



# Security Council

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## Seventeenth 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 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant<sup>1</sup> (ISIL, hereinafter referred to as “Da’esh”)<sup>2</sup> and associated individuals and groups and requested that the Secretary-General provide an initial strategic-level report on the threat, followed by updates every four months. In its resolution [2610 \(2021\)](#), the Council requested that the Secretary-General continue to provide, every six months, strategic-level reports that reflect the gravity of the threat posed by Da’esh to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.

2. The present report is the seventeenth such report.<sup>3</sup> It was prepared by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities,<sup>4</sup> the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, in close collaboration with other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities.

3. During the first half of 2023, the threat posed to international peace and security by Da’esh and its affiliates remained mostly high in conflict zones and low in non-conflict areas. However, the overall situation is dynamic, with notable subregional variation in activity. Leadership attrition, as well as counter-terrorism efforts by Member States in certain regions, continue to have an impact on Da’esh activities. Multilateral cooperation has remained essential to effectively responding to the threat, including through an integrated and balanced implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The adoption of General Assembly resolution [77/298](#) on the Assembly’s eighth review of the Strategy

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<sup>1</sup> Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

<sup>2</sup> In line with General Assembly resolution [75/291](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [S/2016/92](#), [S/2016/501](#), [S/2016/830](#), [S/2017/97](#), [S/2017/467](#), [S/2018/80](#), [S/2018/770](#), [S/2019/103](#), [S/2019/612](#), [S/2020/95](#), [S/2020/774](#), [S/2021/98](#), [S/2021/682](#), [S/2022/63](#), [S/2022/576](#) and [S/2023/76](#).

<sup>4</sup> The present threat assessment is based on the thirty-second report of the Monitoring Team ([S/2023/549](#)).



sustained the long-standing multilateral consensus on counter-terrorism, which has continued to be fundamental for efforts at all levels to counter and prevent terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The United Nations continued to support Member States in countering Da'esh and other terrorist groups, including through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact and its working groups.

## II. Threat assessment

### A. Overview and evolution of the threat

4. Despite significant attrition of the Da'esh leadership and a reduction in activity in the core conflict zone, the risk of resurgence remained. The group has adapted its strategy, embedding itself with local populations, and has exercised caution in choosing battles that are likely to result in limited losses, while rebuilding and recruiting from camps in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic and from vulnerable communities, including in neighbouring countries. The large number of people that remain in the camps and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic continue to present serious challenges to the region and beyond that need to be addressed.

5. The trend of counter-terrorist pressure prompting Da'esh to adopt less hierarchical and more networked, decentralized structures has continued, with operational autonomy in the affiliated groups. Member States have little evidence that the core leadership is exercising command and control of regional affiliates, although reporting shows that financial, propaganda and other connections remain (see [S/2022/576](#) and [S/2023/76](#)).

6. The group's media apparatus leverages the operations of Da'esh affiliates in conflict zones in its propaganda efforts, reaching a wide audience, with the aim of radicalizing potential recruits, gaining support and inspiring attacks beyond conflict zones. While its previously well-developed external operations capability remained diminished and largely constrained, the ambition to reconstitute is clear. The situation in Afghanistan has become more complex, with increasing Member State concerns about the ability of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161) to project a threat both in the region and further afield.

#### 1. Da'esh leadership

7. Da'esh faced sustained attrition to its leadership owing to ongoing counter-terrorism efforts by Member States. On 25 January, Bilal al-Sudani was killed in an operation carried out by the United States of America in northern Somalia. Al-Sudani had been responsible for expanding Da'esh activity in Africa. He had played a significant role in supporting key elements of a network of financial hubs that operate in Africa and beyond, through the so-called Al-Karrar office. While some Member States assessed his death as significant, it is too early to judge the enduring impact on the financial operations of Da'esh.

8. On 24 February, Ali Jasim Salman al-Juburi was killed in an air strike in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic. As he had influenced overall Da'esh strategy, played a key role in the selection of Da'esh leadership, including the two previous Da'esh leaders, and directed external operations and finances, his death was assessed by Member States as significantly affecting the group. Nevertheless, some Member States noted that his loss appeared to have disrupted the group only for the short term. One Member State noted his potential successor as being Ammar Mohamed Ibrahim al-Juburi (not listed). Other leadership losses included Khalid 'Aydd Ahmad

al-Juburi, who had been responsible for planning attacks in Europe, and Abd-al-Hadi Mahmud al-Haji Ali, who had been responsible for planning terrorist and kidnapping operations in the Middle East and Europe.

9. On 30 April, one Member State reported having killed Da'esh leader Abu al-Husain al-Husaini al-Qurashi in Afrin, Syrian Arab Republic, subsequently identifying him as a Syrian-born individual, holding the alias of Abdul-Latif. Member States could not confirm the death of al-Qurashi, with one identifying the deceased as merely the person in charge of security for the group in the Syrian Arab Republic. Some Member States dismissed the possibility of a non-Iraqi overall Da'esh leader. The real identity of Abu al-Husain remains unconfirmed by Member States.

10. The month of Ramadan had been noted in prior reports as having triggered a surge in Da'esh violence (see for example [S/2022/576](#)), but this did not materialize in 2023. Member States assessed that this might indicate an impact of continued attrition to its leadership. The Da'esh core has also adopted a less hierarchical command and control structure, whereby the increased autonomy of its regional affiliates and the role of the overall leader has become less relevant to the functioning of the group as a whole.

## 2. Da'esh finances

11. Revenue of the Da'esh core continued to decline owing to ongoing counter-terrorism measures by Member States. According to Member States, the previously reported cash reserve estimates of \$25 million to \$50 million are now significantly less, and diminishing. Nonetheless, substantial cash reserves remain at the disposal of the group. Da'esh continued to use funds to pay family members of their fighters who were killed or held in prison, as well as for bribes to attempt to secure the release of prisoners. Member States reported sporadic payments to Da'esh leaders and the lack of payments to its fighters as an indication that the group had a need to increase its limited funding. Da'esh continued to emphasize the importance of fundraising in its communications among followers.

12. While the sources of funding for Da'esh depend on the local circumstances in which they operate, extortion and kidnap-for-ransom remain the primary means for raising funds. Member States registered concern about the continued use of kidnap-for-ransom operations by terrorist groups to generate revenue. They noted that the payment of ransom through intermediaries had significantly enhanced terrorist capability, facilitating lethal attacks. Such payments are contrary to Security Council resolution [2133 \(2014\)](#). Illicit taxation of the population and the collection of charitable donations are other sources of funding, as are illicit gold panning, smuggling, arms trafficking, cattle rustling, poaching, levies on economic activity, taxes on goods shipments and the provision of transport services and escort or protection services. Some Member States reported that Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162) extorted local agricultural businesses and fishing operations in the Lake Chad basin and kidnapped civilians for ransom in Nigeria, raising significant sums.

13. Informal value transfer systems (hawala) and cash couriers continued to be the predominant means for the delivery of funds, but mobile money services are increasingly utilized, including in East Africa and Iraq. Da'esh is reported to be using regional versions of cryptocurrency, including so-called stablecoins, and is increasingly relying on virtual assets for international funds transfers. Member States observed that terrorist groups continued to demonstrate great capacity for innovation and agility in the use of new methods and technologies in financing their operations, including the use of cryptocurrencies and crowdfunding. One Member State cited a

terrorist cryptocurrency initiative, created for the collection of funds in cryptocurrencies, that was disseminated in several languages.

### **3. Da'esh access to weapons**

14. Member States remained concerned about the proliferation of weapons in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Africa, in particular the access by Da'esh and its regional affiliates to small arms and light weapons, as well as their increased use of unmanned aircraft systems and improvised explosive devices. With the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, Member States expressed concern over the proliferation of large quantities of weapons and other military equipment within Afghanistan and into neighbouring States. Regional Member States reported that North Atlantic Treaty Organization-calibre weapons typically associated with the former Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were being transferred to ISIL-K by groups affiliated with the Taliban and Al-Qaida, such as Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (QDe.132) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (QDe.088), also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP).

15. In the core conflict zone, Da'esh has reportedly transitioned to producing fewer, simpler and smaller improvised explosive devices and to now using suicide vests only as a last resort, to avoid the loss of operatives. There are reports that Da'esh has created a so-called Industry Committee within its structures to explore new avenues for advancement in weaponry, such as improvised explosive devices and increased payloads for drones.

16. In parts of Africa, illicit trafficking of weapons remained a serious concern, and the use by Da'esh of improvised explosive devices increased. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) (not listed) used increasingly lethal improvised explosive devices in North Kivu. The group has fractured over allegiance to Da'esh, as previously reported. In the Sahel, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (QDe.163) used illicitly trafficked weapons or arms captured after attacks against security forces. ISGS also engaged in illicit trafficking of weapons both locally and from facilitation networks in southern Libya.

### **4. Da'esh fighters and their family members in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic**

17. Although notable progress was made in repatriation efforts in the first six months of 2023, the challenges associated with the camps and detention facilities in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic, and the risks they generate, persist. One Member State reported that Da'esh has maintained its "Cubs of the Caliphate" programme, which had involved children recruited in the overcrowded Hawl camp between 2014 and 2017 but was now characterized as more operationally experienced and more organized, and assessed it to pose a heightened threat in the short term. One Member State reported that children continued to be recruited within the camp for Da'esh suicide operations. Iraq has now repatriated more than 5,000 individuals from the camps, in 10 waves. At the current pace of repatriation of all nationalities, however, the risks associated with these camps and detention facilities will persist for several more years.

18. There are approximately 11,000 suspected Da'esh fighters, members or former members being held in facilities of the Syrian Democratic Forces, including more than 3,500 Iraqis and approximately 2,000 individuals from almost 70 nationalities. There were few reports of attacks on prisons or prison breaks during the reporting period, but Member States reported that Da'esh continued to aspire and plan to undertake such attacks to replenish leadership ranks and gain experience and operational capability. Some Member States flagged that the volatile environment in

the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic, where there were some 40 detention facilities, combined with the impact of earthquakes in early 2023, heightened concerns about the possibility of detainees being able to escape to rejoin Da'esh ranks.

19. While difficult to estimate, one Member State noted the number of foreign terrorist fighters associated with Da'esh at large in the core conflict zone to be approximately 1,000, with 90 per cent in the Syrian Arab Republic. Some Member States saw a small-scale flow of fighters away from the core conflict zone, including to Africa, Europe, Central Asia and South-East Asia. That included North African foreign terrorist fighters returning to their home region, raising concerns that that could enhance the capabilities of groups in West Africa and the Sahel.

## **B. Regional developments**

### **1. Africa**

#### *Central and Southern Africa*

20. In Mozambique, the deployment of regional forces in Cabo Delgado Province continued to have a significant impact on Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) (not listed), disrupting its leadership, command structures and bases. ASWJ has pledged allegiance to Da'esh, and regional Member States estimated that the group had between 180 and 220 adult male fighters with battlefield experience, down from the 280 fighters estimated in the previous report. Since January, there has been an escalation in clashes between ASWJ and deployed regional forces on both sides of the Messalo River in central Cabo Delgado, leading to the deaths of three senior ASWJ commanders. Mozambican forces and those deployed by the Southern Africa Development Community Mission in Mozambique have been successful in bringing more stability to Cabo Delgado, with Member States reporting a significant decrease in deaths and attacks on civilians in the past six months. There is information that ASWJ has tried to cultivate social and economic relationships with local communities to sustain themselves. Member States assessed that there was little evidence of ASWJ receiving any significant external funding.

21. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, joint military operations conducted by Congolese and Ugandan forces against ADF, known as Operation Shujaa, continued to disperse the group into smaller units across a wider area of operation beyond its traditional strongholds. Member States assessed ADF to have between 1,500 and 2,000 adult male fighters under the leadership of Seka Baluku (alias Musa Baluku) (not listed). Operation Shujaa has targeted senior commanders and strongholds of ADF, killing Muralo Seguja (alias Ssegujja) (not listed), the head of its political wing. One Member State reported that, in two months, 424 fighters had been killed, 81 captured and 115 abductees rescued.

22. ADF killed 500 people in a number of attacks in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On 15 January, ADF detonated an improvised explosive device at Lubiriha Church in Kasindi, Beni territory. The explosion killed 16 and injured more than 60 civilians. Member States assessed that the device was the largest and most powerful bomb ever used by the group, with the highest number of casualties in a single attack. Member States reported that the bomb had been built by Abu Akassi (alias Abwakasi) (not listed), an ADF commander who used his network to procure explosives to make larger and more dangerous bombs with the express intent to cause maximum civilian casualties. In March, ADF killed more than 150 civilians in North Kivu province.

*East Africa*

23. Da'esh in Somalia maintained a presence in Puntland, but it lacks the capacity to control large areas of territory or to undertake significant operations, owing largely to continued armed clashes with both Somali government forces and Al-Shabaab. Da'esh in Somalia is now estimated to have between 100 and 200 fighters, down from the 200 to 250 estimated in the previous report, and is headed by Abdul Qadir Mumin (not listed). Its presence in Somalia remained significant, owing to the location of its so-called Al-Karrar office, which reportedly functions as a financial hub for Da'esh regional affiliates.

24. Several Member States registered concern that terrorist groups like Da'esh could exploit the political instability and violence in the Sudan. Da'esh have maintained a fully operational cell in the Sudan since 2019, which is headed by Abu Bakr al-Iraqi (not listed) and has between 100 and 200 experienced fighters who facilitate logistics and financial transactions. Al-Iraqi reportedly used false identities to register several money exchange businesses, as well as a travel and tourism agency in Türkiye, and has significant investments in the Sudan. Member States warned that North African fighters use the Sudan as a hub for arrival and onward transfer to southern Libya, Mali and West Africa.

*West Africa*

25. Some Member States assessed that the Da'esh affiliate in the Sahel, ISGS, had become increasingly autonomous and had played a significant role in the escalation of violence in the region, alongside other terrorist groups. ISGS expanded its areas of operation, with increased attacks on several fronts in Mali and, to a lesser extent, Burkina Faso and the Niger. It has recently been making efforts to establish a corridor to Nigeria for logistical, supply and recruitment purposes, possibly in collaboration with ISWAP.

26. Armed confrontations with the Al-Qaida affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159) continued to put pressure on the command structure of ISGS. Member States assessed that the differences between JNIM and ISGS might have a significant impact on the evolution of the security situation in the Sahel, which might, at times, be influenced by national political issues. In addition, continued clashes between the two groups may lead to alliances of convenience forged by tribal or ethnic considerations and with unpredictable consequences.

*North Africa*

27. Member States assessed that Da'esh affiliates in some North African countries had weakened, but that conditions for a potential resurgence persisted. Returning foreign terrorist fighters and the impending release of prisoners whose sentences are ending were the most significant concerns. Jund al-Khilafah in Tunisia (QDe.167) faces challenges, owing to a lack of funding and the killing of their most prominent leaders, with around 15 members currently spread across western Tunisia. In Morocco, authorities dismantled five terrorist cells, resulting in the arrest of 25 individuals, several of whom maintained coordination with Da'esh core or ISGS. The most significant cell, whose members had planned to rob banks and attack vital security infrastructure, was disrupted on 15 March.

28. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Libya (QDe.165) maintained a growing presence in the southern part of Libya, where the group continued to exploit social discontent, while collaborating with organized criminal groups. It continued to recruit from communities in the south and sought to infiltrate local tribes. Member States estimated the group's strength as between 300 and 500 fighters, a significant increase

from the 100 to 240 estimated in previous reporting. One Member State reported an increasing focus by the Da'esh affiliate in Libya to recruit scientists capable of producing biological materials or handling sophisticated technological devices to use in terrorist attacks. However, several Da'esh terrorist cells were dismantled by Libyan security services, which included the arrest of a 20-year-old Libyan engineer on 21 January, who had planned to target gas supply pipelines using an armed unmanned aircraft in collaboration with the Da'esh core.

29. In Egypt, terrorist activities by the Da'esh-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (not listed) continued to decrease, owing mainly to counter-terrorism efforts by Egyptian authorities that have largely dismantled the core structure and leadership cadres of the group. The presence of the Da'esh affiliate was contained locally and the group was unable to undertake high-profile attacks. One Member State estimated the number of active fighters to be in the dozens, while others estimated it between the low to mid-hundreds, which is a significant decrease from the 1,000 fighters estimated in the previous report.

## 2. Middle East

### *Iraq and the Levant*

30. Despite sustained counter-terrorism operations by Member States, the Da'esh core persists and continues to command between 5,000 and 7,000 members across Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, most of whom are fighters. The group deliberately adopted a strategy to reduce attacks, in order to facilitate recruiting and reorganization. Although most senior Da'esh leaders remain in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, the group has relocated some key figures elsewhere.

31. In the Syrian Arab Republic, Da'esh continued to wage asymmetric attacks, albeit at a slightly lower frequency. Ongoing military activity has largely contained the group in the central desert, Badiyah, which, while a haven for Da'esh with regard to training and reorganizing, is characterized by difficult terrain and lack of critical infrastructure, thereby limiting its ability to operate or disseminate propaganda effectively. Small cells undertook regular attacks, including in the northern parts of Tadmur (Palmyra) and the eastern parts of Hama. Da'esh reportedly continues to use the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic to reconstitute, including through attempts to release key leaders from prisons, while viewing the north-west as a potential gateway to Türkiye.

32. In Iraq, counter-terrorism efforts by Iraqi forces continued to result in a reduction in Da'esh activities. Nevertheless, the group maintained its low-grade insurgency, exploiting security gaps along the border of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to enable attacks and resupply its cells in desert and mountainous areas. Operations were contained in rural areas, while attacks in urban centres were less frequent. Da'esh maintained its presence in its strongholds around Salah al-Din, north of Baghdad (Tarmiyah), Diyala and Kirkuk. One Member State reported ties between Da'esh and organized criminal groups in Mosul, Kirkuk, Tikrit and Ramadi.

33. Da'esh in Iraq is organized into eight units: administration, media, sharia, procurement, finances and economy, groundwork, explosives manufacturing and prisoner release, across 10 Iraqi regional divisions, some of which have been combined owing to insufficient resources. The group is becoming increasingly risk-averse to personnel losses, with plans to release its prisoners and recruit from vulnerable communities.

*Arabian Peninsula*

34. The Da'esh affiliate in Yemen, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Yemen (QDe.166), maintained minimal activity. Its strength has further declined from the 250 fighters estimated in the previous report and is now estimated to be around 100 fighters, who coordinate with Da'esh in Somalia, especially for logistical purposes. One Member State noted that the Da'esh affiliate in Yemen was working on a new organizational structure and had called leaders to a meeting in Shabwah in May. Member States have also reported opportunistic cooperation and profit-sharing between Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (QDe.129) and the Da'esh affiliate in Yemen in kidnapping-for-ransom operations.

**3. Europe**

35. The situation in Europe remained stable, with a slight increase in the number of thwarted terrorist acts, mostly against soft targets and places of worship. Most attacks were conducted by individuals without a direct affiliation with Da'esh, and some appeared to have been triggered by acts perceived as hostile towards Islam. According to one Member State, some of the attackers had aspired to use explosives and chemical toxins.

36. Some Member States reported that, in addition to the January incitement campaign wherein Da'esh used its media apparatus to call for terrorist attacks against Christians in retaliation for Qur'an-burning incidents in Europe, the enhanced media and operational capabilities of ISIL-K risked inspiring more lone actors in the region. Member States assessed that ISIL-K might pursue high-impact attacks against Western countries and their interests abroad in the medium term, as evidenced by a recently disrupted attack in Strasbourg, France.

**4. Asia***Central and South Asia*

37. Member States assessed ISIL-K as being the most serious terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the wider region. The group has reportedly increased its operational capabilities inside Afghanistan, with fighters and family members estimated at 4,000 to 6,000 individuals.<sup>5</sup> Sanaullah Ghafari (alias Shahab al-Muhajir) (QDi.431) is viewed by some Member States as the most ambitious leader of ISIL-K. One Member State reported that Ghafari was killed in Afghanistan in June. That remains to be confirmed. Mawlawi Rajab (QDi.434) is the leader of external operations for ISIL-K.

38. ISIL-K is becoming more sophisticated in its attacks against both the Taliban and international targets. The group was reportedly focused on a strategy of carrying out high-profile attacks to undermine the Taliban's ability to provide security. Overall, ISIL-K attacks demonstrated strong operational capability involving reconnoitre, coordination, communication, planning and execution. According to some Member States, attacks against high-profile Taliban figures in Balkh, Badakhshan and Baghlan Provinces raised ISIL-K morale and boosted recruitment.

39. Some Member States reported that ETIM/TIP had developed links in Afghanistan with ISIL-K, with the two groups jointly publishing propaganda posters and some ETIM/TIP members joining ISIL-K operations. One Member State assessed that some elements of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (not listed) were ready to either join or collaborate with ISIL-K.

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<sup>5</sup> Information provided by Member States without a breakdown.



### *South-East Asia*

40. Terrorist activity in South-East Asia slightly increased in two countries, with some Member States reporting that effective counter-terrorism efforts had contributed to the relatively low number of terrorist attacks during the reporting period. Successful operations against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-South-East Asia (ISIL-SEA) (QDe.169), especially in the Philippines, provided a reminder of the residual threat due to the substantial number of terrorists remaining in the region and the recent tendency to strengthen cooperation between the main terrorist groups under the Da'esh banner. Faharudin Hadji Benito Satar (aliases Abu Zacharia and Jer Mimbantas), the so-called Emir of ISIL-SEA and former leader of the Dawlah Islamiya-Maute Group, as well as Joharie Sandab (alias Abu Morsid), who oversaw the group's logistics and finances, were killed in Philippine operations.

41. Da'esh-affiliated groups in South-East Asia generated revenue locally. In some cases, they supported Da'esh networks in the Middle East, with some exploiting the charitable sector to raise funds for terrorist activities in Indonesia. In the Philippines, ISIL-SEA continued to raise its own funds using the formal financial sector to transfer fiat currency, with increased use of virtual currencies.

## **III. Updates on responses to the evolving threat**

### **A. Overview**

42. United Nations entities continued to support and cooperate with Member States in their efforts to prevent and counter terrorism, with a particular focus on conflict zones and neighbouring regions where the threat posed by Da'esh remained high during the reporting period. Organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the third Counter-Terrorism Week<sup>6</sup> was held from 19 to 23 June 2023, with the aim of taking stock of progress and lessons learned, assessing the evolving terrorist threat and fostering networked multilateral responses. Some Member States took action for the first time to repatriate, prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate their nationals from camps and detention facilities in Iraq and the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic.

43. Border management and law enforcement remained a challenge for Member States, especially in conflict areas and where the level of violence and destruction by Da'esh affiliates had increased. In parts of the African continent, terrorist groups continued to exploit local grievances and regional vulnerabilities to expand their reach across national borders, including through the movement of weapons and terrorist fighters. The Office of Counter-Terrorism, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities strengthened partnerships with African countries, in particular in and around East Africa and the Sahel, to identify and address capacity-building needs in countering the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, responding to the nexus between organized crime and terrorism and mainstreaming human rights-based responses to terrorism.

44. On behalf of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism (Counter-Terrorism Committee), and on the basis of the recommendations contained in the Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes,<sup>7</sup> adopted by the Committee during its special meeting held in New Delhi in October 2022, the

<sup>6</sup> See [www.un.org/counterterrorism/2023-counter-terrorism-week](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/2023-counter-terrorism-week).

<sup>7</sup> See [www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/delhi-declaration-countering-use-new-and-emerging-technologies-terrorist-purposes-now-available](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/delhi-declaration-countering-use-new-and-emerging-technologies-terrorist-purposes-now-available).

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate conducted consultations with a wide range of United Nations partners, international and regional organizations, think tanks and representatives of civil society, academia and the private sector. The consultations were aimed at informing the development of non-binding guiding principles for Member States on the following topics: preventing, detecting and disrupting the use of emerging financial technologies for terrorist purposes; information and communications technologies; and unmanned aircraft systems.

## **B. Suspected Da'esh members and their family members in conflict zones**

### **1. Current situation**

45. Foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members continue to pose a broad range of challenges globally. There are serious concerns regarding human rights, as well as security implications in the short term, with potentially far-reaching impacts in the mid- to long term. Grave abuses, primarily against women and children, continued to be observed in areas where Da'esh and its affiliates operate.

46. In the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, some 55,000 individuals remained in the closed Hawl and Rawj camps for their alleged links or family ties to Da'esh. Approximately two thirds of the population in the camps are children, including 11,838 Syrian children, as well as approximately 15,800 children from Iraq and 6,730 children from more than 60 other countries.

47. Living conditions in the camps remained dire, with significant humanitarian hardship. Hawl, the largest camp, continued to be severely overcrowded with inadequate shelter and a lack of education. Camp inhabitants have limited access to food, medical care, clean water and other basic services. Security remained volatile in the camps, with continued reports of killings, including of children. More than 850 boys, some as young as 10 years of age, were also being held without legal procedural safeguards in detention and other facilities, including "rehabilitation" centres, throughout the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>8</sup> With few exceptions, humanitarian actors are not permitted contact or engagement with individual children in prisons and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic.

### **2. Repatriation efforts**

48. Member States continued to repatriate their nationals from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, with some of them announcing or conducting repatriations for the first time. It is essential to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified repatriation of these individuals in full respect of all Member States' respective obligations under international law. The consent of relevant Governments for any activity to be undertaken in territories under their control is a paramount consideration in all repatriation efforts. However, the pace of those efforts remained too slow, considering the persistently dire conditions in the camps and detention facilities. Repatriations continued to prioritize women and children, leaving the situation of adult men and boys in detention and other facilities largely unaddressed. Concerns over potential risks of radicalization to violence in prisons, recidivism and limited or insufficient evidence for prosecution continued to be cited by several Member States as reasons for delaying repatriations. Nevertheless, the increased instances of prosecution by

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<sup>8</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Syria: UN experts alarmed by reports of boys taken from Camp Roj by de facto authorities", press release, 16 February 2023.

countries of origin of returnees believed to have committed terrorist and other offences, including for international crimes, are welcome.<sup>9</sup>

49. The Government of Iraq continued to repatriate its nationals from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded the transfer by the Government of Iraq of 1,820 Iraqi nationals from the Hawl camp to the Jad'ah rehabilitation centre in the north of Iraq. Those transfers brought the overall number of Iraqi returnees to more than 5,000, including more than 3,000 children, or between 15 and 20 per cent of the number of Iraqi nationals in the Hawl camp registered in 2019. Of the total number of returnees, some 2,200 remain in the rehabilitation centre, while more than 800 have departed the centre to areas of return within Iraq.

50. In Iraq, the technical working group for the implementation of the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq Third Country National Returnees continued to facilitate collaboration across and between the Government of Iraq and United Nations entities on the return of Iraqi nationals from the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. The working group established four task forces on the following joint programmes of work: (a) legal protection for children; (b) security and accountability for adults; (c) rehabilitation and transitional services; and (d) reintegration. IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Children's Fund also worked with the Government of Iraq to improve its ability to issue civil documentation for returnees, which remains a barrier to government service access, in particular for children.

### **3. Prosecution and investigation**

51. Prosecution and investigation remained central to United Nations efforts to address crimes committed by Da'esh, with the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD) playing a central role. Since its creation, a total of 17 Member States have requested assistance from the Investigative Team in ongoing investigations and prosecutions. UNITAD also increased the support it provided to the Government of Iraq, through the creation of a joint working group of senior officials and legal experts to determine pathways towards legislating against international crimes and to increase the capacity of the Iraqi judiciary to build criminal cases and enhance international humanitarian and criminal law expertise.

52. UNITAD expanded its evidence holdings and strengthening the evidential basis for future Da'esh accountability proceedings. It also identified and collected the largest known online repository of digital materials, amounting to 2.6 terabytes of data, that had been stored by Da'esh in the cloud. Evidence was also gleaned from an additional 64 hard drives and approximately a dozen new mass grave excavations.

53. In May, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate partnered with the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to organize an expert group meeting on accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in terrorist contexts. At the meeting, practitioners and members of academia and civil society explored criminal justice avenues for sexual and gender-based violence when committed by a designated terrorist group or with terrorist intent. The meeting provided an opportunity to share challenges and promising practices regarding the use of relevant legal frameworks; regarding the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of those crimes, including with respect to gender-sensitive and victim-centred approaches; and regarding institutional capacity and international cooperation.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, [A/77/751](#), para. 22, and [S/PV.9059](#).

#### **4. Rehabilitation and reintegration**

54. United Nations entities expanded their frameworks and programmes to assist Member States in managing the challenges they faced in rehabilitating and reintegrating their nationals returning from conflict zones. As the numbers of reintegrated individuals have increased over time and across more Member States, so has the United Nations knowledge base of good practices and evidence-based policy guidance. In Uzbekistan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported national partners in conducting needs assessments among adult returnees, enabling the preparation of recommendations for national stakeholders. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office of Counter-Terrorism also provided technical expertise to government and civil society partners in the country, to advance the integration of human rights considerations in prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

55. Member States reported mental health challenges as a major obstacle affecting returnees' ability to fully participate in reintegration programmes. In response, UNDP implemented several initiatives related to policy, programming and partnerships to integrate mental health and psychosocial support in prevention and peacebuilding activities in 21 countries. In Kyrgyzstan, UNDP partnered with national authorities and local non-governmental organizations to provide legal, psychological, social and medical services to 70 probation clients (48 male and 22 female) charged with violent extremist-related criminal activities and to their families.

### **C. International and regional cooperation**

56. United Nations entities continued to promote international and regional cooperation in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. On 19 and 20 June, more than 1,050 participants representing 160 Member States, 23 international and regional organizations, 135 civil society and private sector organizations and 23 United Nations entities attended the third United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States. The Conference advanced a reinvigorated multilateral response and institutional cooperation to address the global terrorist threat. Together with the adoption of General Assembly resolution [77/298](#), as well as 40 thematic side events, the Conference formed part of the 2023 Counter-Terrorism Week and served to highlight the United Nations as a platform for bringing together a broad range of stakeholders to bolster common action on counter-terrorism.

57. United Nations entities advanced regional efforts to assist Member States in countering terrorist access to weapons. As a result of collaboration within the Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement relating to Counter-Terrorism of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research organized two regional workshops to train participants on implementing the technical guidelines to facilitate the implementation of Security Council resolution [2370 \(2017\)](#) and related international standards and good practices on preventing terrorist acquisition of weapons. To promote regional efforts to counter the threat of terrorist access to biological weapons, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe held a regional workshop in June on preventing bioterrorism attacks involving biological agents and toxins for Member States of Central Asia.

## **D. Coordination and coherence across United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities**

58. Collective efforts to coordinate and share best practices, resources and expertise across United Nations entities have resulted in the provision of more cohesive support to Member States. The Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact digital platform has grown to connect more than 1,000 focal points from 136 Member States, 13 regional organizations and all of its 46 entities, promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration to address the complex and evolving terrorist threat. In addition, the relevant recommendations of the Counter-Terrorism Committee have been made available to all Global Compact entities, unless they had been withheld, either in whole or in part, upon request by the Member State visited. Those recommendations guide United Nations entities in the support they provide to Member States in countering the threat posed by Da'esh and its affiliates, including capacity-building programmes.

59. To enhance knowledge-sharing across United Nations counter-terrorism entities, the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized the ninth meeting of the Coordination Committee of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact. The meeting was attended by representatives of Member States, Global Compact entities, regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and the Global Counterterrorism Forum. An outcome document was prepared, with recommendations on the implications of evidence-based and data-centric approaches, on integrating human rights and gender and on transparency and accountability with regard to counter-terrorism efforts.

## **E. Supporting the victims of Da'esh**

60. Partnering with Member States to improve support services to victims and survivors of terrorism remained a priority for the United Nations. Many victims of terrorism, in particular of sexual or gender-based violence perpetrated by Da'esh, continue to face stigmatization. Child victims of Da'esh are severely affected, with a long-lasting impact on their physical and mental health. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and OHCHR continued to support a victim-centred approach to victims of terrorism, in particular Yazidi survivors who had experienced widespread violations of international law at the hand of Da'esh fighters, including conflict-related sexual violence. UNAMI and OHCHR worked closely with Iraqi ministries and judicial institutions to ensure that evidentiary requirements for compensation are applied in a manner that ensures that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are not faced with excessive challenges when lodging their claims.

61. In June, the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized an expert working group meeting in Morocco to manage the challenges and technical needs of Member States in addressing the needs of victims of terrorism. The event was attended by 28 officials from national law enforcement agencies in African countries and sensitized participants to victims' perspectives by inviting victims to share their stories.

## **F. Border management and law enforcement**

62. The United Nations Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, which is led by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, currently supports 66 beneficiary Member States in building their capabilities to prevent, detect and investigate terrorist offences and other serious crimes, including by collecting and analysing travel information. The Programme organized national consultations, led by the Counter-Terrorism

Committee Executive Directorate, with officials from Ethiopia, Georgia, Malawi and Pakistan, to identify specific areas for capacity-building and technical assistance support related to the adoption and use of advance passenger information and passenger name record data systems, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions and the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (Madrid Guiding Principles) (S/2015/939, annex II) and the addendum thereto (S/2018/1177, annex). In May, the Programme held a regional workshop in Egypt for more than 80 representatives of law enforcement and civil aviation agencies of 13 Member States in the Middle East and North Africa. The workshop was aimed at fostering cooperation and the exchange of lessons learned, best practices and information among passenger information units in the region.

63. The United Nations system continued to prioritize efforts to strengthen frameworks to address the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. In March, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and UNODC provided training for border control and justice officials to enhance their knowledge on countering firearms trafficking and terrorism in Turkmenistan. In June, a regional meeting was held on data collection and information-sharing on small arms and light weapons trafficking and terrorism in Central Asia, to increase awareness of effective cooperation and information-sharing among judicial and law enforcement agencies at the regional and international levels with regard to detecting, investigating and prosecuting complex cases involving the terrorism-arms-crime nexus. Those activities were guided by recommendations of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and capacity consultations led by its Executive Directorate.

64. UNODC, the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization and its Regional Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence organized a coordination meeting to promote regional cooperation in East Africa, which led to the adoption of a joint workplan for law enforcement and criminal justice practitioners in 14 countries. UNODC also supported the development of the Eastern African regional guidelines for standardized human rights-based terrorism prevention responses.

65. In June, the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Executive Directorate and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) launched the 2022 update of their document entitled *The Protection of Critical Infrastructure against Terrorist Attacks: Compendium of Good Practices*,<sup>10</sup> in which they raise awareness about the importance of protecting critical infrastructure and provide guidance to decision makers and practitioners. Following capacity consultations led by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate with the Governments of Indonesia in April and Kenya in May, the Office of Counter-Terrorism developed national road maps for the two Governments, with recommendations on further actions to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure and soft targets against terrorist attacks.

66. OHCHR provided capacity-building and technical support to officials in Burkina Faso and the Niger to increase security sector awareness of and adherence to international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including in areas of military operations. Those activities have contributed to increased confidence between defence and security forces and the communities in areas where they operate.

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<sup>10</sup> See [www.un.org/counterterrorism/events/unodc-launches-2022-update-un-compendium-good-practices-protection-critical-infrastructure](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/events/unodc-launches-2022-update-un-compendium-good-practices-protection-critical-infrastructure).

## G. Countering the financing of terrorism

67. The United Nations forged new partnerships to enhance its support for Member States in their efforts to counter the financing of terrorism. In May, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) officially joined the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact at a high-level event on enhancing global cooperation on countering the financing of terrorism. At the event, IMF presented its latest publication, *Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Good Practices to Enhance Effectiveness*,<sup>11</sup> developed to assist policymakers in identifying good practices in anti-money-laundering efforts and efforts to combat terrorism financing.

68. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate published a thematic summary assessment of gaps and areas requiring further action to implement key provisions on countering the financing of terrorism of relevant Security Council resolutions. The publication is aimed at informing the design of targeted technical assistance and capacity-building programmes. On the margins of the 2023 Counter-Terrorism Week, the Office of Counter-Terrorism convened an event with the Office of Information and Communications Technology of the United Nations, the Executive Directorate and the Governments of the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the participation of the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the Royal United Services Institute, to analyse the shifting terrorist financing landscape. The event served to highlight information technology solutions being developed by the United Nations to enhance cooperation within and among Member States, through accessible, uniform and transparent technology, as well as the importance of appropriate risk management and due diligence protocols to address potential human rights implications.

## H. Impacts of information and communications technologies and new technologies on counter-terrorism

69. United Nations entities continued to assist Member States in countering the threat posed by terrorist use of new and emerging technologies, while identifying ways to harness technological advancements to counter terrorism through a human rights-based approach. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate co-organized an event with the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Royal United Services Institute, the Tech against Terrorism initiative, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and other partners to address challenges presented by unregulated online “grey areas”. Participants identified cross-jurisdictional and multidisciplinary solutions in compliance with international and national human rights obligations and disseminated new knowledge products and best practices.

70. In collaboration with INTERPOL and other partners, the Office of Counter-Terrorism has developed six knowledge products to strengthen the capacities of law enforcement agencies in developing and implementing effective responses to challenges and opportunities that information and communications technologies provide in countering terrorism. The knowledge products were launched in June, on the margins of the 2023 Counter-Terrorism Week, and are aimed at strengthening the capacities of Member States to develop effective national counter-terrorism policy responses and enhanced investigative skills, as well as law enforcement cooperation and information-sharing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Chady El Khoury, ed., *Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Good Practices to Enhance Effectiveness* (Washington, D.C., IMF, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> The six knowledge products are available at [www.un.org/counterterrorism/ct-tech-initiative](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ct-tech-initiative).

71. In collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union and the Organization of American States, the Office of Counter-Terrorism continued to support Member States in strengthening their responses to cyberattacks against critical infrastructure perpetrated by terrorists. In May, the partners delivered two regional cyberdrills for more than 350 officials, which contributed to the strengthening of strategic partnerships among government bodies, law enforcement, the private sector, academia and civil society in preventing and countering the use of new technologies for terrorist purposes, as well as the strengthening of Member States' capacities to investigate cyberattacks perpetrated by terrorist actors and promote accountability for such crimes.

## **I. Countering terrorist narratives and engaging with communities to prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism**

72. The United Nations built on its partnerships with Member States and civil society to formulate effective counter-narrative and prevention strategies. In January, the Office of Counter-Terrorism organized a workshop for officials from nine national ministries and agencies in Uzbekistan to jointly design a cohesive reintegration narrative for use across government agencies, enhancing their ability to address communication challenges around reintegration and help promote contextualized approaches and social cohesion. During the thirty-sixth African Union summit, held in February, UNDP launched guides on the emerging influence of violent extremist groups<sup>13</sup> and on identifying drivers of recruitment to assist Member States in designing and implementing prevention and counter-narrative strategies. In Iraq, UNDP trained 105 young journalists to promote social cohesion, combat hate speech and prevent violent extremism on social media using citizen journalism tools.

73. In its analytical brief on the management of violent extremist prisoners and the prevention of radicalization to violence in prison, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate analysed challenges and common elements to guide Member States in strengthening terrorism prevention and management of terrorist offenders. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute launched a project to enhance understanding and knowledge of the linkages between gender-based discrimination and radicalization in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. The project includes an evidence-based capacity-building component for local authorities and civil society organizations to strengthen existing responses, in order to prevent and counter violent extremism at the local level.

## **IV. Observations**

74. Despite the progress made in targeting its financial operations and leadership cadres, the threat posed by Da'esh and its regional affiliates remained both high and dynamic across the broad geographic areas where it is present. In no theatre of conflict does Da'esh operate in isolation from other non-State armed groups, including regional affiliates of Al-Qaida in many regions. Developments in parts of Africa are deeply concerning and interconnected with existing conflicts and local grievances. Those trends further exacerbate and complicate the threat. As acknowledged in the policy brief on A New Agenda for Peace, this requires a new generation of counter-terrorism operations in response, led by regional African partners and with a Security Council mandate under chapters VII and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as guaranteed funding through assessed contributions. At the same time, the

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, UNDP, *Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Africa: Conflict Ecosystems, Political Ecology and the Spread of the Proto-State*, research paper (New York, 2022).



underlying drivers of conflict must be tackled to prevent terrorist exploitation and further radicalization and recruitment. I call upon all actors to prioritize and significantly step up and invest in prevention efforts to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

75. The situation in camps and detention facilities in which individuals with alleged links to Da'esh and other terrorist groups are being held has been dire for many years and is unlikely to improve soon. As long as that situation persists, the range of challenges will continue, with unpredictable consequences for regional and international security that Da'esh could exploit for their purposes. I repeat my call upon Member States with nationals in such facilities to consider the implications of the situation and to step up their efforts without delay to facilitate the safe, voluntary and dignified repatriation of those individuals, in line with Member States' respective obligations under international law, including having as a primary consideration the best interests of the child.

76. While the Da'esh threat is generally higher in conflict zones, it varies at the subregional level. In areas where multilateral or regional collaboration generated a functional response, terrorist violence decreased. Together with the group's continued cross-border activities, this points to the need for reinvigorated and networked multilateralism at the core of counter-terrorism efforts. I welcome the strong attendance by all stakeholders at the 2023 Counter-Terrorism Week, held in New York, and look forward to close collaboration with partners on the key priorities identified and discussed at the event.

77. The fight against terrorism requires a long-term commitment and continued, coordinated and comprehensive efforts at all levels. I therefore welcome the General Assembly's adoption of its resolution [77/298](#), which sustains multilateral consensus and the progress made over the past few years to update the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in the light of the evolving terrorist threat. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact is a unique platform and mechanism for implementing counter-terrorism mandates, in close collaboration with Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society and other partners. The United Nations remains committed to promoting and adopting gender-responsive counter-terrorism efforts and a balanced implementation of the Strategy, anchored in the rule of law and human rights, as well as to continuing to support Member States in their responsibility to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

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