the Security Council on 13 February 2018. As reflected in the first report of the Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD dated 16 November 2018 (S/2018/1031), significant progress has already been made by the Team in establishing its core infrastructural, budgetary and substantive framework. As a result, the initial elements of the Investigative Team were deployed to Baghdad on 29 October 2018.

B.   Prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration

52.   In view of the challenges posed by returning or relocating foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members, and the growing number of terrorist offenders currently imprisoned in many Member States, United Nations entities continue to support Member States in their efforts to develop comprehensive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies which take into account gender and age sensitivities.

53.   In November 2018, the Executive Directorate updated the Counter-Terrorism Committee on those efforts, focusing on responses to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon and to the activities of Boko Haram by the States of the Lake Chad Basin region. The Executive Directorate stressed the need for a holistic approach, noting the tendency for States of the region to adopt a piecemeal approach, with rehabilitation and reintegration strategies developed separately from prosecutorial strategies. Continual monitoring and evaluation of newly introduced prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies to identify good practices and challenges

was encouraged. Such strategies should be tailored to the gender- and age-specific needs of men, women and children.

54. West African States continue to face significant challenges in establishing effective screening mechanisms for individuals detained in connection with terrorist groups and terrorist offences, including lack of capacity and of a comprehensive approach that includes common screening criteria and processes. Some States of the region are considering initiatives that would exempt members of terrorist groups from prosecution if they surrendered to authorities and had not committed serious crimes, including genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

55. In its engagement with Member States, the Executive Directorate has continued to emphasize the need for multi-agency, comprehensive approaches to prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration that deny impunity to those responsible for terrorist acts (in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions) and facilitate the reintegration of former members of terrorist groups into their communities. States should use a screening process to determine whether an investigation or prosecution is warranted before considering alternative approaches. They should also ensure that exemptions from prosecution for surrendered individuals are not applied systematically and that the right of victims to a remedy have been addressed.

56. In many West African countries, unprecedented levels of arrests and detentions for terrorism-related offences present new challenges for criminal justice systems. Because significant numbers of terrorist cases have not yet been processed, suspects have been held in pretrial detention for extended periods. Some States have also introduced special procedures to permit extended pretrial detention in terrorism-related cases, raising serious human rights concerns.

57. To address the backlog of cases, West African States have taken steps to strengthen cooperation between national and local law enforcement agencies and criminal justice professionals. In the Sahel, the 2017 agreement on judicial cooperation between Chad, Mali, the Niger and the "police" component of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel offers a significant opportunity to deepen regional cooperation.

58. The criminal justice systems of Member States in or neighbouring the conflict zones of the Middle East are also under considerable strain, owing to the large number of ISIL fighters (or suspected ISIL fighters), and supporters, including significant numbers of women, currently in detention. UNODC is assisting the judicial authorities of Iraq to ensure that they meet international fair trial standards.

59. Many Member States continue to struggle in their efforts to manage prisoners convicted of terrorism offences and to prevent radicalization to violence in prisons. The risks of violent extremism can be further exacerbated if treatment in detention or the conditions of detention are contrary to human dignity and the rights of prisoners. The Executive Directorate has identified concerns in its engagement with West African Member States, where few prisons have the resources or training required to conduct individual risk and needs assessments, detect early signs of radicalization to violence or manage high-risk terrorist detainees.

60. Some Member States in other regions, including in Central and South-East Asia, face similar challenges, and face difficulty in adequately assessing the risks posed by, or needs of, prisoners. The Executive Directorate has identified good practices in Oceania, North America and South-East Asia on these measures which other Member States might consider.

61. UNODC and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in close cooperation with the Executive Directorate, are engaged in a joint project to provide tailored capacity-building assistance to prison staff and other relevant stakeholders in three Member

States, with the aim of enhancing security and safety in prisons and strengthening risk and needs assessment, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The project members conducted two scoping missions in late 2018.

62.   Addressing the situation of children associated with foreign terrorist fighters continues to be a priority for United Nations entities. Significant numbers of children affiliated with ISIL members are detained in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, often in poor conditions with a lack of access to education and basic services and with limited likelihood of their return to States from which they or their parents originated. Such children may be at risk of becoming stateless, despite having citizenship or a claim to citizenship of a Member State or States.

63.   Noting these developments with concern, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict has called for the immediate repatriation of all children under 18 and the development of specialized child-protection programmes to ensure their full reintegration. I urge all concerned States to collectively develop solutions for those children, whose human rights are under grave threat.

64.   The addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles contains guidance on several issues relating to the impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism on children and children's rights. The Office of Counter-Terrorism has continued to hold regional consultations to develop a handbook on the human rights-compliant treatment of children accompanying foreign terrorist fighters. Regional meetings for practitioners were held in Paris in September 2018 and Amman in January 2019. The handbook will be finalized in the coming months.

C. International judicial cooperation

65.   The transnational nature of the evolving threat posed by ISIL and its affiliates reinforces the need to strengthen international judicial cooperation, including in the collection, handling, preservation and sharing of information and evidence. Member States face significant challenges in their efforts to collect admissible evidence in conflict and post-conflict situations in which ISIL is prevalent. Where criminal justice officials lack access or are unable to operate in high-risk environments, the military could play a critical role in the collection, preservation and lawful sharing of evidence.

66.   The Executive Directorate, in cooperation with the member entities of the Working Group on Legal and Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Task Force and the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, continued to develop guidelines to facilitate the sharing, use and admissibility of information and evidence collected by the military. The guidelines will, inter alia, provide guidance on ensuring the chain of custody of the evidence collected by the military and highlight the relevant international law principles, including of international humanitarian law and human rights law, with which the relevant national authorities should comply in relation to the collection, handling, preservation and sharing of information and evidence by the military.

67.   The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Executive Directorate, in partnership with the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations entities, have supported the development of a basic reporting form for use by those who make first contact with a member of a terrorist group. The form, developed in partnership with military authorities and the Multinational Joint Task Force, will help to preserve the chain of evidence. In December 2018, UNODC and the Executive Directorate assisted Cameroon in promoting the use of the form at the national level.

68.   The preservation and use of digital evidence from communications service providers continue to be a priority for many States within the framework of the investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences. To support their efforts, UNODC, the Executive Directorate, and the International Association of Prosecutors launched a practical guide for requesting electronic evidence across borders in New York in September 2018. The guide is a reference tool for practitioners seeking cross-border cooperation in relation to digital evidence. A series of associated global training activities have also been initiated for Member States.

69.   Despite the numerous and well-documented acts of sexual violence committed by members of ISIL and its affiliates, there have been no prosecutions for crimes of sexual violence by terrorist groups.

I urge all Member States to prosecute ISIL operatives for their crimes, including crimes of sexual violence and trafficking in persons, and to do so in accordance with relevant international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law and standards, in particular regarding fair trial and due process. Any State hosting refugee populations who are victims of ISIL should also ensure that local prosecution services provide those individuals with access to formal justice in a victim-sensitive manner.

70.   The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has worked with the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to support the efforts of Iraq to bring justice and accountability for crimes of sexual violence committed by ISIL. The Team has also engaged with civil society and victims' organizations to ensure that victims of those crimes can participate in future judicial processes.

71.   Given these evidentiary challenges and transregional travel from the conflict zones by foreign terrorist fighters and ISIL operatives, Member States in the Middle East should consider broadening their cooperation beyond neighbouring or like-minded States, strengthening their ability to cooperate effectively in criminal matters. The Executive Directorate has recommended that States consider treaties on cooperation in criminal matters with all States, in accordance with the rule of law and relevant international law, including international human rights law and standards. States should also consider establishing laws, with appropriate safeguards, to allow courts to use information shared through police-to-police or military-to-police cooperation, where such information is collected in compliance with relevant national law and international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

72.   Compliance with international human rights law and standards is essential for effective international cooperation and for effective counter-terrorism. In this regard, I welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism (A/73/361). In November 2018, in an effort to further strengthen the capacities of Member States, UNODC and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights delivered the final workshop in their regional train-the-trainer course on the human rights aspects of criminal justice responses to terrorism to participants from six States in the Sahel and Lake Chad basin region.

D.   Countering the financing of terrorism

73.   In view of the evolving financing methodology of ISIL, there is a need for a holistic and coordinated approach to counter-financing of terrorism. One element of this approach is the introduction and effective use of asset-freezing measures pursuant to Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). The Executive Directorate continued to

promote the inclusion of this element within the framework of its engagement with Member States. In November 2018, Tunisia adopted its first list of domestic terrorist designations, the culmination of a process jointly supported by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate since January 2017. The Office of Counter-Terrorism convened national training workshops on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1267 (1999), 1373 (2001), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) for regulatory officials and private sector entities in Mauritius and Mongolia.

74. Member States in or neighbouring the conflict zones of the Middle East continue to take steps to counter the two-way flow of funds controlled by, or linked to, ISIL. In many States, however, regulations or laws to counter terrorism financing have been introduced relatively recently, resulting in a lack of expertise among institutions, law enforcement agencies and judicial systems that prevents them from fully investigating and prosecuting terrorism-financing offences.

75. To strengthen that expertise, UNODC continues to assist Member States to establish and maintain an inter-agency group of trainers on counter-financing of terrorism and a corresponding localized training curriculum on counter-financing of terrorism. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also undertaken initiatives to strengthen the capacities of cultural heritage professionals, law enforcement authorities and financial services professionals to prevent and counter illicit trafficking in cultural property as a source of terrorism financing. In late November 2018, UNESCO delivered a training programme in Paris to European judicial and law enforcement bodies, with the aim of helping to protect cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict.

76. Increased regional and international cooperation is also critical to detecting and preventing the flow of funds and goods to and from ISIL. The Office of Counter-Terrorism collaborated with the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group to prepare a regional operational plan on countering the financing of terrorism, which was adopted at the Group's ministerial-level plenary meeting held in the Seychelles in September 2018. The Office of Counter-Terrorism is currently working with the Group to implement the operational plan on counter-financing of terrorism at the national level.

New challenges

77. The limited supervision of mobile payment services in West Africa has been identified as a potential terrorism-financing risk by the Executive Directorate during its assessment missions conducted on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee during the reporting period. Rapid growth in the use of mobile payments has helped enhance financial inclusion, but Member States have detected mobile money transfers in connection with several terrorist attacks in the region. Even if the necessary regulation is in place, controls on the senders and recipients of the money are not always effectively enforced.

78. West Africa's artisanal gold-mining sector also appears to be potentially vulnerable to exploitation for terrorism-financing purposes. Terrorist groups, including ISIL affiliates, are known to operate in areas where artisanal gold extraction takes place, and gold extraction is increasingly important to the economies of some West African States. In June 2018, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development called for greater due diligence controls and sensitization among all actors involved in this industry.

79. Member States are increasingly responding to the potential risk that cryptocurrencies will be misused for criminal and terrorist purposes. Some States have introduced new regulations to make exchange platforms and digital wallet providers subject to regulations concerning anti-money laundering and counter-

financing of terrorism, requiring them to be licensed or registered by national authorities. To ensure that this response is coordinated, the Financial Action Task Force has adopted a revised definition of "virtual assets" and "virtual asset service providers" during its plenary meeting held in Paris in October 2018.

Organized crime

80.   Addressing the potential nexus between international terrorism and transnational organized crime remains a priority for United Nations entities and Member States. In my statement to the General Assembly on 25 September 2018 (see A/73/PV.6), I underscored that terrorism is increasingly interlinked with international organized crime, particularly with regard to trafficking in persons, drugs and arms, and corruption. In my November 2018 report on trafficking in persons in armed conflict,[34] I noted with concern that acts of violence and exploitation perpetrated by terrorists, and which qualify as forms of trafficking in persons, continued to be committed in the conflict zones.

81.   Tackling the crime-terror nexus, as requested by the Council in its presidential statement of 8 May 2018 (S/PRST/2018/9), remains a priority for the Counter-Terrorism Committee. In October 2018, the Committee, acting in close cooperation with UNODC and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, held an open briefing on that topic, which focused on the trafficking of persons, drugs and arms.

82.   The crime-terror nexus was also addressed at the first meeting of the working group of experts on terrorism and transnational organized crime, organized by the Council of Europe in October 2018. In December 2018, the Eurasian Group on Combating Money-Laundering and Financing of Terrorism and the Asia/Pacific Group on Money-Laundering jointly organized an expert workshop on the use of proceeds of crime for financing of terrorism.

E.   Border management and law enforcement

83.   Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), the Executive Directorate has continued to assess the implementation of advance passenger information and passenger name record systems by Member States and collected good practices in that regard. Since my most recent report, few additional Member States have introduced measures requiring airlines to provide advance passenger information, in accordance with the relevant 2017 standard of the International Civil Aviation Organization. The number of States that have developed the capability to collect, process and analyse passenger name record data is even lower, constituting only approximately 10 per cent of Member States. These relatively low implementation levels appear to be due to a lack of resources, capacity or expertise.

84.   In this regard, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, together with the Executive Directorate, UNODC, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and ICAO, has developed a multi-year project, launched on 1 October 2018, aimed at enhancing the capacity of Member States to use passenger information and passenger name record data to prevent terrorists from travelling. Supporting Member States in their collection and analysis of such data, the project provides States with the necessary software (developed by the Netherlands), which can be used by airline carriers to provide the data to law enforcement authorities for analysis. It also guides Member States in their efforts to adopt legal and administrative frameworks that allow the transfer, processing and use of passenger data and put in place appropriate

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[34] S/2018/1042.

safeguards to comply with international human rights obligations and address conflict-of-law issues. The commencement of assessment and capacity-building missions is expected in the first weeks of April 2019.

85. In October 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, acting in coordination with IOM, UNODC and the United Nations country team in Turkmenistan, organized a regional training workshop in Ashgabat on good practices in border security and management. The workshop will be part of the core capacity-building activities overseen by the Office of Counter-Terrorism's global border security management programme to strengthen Member State capacities to counter terrorism and stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, launched in December 2018.

86. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), promoting the responsible use and sharing of biometric data has remained a significant priority for United Nations entities and Member States. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate continued to raise awareness of the importance of the responsible use and sharing of biometrics in countering terrorism, including by promoting the United Nations compendium of recommended practices in this area. The entities participated in the Biometrics Institute's global congress in London in October 2018, and plan to hold a briefing for Member States on this issue in New York in March 2019.

87. In its resolution 2396 (2017), the Security Council also introduced requirements relating to the development of watch lists and databases of suspected foreign terrorist fighters and called for enhanced cross-border information-sharing. On 13 December 2018, the Executive Directorate organized an event in New York to explore potential privacy and data protection challenges. The discussions highlighted the need for Member States to respect the principles of necessity and proportionality, establish independent oversight mechanisms and introduce effective legal frameworks for data protection.

88. The protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks remains a priority, as ISIL and its supporters continue to plan or carry out attacks against vulnerable targets, often using small arms and light weapons or improvised explosive devices. In January 2019 in Singapore, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Executive Directorate, in partnership with INTERPOL, organized the first in a series of regional workshops to raise awareness of, and enhance the implementation of, Security Council resolution 2341 (2017), on the protection of critical infrastructure.

89. Member States, including those of the Sahel, are increasingly concerned by terrorists' use of improvised explosive devices. Preventing the use of such devices can present significant challenges. Dual-use items may be exported to States in which terrorist groups operate, and equipment or material may be stolen during targeted attacks on construction or mining sites. A coordinated international effort is required to strengthen information-sharing, to ensure that regulatory frameworks for commercial explosives and dual-use goods are updated and enforced and to consider measures to create an obligation for retailers and mining and construction companies to report suspicious purchases or theft. In November 2018, the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research and the Executive Directorate jointly organized an expert seminar in New York on implementing resolution 2370 (2017) and preventing terrorists from accessing small arms and light weapons and improvised explosive devices.

F. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities in approaches to counter violent extremism

90.   United Nations entities have continued to encourage a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to preventing and countering violent extremism, including among civil society, women and youth. At the eighth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, held in New York in November 2018, more than 100 youth leaders (54 women and 49 men) from 64 States shared their experiences and good practices, including in the field of media and information literacy.

91.   The youth and education sectors have remained a focus for many programmes for preventing and countering violent extremism. In November 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, UNESCO and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel held a regional capacity-building workshop in Mauritania on the role of education in preventing violent extremism. In Iraq, in October 2018, UNESCO launched a programme for the education sector as part of its "Revive the spirit of Mosul" initiative, providing youth with economic opportunities through the restoration of the Old City, monuments and archaeological sites.

92.   In November 2018, UNESCO organized training sessions for learners, teachers and relevant stakeholders in States of the Sahel and Central Asia and coordinated a joint project with the Office of Counter-Terrorism on preventing violent extremism in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, training young journalists and members of community media associations. The project is aimed at enhancing critical thinking about media messaging and encouraging more ethical use of social media.

93.   Other United Nations entities also recognized the role of the media and social media in preventing and countering violent extremism. In October 2018, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect organized a workshop for media practitioners in Bangui on countering religious and ethnic hatred and incitement to violence, resulting in the establishment of a committee for the prevention of incitement to violence.

94.   In accordance with Security Council resolutions 2354 (2017), 2395 (2017) and 2396 (2017), Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector have continued their collaborative efforts to combat exploitation of social media and the Internet by ISIL. This response has combined efforts to disrupt propaganda dissemination by ISIL, often through public-private partnerships, with counter or alternative narrative campaigns. In its November 2018 Trends Alert,[35] the Executive Directorate noted that, while those efforts had made it increasingly difficult for ISIL to exploit large social media platforms, they had caused an increase in the use by ISIL of smaller, less visible platforms to store and share material.

95.   Because smaller platforms are less able to moderate content or respond to Member State requests in a human rights-compliant manner, the Executive Directorate and its Tech Against Terrorism initiative has continued to work with small technology platforms to raise awareness of possible risks and provide practical support. In partnership with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, they organized the latest in their series of global workshops in Tel Aviv, Israel, in November 2018 and Berlin in December 2018.

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[35] https://gallery.mailchimp.com/8343c3b932a7be398ceb413c9/files/ffbb7fe9-5a06-4390-8861-50e488ecad69/CTED_Trends_Alert_November_2018.pdf.

96.   Member States and United Nations entities have continued to develop and implement initiatives to counter terrorist narratives. UNESCO continued its #Unite4Heritage social media campaign, which is aimed at countering terrorist propaganda by establishing role models in the field of culture and heritage protection. The Redirect Method, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiative, has sought to identify audiences interested in ISIL messaging and redirect them towards videos that counter that messaging or provide alternative narratives.

97.   Other United Nations entities have supported Member States in their development of national or regional action plans for the prevention of violent extremism. In September 2018, the Office of Counter-Terrorism published a reference guide entitled *Developing National and Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism*, which outlines overarching principles that can serve as guidelines for Governments and regional organizations seeking to develop their own plans of action, as suggested by the General Assembly in its resolutions 70/291 and 72/284. The Executive Directorate, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the United Nations country team in Mali have supported the launch of the comprehensive counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism strategy for Mali and a sectoral plan of action for 2018–2020.

IV.   Observations

98.   The continuing transformation of ISIL into a covert network with various regional affiliates yet a centralized leadership, and its retention of weaponry as well as financial and information technology expertise, has the potential to advance the group's aims and destabilize a government's service provision, stabilization, reconciliation and reconstruction efforts. The United Nations system will continue to support Member States in tackling this challenge.

99.   I welcome the Member State efforts to address the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, relocators and returnees, with the support of the United Nations through projects focusing on the priority areas outlined in Security Council resolution 2396 (2017), including prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies. I encourage the Office of Counter-Terrorism to provide a forum in which relevant expertise and good practices can be shared, in order to strengthen coordinated action to meet the ongoing needs of Member States.

100.   I am encouraged by the increasingly coordinated assistance provided by the United Nations system to Member States, and expect that the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact will further enhance these efforts by supporting joint resource mobilization and programming. I also encourage Member States to make the best possible use of expertise provided by United Nations entities through this Global Compact and to use the upcoming thematic regional events on countering and preventing terrorism and violent extremism – organized in follow-up to the June 2018 United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies – as a way to engage with this expertise and to seek further support.

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