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# Security Council

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## Letter dated 21 January 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#), which was submitted to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, in accordance with paragraph (a) of annex I to resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#).

I should be grateful if the attached report could be brought to the attention of the members of the Security Council and issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Trine **Heimerback**  
Chair

Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities



[Original: English]

**Letter dated 31 December 2020 from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in accordance with paragraph (a) of annex I to resolution 2368 (2017) addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities**

I have the honour to refer to paragraph (a) of annex I to resolution 2368 (2017), by which the Security Council requested the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to submit, in writing, comprehensive, independent reports to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, every six months, the first by 31 December 2017

I therefore transmit to you the Monitoring Team's twenty-seventh comprehensive report, pursuant to annex I to resolution 2368 (2017). The Monitoring Team notes that the document of reference is the English original.

(Signed) Edmund **Fitton-Brown**

Coordinator

Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team

**Twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities**

*Summary*

During the second half of 2020, developments within the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) showed a high degree of continuity from trends apparent earlier in the year, whereas Al-Qaida faces a new and pressing challenge concerning its leadership and strategic direction, following an exceptional period of attrition of its senior leaders in various locations.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to have an effect on the threat posed by ISIL and Al-Qaida. In conflict zones, the threat continued to rise as the pandemic inhibited forces of law and order more than terrorists. In non-conflict zones, the threat remained comparatively low, despite a series of attacks in Europe that illustrated the resilience of radical ecosystems strengthened by online propaganda and ineffective disengagement programmes. The economic and political toll of the pandemic, its aggravation of underlying drivers of violent extremism and its expected impact on counter-terrorism efforts are likely to increase the long-term threat everywhere.

Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic remain the core area for ISIL, and the Idlib area, where Al-Qaida also has affiliates, a source of concern. The trajectory of ISIL activity in this arena is unclear, with periodic surges that have not been sustained. There is no indication that ISIL will be able to resurge to the point of taking and holding territory in the short to medium term, although the group will certainly exploit its capacity to remain in a region characterized by limited stabilization and reconstruction prospects.

Afghanistan remains important to both ISIL and Al-Qaida, and the peace process key to suppressing the long-term threat from both. The Taliban's fulfilment of its commitments stands to aggravate Al-Qaida leadership difficulties. Consolidation of ISIL and/or Al-Qaida in other conflict zones would likely lead to the revival of external attack plans that would eventually have an impact on non-conflict zones. The arenas where the groups have made recent progress in this regard are located mainly on the African continent. While terrorism continues to spread in West Africa, the region of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique is among the most concerning areas.

The fragile consensus between Al-Qaida and ISIL to fight a common enemy is over, as both groups are now involved in violent confrontations in all conflict zones apart from Libya.

Notwithstanding continuing Member State concerns about abuse of technology by terrorists, especially in the fields of finance, weaponry and social media, neither ISIL nor Al-Qaida is assessed to have made significant progress in this regard in late 2020.

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## I. Overview and evolution of the threat

1. In late 2020, as earlier in the year, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was still a key feature of the terrorist and counter-terrorist landscape. The international community also remained seized of the legacy of foreign terrorist fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)<sup>1</sup> “caliphate”, and the fragile holding arrangements in the core conflict zone of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic for displaced persons and detainees, which still include many foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. However, international agreement on how to address this issue in the Syrian Arab Republic remains elusive, with the pandemic adding a further layer of practical complexity and political reluctance to tackle it with the urgency that it merits.

2. ISIL continues to emphasize the “divine punishment of arrogance and unbelief” narrative regarding the pandemic that it adopted in March 2020, and to exhort followers to attack the enemy while counter-terrorist defences are supposedly weakened. (It should be noted that some Member States have observed a shift in recent months away from the “divine punishment” narrative as the pandemic’s impact has spread.) However, no developed ISIL strategy has evolved for the pandemic. This includes weaponization of the virus by using contagious supporters to infect opponents, which was mooted within ISIL in March but has not progressed as a practical proposition in the way that it has among some other terrorist groups.

3. With mobility and targets still reduced by COVID-19 travel restrictions and lockdowns, ISIL members cannot easily travel, meet, raise funds or otherwise operate in non-conflict zones. This translates into compounded difficulties for the group in mounting high-impact attacks, although recent incidents in Europe have demonstrated that even low-casualty attacks may have a significant psychological impact if they occur frequently enough. The threat level in non-conflict zones remains low relative to that in conflict zones. Inspired attacks are assessed to be the principal source of such threat in 2021.

4. ISIL has enjoyed a captive audience, with so many people facing restrictions on movement and spending more time online. Threats may have accumulated during this period that remain undetected but could manifest in due course. Member States assess that ISIL intends to end its marginalization from the news and that, as restrictions ease in various locations, a rash of pre-planned attacks may occur. Even in non-conflict zones, the economic and political strain of the pandemic suggests that the threat will also rise in the longer term.

5. In conflict zones, where restrictions on movement and gatherings are difficult or impossible to enforce, and where foreign terrorist fighters have continued to travel freely, threat levels have increased. Both ISIL and Al-Qaida (QDe.004) have had success in certain African arenas affected by conflict. Meanwhile, the pandemic has weakened the hand of Governments in conflict zones more than it has inhibited terrorist groups, and its long-term impact on economies, government resources and allocations for international cooperation risks aggravating the threat further.

6. Member States continue to assess that the strategic direction of ISIL under Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla (QDi.426) has not changed significantly. Command and control of the group by al-Mawla is under continuous pressure from Member State counter-terrorist operations, meaning that loosening of command and control within ISIL and delegation of authority from the core have continued.

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

7. The ISIL so-called general directorate of provinces is key to reviving ISIL external operational capability, which one Member State assesses it may achieve during 2021. The better established the remote provinces become, and the more unstable the conflict zones in which many of them are embedded are, the greater the potential external threat. There is dynamic influence back and forth between conflict zones and non-conflict zones such that failure to address the former will weaken long-term security in the latter. The directed and enabled threat from ISIL will likely trend upwards unless suppressed by continuous counter-terrorist pressure.

8. Al-Mawla remains invisible, avoiding direct communication, presumably to avoid his predecessor's fate of being traced and killed, but at a potential cost (disputed by some Member States) of allowing the enthusiasm of ISIL supporters to dissipate. ISIL spokesman Abu Hamza al-Qurashi (not listed) has now made four audio releases in the past year but is a limited substitute for the "caliph". His latest on 18 October had limited practical content, revealing frustration in his injunction to supporters to spend less time on social media and more effort on high-impact attacks, jail-breaks and other operational activity directed against Al-Qaida, the Taliban and Member States.

9. Al-Qaida has endured a period of high leadership attrition, with multiple losses in Afghanistan, Mali, Somalia, Yemen and the Governate of Idlib in the Syrian Arab Republic. One Member State has confirmed the death of Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah el Alfi, also known as Abu Mohamed al-Masri (QDi.019), in August, who was the deputy of Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri (QDi.006). There were also reports of the death of al-Zawahiri in October, although no Member State has been able to confirm such reports to the Monitoring Team. The importance of Mohammed Salahaldin Abd El Halim Zidane, also known as Sayf-Al Adl (QDi.001), previously assessed to be the third most senior leader of Al-Qaida, has likely increased. Should a succession to al-Zawahiri become necessary, it may be difficult for the new leader to take up residence in Afghanistan, as such a move could have an impact on the interests of the Taliban, given their peace process obligations. Al-Qaida is expected by Member States to overcome these challenges, but it is not clear whether it will ultimately emerge stronger, under a more dynamic leadership, or indeed where its leaders will ultimately find a safe haven from which to operate. The success or otherwise of the Afghan peace process will be an important factor in this, as well as in the shorter- and longer-term prospects of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161).

## **II. Regional developments**

### **A. Iraq and the Levant**

10. ISIL maintains a largely clandestine presence in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and wages a sustained insurgency straddling the borders between the two countries, with a reach over territories it once held under the banner of the so-called "caliphate". The insurgency enjoys limited support from pockets of the local population holding grievances against the authorities. While the capacity of the terrorists to mount attacks in metropolitan areas is reportedly decreasing, they maintain the ability to hide out in rural areas, and to exploit security gaps both along the border between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and close to the Hamrin mountain range in Diyala, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din Governorates.

11. ISIL is estimated to retain a combined total of 10,000 active fighters in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. Although the majority are reported to be in Iraq, pressure by Iraqi security forces is rendering the country more difficult for ISIL operations in

comparison with the Syrian Arab Republic. As with its affiliates abroad, there is a tendency within ISIL in the core conflict zone towards decentralization and increased devolution of tactical decision-making to each independent cell on the ground.

12. The Syrian desert in Dayr al-Zawr Province provides a safe haven for ISIL fighters from which they launch attacks against Syrian government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and where they are also reported to have forged ties to smuggling networks operating across the Iraqi border.

13. Foreign terrorist fighters numbering in the low thousands persist within the core conflict zone. Member States assess that those remaining have likely become integrated into and invested in the region. Outflows of foreign terrorist fighters from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic are at a nadir. Member States continue to raise concerns regarding the release or escape of ISIL fighters from detention in facilities under the control of SDF.

14. The Idlib de-escalation zone remains important to ISIL as a limited safe haven. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)<sup>2</sup> regularly arrests ISIL fighters. However, some ISIL leaders continue to reside in the region and it is a target destination for many former ISIL fighters and families as the safest gateway into Turkey.

15. HTS is still the dominant militant group in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, with approximately 10,000 fighters, most of them Syrian. HTS seeks further to consolidate its control of the Idlib de-escalation zone and applies pressure on local leaders to accept the group's authority, ensuring that the population complies with its version of sharia law. The group asserts influence and control over the so-called "Salvation Government" through its large access to resources.

16. In addition to taxation of local businesses, HTS maintains a monopoly over the import and distribution of gasoline and diesel fuel through a front company called Wadat Petroleum, affiliated to Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani (QDi.317) and headquartered at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point. The chief financial officer of this enterprise is reported to be Mohamed Omar Qadeer, also known as Abu Abdulrahman Al-Zurba (not listed), who operates the company at the behest of HTS. The group's earnings from trading fuel and energy are estimated at approximately \$1 million monthly. HTS is also reported to control distribution of humanitarian aid through an entity known as Maktab Sho'un Al-Munathammat (the Bureau of Organization Affairs), which limits direct distribution of goods to the local population by humanitarian organizations. It also confiscates portions of these goods to reinforce HTS patronage networks.

17. The other major Al-Qaida affiliate in the Idlib area is Hurras al-Din (HAD), with between 2,000 and 2,500 fighters. It was weakened by a significant number of leadership losses in 2020 and is overshadowed by HTS, with which it competes for recruits and reputation among the local population. Member States report that it is still led by Samir Hijazi, also known as Faruq al-Suri or Abu Hammam al-Shami (not listed), who is believed to be the son-in-law of El Halim Zidane (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 16).

18. The Idlib area continues to harbour other terrorist groups composed mainly of contingents of foreign terrorist fighters who remain subject to the authority of HTS. These groups include the Khattab Al-Shishani Brigade (Chechen fighters), Katiba al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ, Central Asian fighters) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (QDe.088), also known in the Syrian Arab Republic as the Turkistan Islamic Party. The latter is reportedly composed of 3,000 to 4,500 members. A Member State reported that ETIM maintains an operational headquarters in Harim

<sup>2</sup> Listed as Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant (QDe.137).

and that some of its fighters have joined with HTS units along the battle lines of Jabal al-Zawiyah, south of Idlib Governorate. Member States also note that HTS maintains training camps and provides logistical support to like-minded groups.

## **B. Arabian Peninsula**

19. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (QDe.129) suffered setbacks in late 2020. Its leader Khalid Batarfi, also known as Abu Miqdad al-Kindi (not listed), was arrested during an operation in Ghayda City, Al-Mahrah Governorate, in October. The same operation also led to the death of the group's second in command, Saad Atef al-Awlaqi. It was further reported that the leader of the group in Abyan, Al-Khadr al-Walidi, was killed in November, and that the group was routed in Bayda', with remnant fighters from that governorate dispersing towards Shabwah, Ma'rib and Abyan.

20. In addition to leadership losses, AQAP is suffering an erosion of its ranks caused by dissensions and desertions, led primarily by one of Batarfi's ex-lieutenants, Abu Omar al-Nahdi (not listed). However, despite these disruptions and the relative quiescence that followed Batarfi's capture, AQAP was able to mount a significant attack in Lawdar, Abyan Governorate, in December, leading to the death of several members of the Security Belt Forces. The attack underscores the continued threat that the group poses and its offensive ambitions against infrastructure targets.

21. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Yemen (ISIL-Yemen) (QDe.166) suffered substantial losses in July and August, including the death of its leader, Abu Al-Walid Al-Adeni. Member States also reported that several members of the leadership cadre had been killed, including Abu Suleiman al-Adeni, the group's explosives expert. In the wake of these losses, ISIL-Yemen released a statement mourning their losses and proclaiming a stage of regrouping and gradual rebuilding. The group has maintained a low-key presence in Yemen for the time being.

22. The recent normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab countries was used as a rallying narrative by terrorist organizations in the region. In the wake of the Abraham Accords, Al-Qaida's Al-Sahab Media, as well as Al-Malahim Media of AQAP, issued statements condemning the leadership of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, warning other countries against following suit and calling on their followers to retaliate by attacking foreign interests in the region. The ISIL spokesperson, in his audio release of 18 October, also called on the group's followers to attack foreign nationals in Gulf States. No attacks have yet been reported in response to these incitements. However, attacks targeting French interests took place in Saudi Arabia following the start of the trial related to the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris.

## **C. Africa**

### **North Africa**

23. The ceasefire between warring factions in Libya has aided efforts to counter terrorism in the country, but there remains scope for re-escalation. The success of counter-terrorism efforts will continue to hinge on national reconciliation. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (ISIL-Libya) (QDe.165) has been weakened. Member States confirmed the death of Abu Abdullah al-Libi, also known as Abu Moaz al-Tikriti or Abdulqader al-Najdi, during a raid conducted by the Libyan National Army on 15 September in Sabha. This individual had led ISIL-Libya since the death of its previous leader, Wisam al-Zubaydi, also known as Abu Nabil al-Anbari, in 2015. While the core of ISIL-Libya remains in the south, the group is

reported to maintain cells in coastal areas. Small numbers of ISIL fighters remain in Janzur and Msallata.

24. Al-Qaida maintains a presence in south-western Libya, with some fighters who previously belonged to the Al-Qaida-affiliated Ansar al Charia Derna (QDe.145) reportedly fleeing to Ubari and Sabratah. On 28 November, an Al-Qaida cell in Ubari was neutralized through the arrest of seven members of the Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (QDe.014), including Hassan al-Washi (not listed), who had recently returned from Mali.

25. Member States continued to express concern over fighters traveling from the north-western Syrian Arab Republic to Libya. Some of these fighters are not organizationally affiliated with HTS, but rather with factions of the so-called Syrian National Army. In particular, the Sultan Murad Brigade is reported to have contributed most of the Syrian fighters in Libya, as well as most of those who joined the fighting in the current conflict in the South Caucasus. According to Member States, this faction harbours a radical ideology and has assimilated former ISIL fighters to strengthen its numbers.

26. Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), which pledged allegiance to ISIL in 2014, remains resilient in north-east Sinai despite heavy Egyptian military pressure. The group is reportedly between 500 and 1,200 fighters strong and attacks military targets and critical infrastructure, primarily using improvised explosive devices. Egypt continues to assert (see [S/2019/570](#), para. 29) that ABM remains a local phenomenon with no operational, organizational or financial ties to the ISIL core or other affiliates.

27. AQIM continues to atrophy in Algeria, with its centre of gravity moving steadily towards the Sahel. Remnants of the group persist, however, and are under constant military pressure. In early December, Algerian forces were able to neutralize a cell of AQIM in Jijel, resulting in the death of Abu Hayyan 'Asem, a member of the AQIM leadership council, and Abu Mousa al-Hasan, who had reportedly led the group's propaganda efforts in Algeria.

28. In Morocco, small cells of ISIL sympathizers have been neutralized in several towns, including a cell of three men in Tetouan in December and a five-man cell in Tangier in October. In September, another five-man cell was neutralized that had been operating between Temara, Skhirat, Tiflet and Tangier. The leader of this cell was able to kill a prison guard at Tiflet prison while in custody on 27 October 2020. All such cells were comprised of frustrated travellers who had been unable to travel to join ISIL in the core conflict zone and had instead pledged allegiance to ISIL and planned to carry out terrorist attacks in Morocco using improvised explosive devices.

## **West Africa**

29. In the Sahel, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (QDe.163) suffered significant attrition during its armed confrontation with Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159), backed by Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso, and as a result of international counter-terrorism operations. Nonetheless, its command-and-control capacity remains effective. The group avoided combat in the Liptako-Gourma region, but regularly managed to detonate improvised explosive devices, and also attacked French humanitarian workers in Kouré on the outskirts of Niamey on 9 August. Moreover, ISGS appears resilient enough to regenerate its base of fighters while maintaining a strong presence in ISIL core propaganda.

30. Following the death of Abdelmalek Droukdel (QDi.232), Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi (QDi.389) took over the leadership of AQIM. The appointment of an Algerian reflects continuity in leadership despite the AQIM shift towards the Sahel region, where Iyad Ag Ghali (QDi.316) remains the key Al-Qaida figure. Ghali is

assisted by Amadou Koufa (QDi.425) in Macina, Sidan Ag Hitta (not listed) in Kidal and Talha Al-Libi (not listed) in Timbuktu.

31. In Mali, following the 18 August military coup d'état, Malian troops continued to engage in counter-terrorism operations with their international partners. The open dialogue with JNIM leadership shows continuity with the previous Government, and possible sanctions violations are being monitored. On 8 October, the dialogue enabled the exchange of approximately 200 JNIM fighters for a leading Malian political figure and three foreign nationals held hostage. A few weeks earlier, JNIM had murdered a Swiss hostage held since 2016. Terrorist groups have exploited the transition and ongoing political, social and ethnic tensions, as illustrated by the difficulties Malian authorities faced in resolving the crisis in Farabougou in central Mali or imposing security on the Dogon plateau.

32. JNIM further benefits from a strong position in the Mopti and Ségou regions, especially in the areas of Diabali, Bankass, Bandiagara and Koro. It purports to bring different ethnic groups together, despite having itself been responsible for the orchestration of inter-ethnic violence. It has recently recruited fighters within the Dogon and Bambara communities.

33. Katiba Macina continues to destabilize Burkina Faso. Similar phenomena are expected in the sectors of Kayes near the Mali-Senegal border, where the number of attacks doubled in 2020, and Sikasso near the border with Côte d'Ivoire, where security incidents have been increasing and are fuelled by the instability in Burkina Faso. JNIM elements, backed by radical Islamist influencers, encroached into Senegal along the road from Kayes to Kaffrine, in Bakel, in the Ferlo reserve and in the gold extraction area of Saraya.

34. Since the end of 2019, counter-terrorism operations have successfully targeted JNIM fighting capacity in central Mali and the Gourma regions of Burkina Faso and Mali. In the first half of November, JNIM lost more than 100 operatives from Katiba Macina and Katiba Gourma, and Bah ag Moussa (QDi.424) was killed on 10 November. He was the third JNIM chief of operations killed, after Abou Yahia al-Jazairi on 6 April 2020 and Djamel Akkacha (QDi.313) on 21 February 2019. Simultaneous attacks perpetrated by JNIM on 30 November with indirect fire against international military targets in Gao, Kidal and Ménaka prove, however, the group's ability to mount coordinated operations despite these losses.

35. In the Lake Chad basin, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162) and Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) (QDe.138) maintained their respective areas of operations in north-eastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon, although they fought over the lake border region with Chad. The extension of their reach into Katsina State is yet to be assessed. Ba Koura (not listed) remains Boko Haram's emir and tactical commander in this sector. On 28 November, approximately 110 civilians were murdered by Boko Haram in the Jere local government area near the village of Koshebe. This major attack against the local population took place in territory where ISWAP usually operates.

36. One Member State reported the presence of Boko Haram militants in an area of north-western Nigeria where criminal groups operate and Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Ansaru) (QDe.142) was recently reactivated. Nevertheless, Ansaru's ability to contribute significantly to instability in the region is limited and would require the integration of criminal groups under its banner. In 2020, Ansaru claimed responsibility for only four attacks and received limited media coverage.

37. In terms of external support, ISWAP benefits from an effective connection with the ISIL core propaganda apparatus, which enables the group to communicate rapidly and effectively about its operations against local defence and security forces. ISIL core

media products follow a strict graphic charter and validation process to ensure coherence. Compliance by ISWAP with these, and its constant featuring in the Al-Naba newsletter, are evidence of its strong link with the ISIL core global leadership.

### **East Africa**

38. In the latter part of 2020, the operational focus and modus operandi of Al-Qaida affiliate Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin (Al-Shabaab) (SOe.001) in Somalia and abroad remained the same (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 37, and [S/2020/717](#), para. 42). Member States observed continued attacks conducted in various localities in central and southern Somalia and Mogadishu targeting both military operations and civilians. Specifically, the group sustained and launched numerous attacks involving ambushes, landmines, mortars and improvised explosive devices in major towns and transport corridors across Somalia, targeting both local and foreign troops (see [S/2020/717](#), para. 43).

39. These operations were executed by deploying small units of heavily armed operatives across various localities to conduct coordinated simultaneous attacks. Al-Shabaab also began establishing makeshift camps near water points. During the reporting period, there was a remarkable increase in Al-Shabaab propaganda and in the group's online presence to enhance recruitment and radicalization.

40. Member States observed that Al-Shabaab had been forced to address the COVID-19 pandemic, following dissent from operatives and sympathizers due to failure to act as it spread in some territories controlled by Al-Shabaab. The group responded by establishing a pandemic prevention committee and a care facility at its headquarters in Jilib, which remains operational, and also began providing basic goods and foodstuffs to the local population. It exploited the opportunity to recruit members and held information sessions with the local communities.

41. Meanwhile, the ISIL affiliate in Somalia maintained a low profile but continued its activities, including conducting low-scale attacks and enlisting and training recruits to facilitate its role in overseeing and providing guidance to Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). ISIL in Somalia continued to operate as the logistical hub for ISCAP (see [S/2020/717](#), para. 48). Some Member States observed that operatives in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had received reinforcement of trainers, tactical strategists and financial support remitted from the ISIL core through ISIL networks and enablers in Somalia and other East African countries, most recently in September 2020 (see also [S/2019/570](#), para. 43).

### **Central and Southern Africa**

42. During the reporting period, ISCAP displayed enhanced capabilities and was active in various operational bases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Somalia. In addition, the group conducted its first cross-border incursion into southern United Republic of Tanzania. At the various operational hubs, Member States observed enhanced recruitment, an upsurge in high-impact conventional attacks, the takeover of towns and villages and the destruction of property.

43. Member States noted similarities in modus operandi in recent ISCAP attacks, an indication of coordination and skills transfer between ISCAP operatives in different localities. A Member State observed that recent attacks had been directed and controlled from the ISIL core, which had facilitated training and funding. Gradually, ISCAP is evolving into a dependable ISIL affiliate, a development discernible in the adoption of sophisticated tactics and recent operational successes.

44. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ISCAP demonstrated advanced capabilities by conducting several attacks in locations in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces. The group strove to capture more territory and establish new bases in

Rwenzori and Irumi sectors. It conducted more high-impact attacks, using conventional weaponry, and concentrated on hard military targets at various locations, during which it seized weapons and ammunition from the Congolese military. Additionally, Member States observed the deployment of improvised explosive devices and rocket-propelled grenades, a break from previous attacks in which the group used unconventional weapons. In October 2020, ISCAP launched an assault on Kangbaya central prison in Beni aimed at freeing ISCAP members incarcerated there. Of approximately 1,320 prisoners released in the operation, about 235 were ISCAP operatives and sympathizers.

45. In Mozambique, ISCAP continued to evolve and sustained attacks in Cabo Delgado, where Member States noted indiscriminate and retaliatory attacks and the takeover of towns and villages. In recent attacks, ISCAP operatives seemed to have acquired sophisticated operational capabilities and pursued a strategic intent to seize more locations and expand operations to other districts and provinces. Additionally, ISCAP captured and continues to hold the port of Mocimboa da Praia, despite a sustained military offensive from government forces.

46. ISCAP in Mozambique began coordinating simultaneous attacks in different localities. For instance, on 14 October 2020 the group conducted three attacks concurrently: two in locations in Cabo Delgado and its first cross-border attack into the United Republic of Tanzania. Member States observed sophisticated military tactics deployed by ISCAP to cross the Ruvuma River into the southern United Republic of Tanzania, where it attacked Kitaya village in the Mtwara region. In an earlier incident, it attacked a Tanzanian troop base along the common border.

47. Regarding the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, since 2018 some Member States in the region have investigated young recruits travelling to join ISCAP in the northern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Somalia (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 44, and [S/2019/570](#), para. 42). More recently, there are indicators of recruitment in Mozambique and the southern United Republic of Tanzania, where ISCAP has gained sympathizers and enablers. There have also been movements of operatives exploiting the porous borders to join ISCAP in Mozambique.<sup>3</sup>

## D. Europe

48. A series of attacks in Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland between September and November 2020 underscored the enduring threat in Europe. On 25 September, a knife attack outside the former offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris wounded two people. On 4 October in Dresden, Germany, a second stabbing occurred. On 16 October, in a suburb of Paris, a middle school teacher was beheaded. On 29 October, three people were killed in a stabbing attack at a basilica in Nice, France. On 2 November, four people were killed and 22 injured in a shooting in Vienna. On 24 November, two women were injured in an attempted stabbing in Lugano, Switzerland. According to authorities, these attacks were all motivated or inspired by ISIL or Al-Qaida. Threat levels in many European States were upgraded to high or very high in their aftermath. The start of the trial on 2 September 2020 for the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attack generated additional threats and calls for action against France from supporters and propagandists, in particular from Al-Qaida.

<sup>3</sup> ISCAP is emerging as a strong ISIL affiliate comprising some elements of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and several other militia groups operating in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo or Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. The main concern for affected Member States is the extent to which operatives from the militia groups are participating in ISCAP operations (see also [S/2020/53](#), para. 44).

49. The attacks in France were perpetrated with knives by self-radicalized foreign individuals. None were known to authorities or had had recorded contact with terror networks or demonstrated violent behaviour. Acting on guidance from radicalizing elements, they all chose symbolic targets: journalists mistakenly thought to be employed by *Charlie Hebdo*; a professor who was promoting freedom of speech; and worshippers in a church.

50. By contrast, the attack in Austria (involving an assault rifle, a handgun and a machete) was carried out by Kujtim Fejzulai, a dual citizen of Austria and North Macedonia previously jailed for attempting to join ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic. Fejzulai belonged to the terrorist group calling itself the “Lions of the Balkans”, an international network composed of elements based in at least Austria, Germany, Switzerland and western Balkan countries. The group had contacts with Komron Zukhurov (not listed), a 24-year-old Tajik national arrested on 29 April 2020 in Tirana in execution of an international arrest warrant issued by Germany for being part of an ISIL cell suspected of planning terrorist attacks against military forces of the United States of America in the country (see [S/2020/717](#), para. 57).

51. Abdoulakh Anzorov, the attacker who beheaded a middle school teacher with a kitchen knife on 16 October, had frequented a martial arts club in the suburbs of Paris. Member States from the region reported that some radical elements from Tajikistan and the western Balkans, as well as of Chechen origin, active in Europe share a passion for specific martial arts. They gather in dedicated sports clubs, often seen as a hotbed for potential extremists of all ideological backgrounds (see [S/2017/573](#), para. 10) and actively develop their relationships through such practice. This phenomenon was previously reported in the western Balkans region but was often connected with broader non-governmental organizations. Member States highlighted the challenges they encounter in monitoring and investigating self-radicalized, lone actor terrorists. They noted the ability of an individual to join illegal migrant networks and perpetrate an attack in Europe in a very short time frame, exploiting flows from North Africa, failed management of illegal migrants disembarked in European ports and non-expulsion back to the ports of origin. The role of diasporas is also critical, given their ability to take in newcomers and maintain ties to radical elements in the country of origin.

52. European Member States have identified a number of concerning trends reflected in these attacks, including (a) the disaffection of individuals who are often isolated despite being part of a radical ecosystem; (b) global motivations and reference to global leaders remote from their local grievances; (c) a lack of sophisticated technical skill among attackers; (d) spontaneity and lack of advance planning; and (e) brutalization, including of young perpetrators with no previous experience of extreme violence who acted with severe cruelty and no emotional restraint.

53. A related challenge identified by counter-terrorism authorities is the rapid evolution, complexity and number of tools available to terrorists, in particular via encrypted channels and the dark web, which greatly complicates the authorities’ work. Discerning between attacks directed, enabled or inspired by ISIL requires longer investigations than in the past. In addition, many of the incidents initially reported as involving a “lone actor” were in fact facilitated by other terrorist individuals and/or networks by providing weapons, vehicles or false documents, among other things.

54. The 2 November Vienna attack also underscores the abuse of social media platforms for the dissemination of ISIL propaganda. In many instances reported to the Monitoring Team, the platforms abused are smaller and may lack the tools necessary to identify and remove such content in a timely manner. In this case, the Monitoring Team is aware of information remaining available on Twitter. The content in question includes a video made by the individual responsible for the attack in Vienna and

posted by a journalist.<sup>4</sup> The video contains the responsible individual's statement of allegiance to ISIL. The Monitoring Team notes that this video has been removed from other major social media platforms, including Facebook, and assesses that this is a clear example of ISIL incitement that is still posted.

**55. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States recalling the provisions of paragraph 23 of resolution 2368 (2017), in which States were urged to “remain vigilant about the use of information and communication technology for terrorist purposes and act cooperatively to prevent terrorists from recruiting and raising funds for terrorist purposes, and to counter their violent extremist propaganda and incitement to violence on the Internet and social media”. The Committee may wish to suggest that Member States communicate directly with the company in question, recalling that ISIL remains designated by the United Nations as a threat to international peace and security. The Monitoring Team further recalls its recommendation on this matter in its report of June 2016 (see S/2016/629, paras. 98 and 99).**

56. Radicalization in prisons and the release of dangerous returnees and frustrated travellers remain acute concerns (see S/2020/53, para. 47). In addition, the risk of radicalization among prison officers and staff cannot be excluded. Deradicalization programmes often still seem ineffective (see S/2019/570, para. 49), as shown by the Vienna attacker, who was enrolled in a deradicalization program aimed at facilitating reintegration. In addition, three returnees belonging to the “Lions of the Balkans” were arrested in North Macedonia on 1 September 2020 after being enrolled in a reintegration programme, released from prison and then detected to be involved in the final planning stage of a terrorist attack.

## E. Asia

### Central and South Asia

57. Despite initial optimism generated by the 29 February 2020 agreement between the United States and the Taliban, and the beginning of direct talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban on 12 September in Doha, the situation in Afghanistan remains challenging. Terrorist activities and radical ideology continue to be a potential source of threats to the region and globally. If the peace process in Afghanistan succeeds, it may have a correspondingly positive impact.

58. Following its setbacks in Nangarhar and Kunar Provinces, ISIL-K has suffered from degraded combat capability, reduced support on the ground and insufficient funding. The group seeks to restore influence, secure new locations, update its organizational structure and logistics, and identify additional financing sources. Without stable support, the prospects of ISIL-K reviving its former offensive activity and holding territory appear remote, considering the pressure it faces from the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), their allies and the Taliban.

59. Nevertheless, ISIL-K has claimed responsibility for many recent high-profile attacks, including the complex assault on Jalalabad City prison on 2 August, the attack on Kabul University on 2 November, the firing of rockets on Kabul on 21 November and the killing of an Afghan journalist in Nangarhar Province on 10 December. More than 600 Afghan civilians and 2,500 ANDSF personnel have been killed in attacks since 29 February. Afghanistan remains the Member State worst affected by terrorism in the world.

<sup>4</sup> The content remained available via Twitter as of 30 December 2020.

60. In June 2020, Shahab al-Muhajir, also known as Sanaullah (not listed), was appointed by the ISIL core to lead ISIL-K. The communiqué announcing the appointment, written in Arabic and translated into Pashto, referred to al-Muhajir as an experienced military leader and one of the “urban lions” of ISIL-K in Kabul who had been involved in guerrilla operations and the planning of suicide and complex attacks.

61. According to a Member State, al-Muhajir was also appointed chief of the Al-Sadiq office of ISIL, which covers the “Khorasan” region, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Central Asian States. Another Member State reported that al-Muhajir had previously been a mid-level commander in the Haqqani Network (TAe.012) and that he had maintained close cooperation with the entity, providing “key expertise and access to networks”, which ISIL-K required following its loss of territory and senior leadership figures.

62. According to Member States, the current number of ISIL-K fighters has fallen to between 1,000 and 2,200. Despite its significant loss of territory, ISIL-K has not been entirely eradicated from the districts of Manogay, in Kunar, and Achin, in Nangarhar. Sleeper cells are active in other parts of the country, particularly in Kabul, where the current commander and his overall ISIL-K deputy Salahuddin (not listed) are based. The Team assesses that under al-Muhajir’s leadership, and based on his expertise, ISIL-K will continue to undertake terrorist attacks, predominantly in Kabul, provincial capitals and urban areas in the east of Afghanistan.

63. Member States report little evidence of significant changes in relations between Al-Qaida and the Taliban. Al-Qaida assesses that its future in Afghanistan depends upon its close ties to the Taliban, as well as the success of Taliban military operations in the country.

64. The overall number of members of Al-Qaida and its affiliates in Afghanistan is currently estimated at between 200 and 500, spread across at least 11 Afghan provinces: Badakhshan, Ghazni, Helmand, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Logar, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktiya and Zabul.

65. The killing of several Al-Qaida commanders in Taliban-controlled territory underscores how close the two groups are. On 20 October, Al-Qaida media chief Husam Abd al-Ra’uf,<sup>5</sup> also known as Abu Muhsen al-Masri, was killed in Andar district of Ghazni Province. On 10 November, a deputy of Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Mohammad Hanif,<sup>6</sup> also known as Abdullah, was killed in Bakwah district of Farah Province, where, according to a Member State, “he had been providing bomb-making training to Taliban insurgents”. Both appear to have been given shelter and protection by the Taliban. Further evidence of close relations between the groups was the release of the wife of the late Asim Umar (not listed), a former AQIS leader, who was among the more than 5,000 Taliban prisoners freed by the Government of Afghanistan in 2020.

66. In Central Asia, the security situation is influenced by developments in Afghanistan. Success in the peace process would have a positive impact on Central Asia, where most attention is on Uzbek groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (QDe.010). This group consists of up to 700 people, including family members and approximately 70 Central Asians who left ISIL-K and joined IMU.

<sup>5</sup> Abu Muhsin al-Masri was on the Most Wanted Terrorists list of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation. He acted as the main propagandist and media protagonist of AQIS.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammed Hanif briefly served as Deputy of AQIS under Asim Umar and was formerly a member of Harakat ul-Mujahidin (QDe.008). He was previously arrested by the authorities of Pakistan for his connection to the 2002 assassination attempt against the then President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, and a suicide attack carried out against the United States Consulate in Karachi, also in 2002.

Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) (QDe.158) has approximately 150 fighters, mostly in Badghis Province. Islamic Jihad Group (QDe.119) has approximately 100 fighters active in the Afghan northern provinces of Kunduz and Faryab under Taliban shelter and control. The Taliban, which continues to deny the presence of foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, has forbidden these groups from launching independent operations against ANDSF, and this has resulted in a reduction of their income. The position of these groups has been further complicated by the killing of the IMU leader, Abdulaziz Yuldash, in Ghormach district, Faryab Province, in November.

67. Financial support from Uzbek groups in the Syrian Arab Republic to their Afghan branches has declined at least in part because of the reported feud between HTS and HAD over the leadership in Idlib Province and control over foreign terrorist fighters, including Central Asians. The latter lean towards HAD, which remains committed to an international agenda. As a result, the founder of Khatiba Tawhid wal-Jihad, Mukhtarov (alias Abu Saloh) (not listed), who had initiated online propaganda in favour of HAD, was detained by HTS and accused of stealing money belonging to HTS fighters. He was given the choice of pledging loyalty to HTS or being convicted of theft.

68. Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (QDe.132) was reported to have overseen a reunification of splinter groups that took place in Afghanistan and was moderated by Al-Qaida. This was expected to increase the threat to Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region. Five entities pledged alliance to TTP in July and August, including the Shehryar Mehsud group, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (QDe.152), Hizb-ul-Ahrar, the Amjad Farooqi group and the Usman Saifullah group (formerly known as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi). This increased the strength of TTP and resulted in a sharp increase in attacks in the region. Member State assessments of TTP fighting strength range between 2,500 and 6,000. One Member State reported that TTP was responsible for more than 100 cross-border attacks between July and October 2020.

69. Member States expressed concern at the rising number of ISIL sympathizers in cyberspace in South Asia. *Voice of Hind*, the only regional ISIL English-language outlet, was started in early 2020 and is published regularly. It has followers in Maldives and Sri Lanka, with the former also highlighted by Member States as an arena for recruitment and operations. The key ISIL operative in Maldives, Mohamed Ameen (not listed), is seeking to cultivate links with ISIL-K, which is consistent with the Al-Sadiq office objective of enhancing cooperation across the region. The Team continues to study divergent information from Member States regarding ISIL-K activity in South Asia, in close consultation with Member States concerned and other interested parties.

### **South-East Asia**

70. South-East Asia continues to confront violence by affiliates of ISIL and Al-Qaida. In recent months, however, counter-terrorism forces in both Indonesia and the Philippines have registered important successes in either disrupting attacks before they could be launched or targeting key leadership figures. The role of women in recruitment, radicalization and operational activities is an ongoing challenge. The prominence of women may also reflect the importance of kinship-based terror cells and networks.

71. The southern Philippines remains home to a number of factions of ISIL in South-East Asia, which is best understood as a loose network of groups with varying allegiances or ties to the ISIL core. The largest recent attack in the Philippines consisted of two suicide bombings undertaken by women within an hour of one another on 24 August 2020 in Jolo, Sulu. The first bomb detonated outside a market close to the lunch hour. The second attacker detonated her device close to the site of the January

2019 attack at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Together, the attacks killed 15 and wounded more than 70. The nationalities of the women involved in these attacks have not been identified by authorities; they are believed to be the widows of Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (QDe.001) leaders killed in the Philippines in July 2020.

72. Philippine authorities confirmed to the Monitoring Team the July 2020 death of ASG leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, the reported mastermind of the 2019 Cathedral attack. Sawadjaan's two brothers, Madsmar Sawadjaan and Mannul Sawadjaan, were described to the Monitoring Team as high-value targets who had been killed in November 2020 by Philippine military forces.

73. In October, a woman identified as Rezky Fantasya Rullie (not listed) was arrested in Jolo. Authorities seized bomb-making equipment at the time of the arrest and believed that a suicide attack was being planned to avenge the death of her husband. Rullie is the daughter of the Jolo Cathedral husband and wife suicide bombers, and also the widow of Andi Basso, an Indonesian national reported killed in Sulu in August 2020. According to one Member State, Basso helped to facilitate the travel into the Philippines of the Jolo Cathedral attackers. Taken together, these deaths and arrests stand to further degrade the group's ability to plan and carry out attacks. They also underscore the deep role of family ties in radicalization and the perpetration of attacks.

74. Al-Qaida's primary affiliate in South-East Asia remains Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) (QDe.092). On 10 December 2020, Indonesian authorities arrested Aris Sumarsono, also known as Zulkarnaen (QDi.187), in a police raid on the island of Sumatra. He had long eluded capture for his role in the 2002 Bali hotel bombings. Other recent arrests indicate that the group may be attempting to regain momentum. Previously, JI focused its attacks primarily on State institutions; it now appears to be borrowing from ISIL tactics and targeting minority groups and engaging in criminal activity as a means of financing its activities.

75. The COVID-19 pandemic has complicated efforts of the Government of Indonesia to validate the status of individuals in the ISIL core conflict zone with a claimed link to the country. Approximately 420 minors are assessed to remain in the Syrian Arab Republic or in neighbouring countries; some of these are potentially eligible for repatriation under current policy. The whereabouts of approximately 275 Indonesian nationals believed to be in the conflict zone are unknown; some may be deceased.

76. Maritime terrorism in the region, including kidnap for ransom, is reported to be declining. Member States attribute this to implementation of a trilateral cooperation agreement involving Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to improve security in the tri-border area of the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas.

77. Member States in the region have raised concerns regarding online recruitment and radicalization during the pandemic, which has seen larger numbers of people turning to the Internet for information and spending extended periods of time online.

### III. Impact assessment

#### A. Resolutions 2199 (2015) and 2462 (2019) on the financing of terrorism

78. The ISIL shift to an insurgency in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic makes it difficult to assess both the scale of revenues available to its leadership and the value of cash reserves, previously estimated to be approximately \$100 million. Funds under the control of ISIL cells in the two countries are sufficient to support insurgent activity, including payments to fighters. It is important to note that the costs of waging

an insurgency are significantly lower than those of seizing and holding territory. ISIL cells continue to raise funds through extortion, harassment and kidnapping for ransom. They also receive funds via informal financial networks from abroad.

79. Member States continue to express concern about funds flowing in and out of camps for internally displaced persons, in particular the Hawl camp, via unregistered money service businesses as a means of support for ISIL and the family members of fighters (see [S/2019/570](#), para. 73). These funds also support the smuggling of people out of camps. Some are remitted to recipients in neighbouring countries via the formal banking sector and are subsequently transferred to their ultimate beneficiaries in the camps via hawala networks or unregistered money service businesses. One Member State acknowledged to the Monitoring Team the likelihood that ISIL funds had entered its jurisdiction, but reported that it was difficult to establish clear ties to ISIL after thorough investigations. The websites of three hawaladars in Turkey with alleged ties to ISIL financing – Al Haram Exchange, Al Khalidi Exchange and Shakshuk – were closed by local authorities.

80. Several Member States have taken action in recent months against individuals accused of financing Al-Qaida and ISIL, or their affiliates. In Pakistan, authorities highlighted the arrests of individuals engaging in terrorism financing and the freezing of the assets of designated individuals and entities. In Indonesia, assets of individuals belonging to both JI and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (QDe.164) were seized following a number of arrests in the latter part of 2020. An American woman was arrested in November 2020 on charges, inter alia, of financially supporting HTS, after allegedly sending at least 18 payments to an associate or relative of an HTS fighter. In October, one Member State domestically designated a 30-year-old Australian gemstone dealer, Ahmed Luqman Talib (not listed), for using his business, which involves international trade in gemstones, for the support of Al-Qaida.

81. Member State reporting on the use of cryptocurrencies in the financing of ISIL and Al-Qaida continues to grow. On 30 September 2020, French police arrested 29 people seeking to finance HTS via the purchase of cryptocurrency coupons for relatively small amounts in tobacco shops across France. Beneficiaries in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic were able to recover the funds following receipt of a code sent through encrypted text messages. The United States announced in August 2020 the dismantling of a campaign that used cyberfinancing to channel funds in support of Al-Qaida. Al-Qaida affiliates in the Syrian Arab Republic operated a bitcoin network using Telegram channels and other social media platforms to solicit cryptocurrency donations.<sup>7</sup>

82. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the financing of terrorism. One Member State observed that closed borders were frustrating international travel of cash couriers. Another Member State brought charges against Murat Cakar (not listed), an alleged ISIL facilitator who had operated a website, FaceMaskCenter.com, accused of fraudulently selling personal protective gear, including N-95 masks. Another Member State reported that ISIL cells in the Syrian Arab Republic were seeking to profit from the sale of medicines and equipment needed to treat COVID-19 patients.

83. The Monitoring Team is aware of crowdsourced fundraising campaigns on social media seeking support, especially of ISIL fighters and relatives in internal displacement camps in the Syrian Arab Republic. Member States consistently highlight this issue as an enduring challenge in countering the financing of terrorism. One Member State reported that JI had taken that a step further, developing its own custom-built social media applications so as not to rely on providers who could close accounts.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.justice.gov/opa/pr/global-disruption-three-terror-finance-cyber-enabled-campaigns](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/global-disruption-three-terror-finance-cyber-enabled-campaigns).

## **B. Resolution 2347 (2017) on cultural heritage**

84. The Monitoring Team continues to receive information regarding illegal excavations, looting and smuggling of cultural property from conflict zones. One Member State noted that international criminal networks engaging in such trafficking often falsify the actual value of objects. In the case of authentic objects, traffickers assign artificially low values to the objects, which subsequently accumulate both value and authenticity as they change hands.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, inauthentic objects may enter the market with highly inflated values. Both practices complicate authorities' efforts to preserve and protect cultural heritage and to combat money-laundering. According to one Member State, ISIL is still believed, despite its territorial defeat, to play a part in these networks and to benefit from online antiquity sales.

85. The Monitoring Team has continued to engage with Member States and relevant international and regional organizations focusing on raising awareness of the need for Member States to establish specialized law enforcement and customs units dedicated to the protection of cultural heritage and investigations into cases of trafficking in cultural property.

## **C. Resolution 2396 (2017) on foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators**

86. The issue of displaced and/or detained persons, including foreign terrorist fighters, continues to grow more serious with neglect and is assessed by Member States to pose a growing threat. It will ultimately have an impact both on other conflict zones and on countries where the threat is currently low. Jail-breaks involving foreign terrorist fighters and their family members in detention facilities, as well as potential COVID-19 outbreaks leading to disorder and rioting, are further risk elements. This challenge is urgent in both humanitarian and security terms but addressing it has proved politically difficult and been practically complicated by the pandemic.

87. The “breaking the walls” campaign that was instrumental to the resurgence of Al-Qaida in Iraq would be difficult for ISIL to replicate because it would struggle to secure and absorb many escapees. Nevertheless, the 18 October statement by Abu Hamza al-Qurashi has renewed and underlined the injunction previously given by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi<sup>9</sup> to prioritize this tactic. One Member State expects ISIL to refocus during 2021 on building the capacity to plan escapes and assist fugitives. Another has expressed concern that local groups guarding the facilities may release some detainees.

88. The renewed ISIL focus on releasing detainees, coupled with COVID-19-related concerns about detention facilities as a public health hazard, has wider resonance for Member States. Abu Hamza al-Qurashi appears to have been influenced in his latest statement by the disruptive and propaganda impact of the jail-break in Afghanistan in August 2020.

89. Internal displacement camps and detention facilities in the ISIL core area, and especially in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, represent a latent threat. Instances of radicalization, training, fundraising and incitement of external operations have been reported in the Hawl camp. Some detainees see Hawl as the final remnant of the “caliphate”. The capacity of de facto local authorities to maintain security in the camps and facilities is reduced, and is minimal in Hawl, where there are still

<sup>8</sup> The process mimics that of money-laundering, involving stages known as placement, layering and integration.

<sup>9</sup> Listed as Ibrahim Awwad Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai (QDi.299).

approximately 65,000 residents. This is vastly more than its intended capacity, and the number of guards fell from 1,500 in mid-2019 to 400 in late 2020. There are 10,000 foreign women and children in the Hawl annex, and some minors are reportedly being indoctrinated and prepared to become future ISIL operatives.

90. In July 2020, an extension of the Roj facility for internally displaced persons was completed, increasing its capacity from 2,000 to 4,000. Some radicalized foreign women from the Hawl annex have been transferred to Roj. Most were reluctant to go because of the less permissive environment at Roj, where, although conditions are more comfortable, security is more intrusive and effective. The cost of being smuggled out of Roj to a safe destination has been reported at approximately \$14,000, compared with between \$2,500 and \$3,000 from Hawl. Member States continue to call for the repatriation of detainees so that they can be prosecuted, rehabilitated and reintegrated, as appropriate. Member States further assess that the status quo in the camps is likely to lead to further radicalization and violence.

91. One Member State assessed in November that there were approximately 11,000 male ISIL fighters detained in this part of the Syrian Arab Republic, of whom 1,700 were foreign terrorist fighters, 1,600 Iraqi nationals, 5,000 nationals of the Syrian Arab Republic and approximately 2,500 of unknown nationality. They are often held in improvised and converted facilities unsuitable from a humanitarian and security perspective. The pathway for judicial processing of the foreign terrorist fighters remains unclear. One hundred male minors are held in Houri camp. Riots occurred in 2020 in Hasakah, and Member States are concerned that more could break out, particularly in that facility.

92. The Monitoring Team continues to take every opportunity to raise Security Council resolution [2396 \(2017\)](#) with Member State interlocutors and to support United Nations policy on the issues of foreign terrorist fighters, detainees, displaced persons and dependants by emphasizing the threat implications of failing to address these issues proactively.

## **IV. Implementation of sanctions measures**

### **A. Travel ban**

93. Travel ban sanctions measures remain a vital tool in combating terrorism, preventing cross-border travel of listed individuals and foreign terrorist fighters and frustrating those who facilitate such travel globally. The most significant development over the reporting period occurred as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought about a sharp decline in international movement around the globe, including complete shutdowns of some Member States' borders to the entry and exit of foreigners, and even their own citizens in some cases. The Monitoring Team assesses that as a consequence of these developments, many listed individuals remain in their current locations, unable to move internationally through regular means of transportation and official border-crossing points.

94. Since its previous report ([S/2020/717](#)), the Team has not received any information from Member States regarding the attempted travel or interdiction of individuals designated on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list. Additionally, no Member State requests for exemptions from the travel ban have been received.

95. The effectiveness of travel ban measures relies on the quality of the United Nations Consolidated List. Member States continue to raise concerns regarding the lack of identifiers, the possible misspelling of names, the absence of biometric information and the reluctance of some States to share information regarding listed individuals.

96. Some States expressed frustration that International Criminal Police Organization-United Nations Security Council Special Notices, including confidential versions for official use only, continued to reflect omissions and gaps that prevented the positive and efficient identification of individuals at points of entry and exit. Consequently, some States have established special units (e.g. point of entry risk analysis units), whose main tasks are to identify and intercept listed individuals, foreign terrorist fighters and other inadmissible persons.

97. The Team continued to cooperate with Member States and other international and regional organizations, with a focus on assisting Member States to establish and maintain effective border control regimes and reinforce the effectiveness of usage of various terrorist stop and/or watch lists, including the Consolidated United Nations Security Council Sanctions List.

## **B. Asset freeze**

98. The Monitoring Team has continued to seek information from Member States regarding the implementation of asset-freezing measures mandated under resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#) and related resolutions. Such information is currently provided to the Team on an ad hoc basis. The report mandated under resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#) provided an opportunity to query Member States on their implementation of asset-freezing measures (see [S/2020/493](#), annex). This exercise, which showed that approximately one quarter of the 112 responding Member States had frozen assets or other economic resources, established that there may be gaps in the implementation of asset-freezing measures. In the absence of Member States reporting such actions at established intervals, it is difficult for the Team to assess whether asset-freezing measures are being implemented effectively.

**99. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee, in considering subsequent Security Council resolutions renewing the ISIL and Al-Qaida sanctions measures, may wish to include a request that Member States submit information to the Committee on their implementation of asset-freezing and exemption measures on an annual basis. This would allow the Team to better assess compliance, and to make recommendations for technical assistance that would be undertaken by United Nations counter-terrorism bodies where appropriate.**

## **C. Arms embargo**

100. Member States continued to report a sustained supply of arms and materiel to terrorist organizations. They also reported that, in addition to diverted or stolen arms, there has been an increase in the number of counterfeit, locally manufactured and custom-modified arms, which makes tracing more difficult.

101. In Idlib, it was reported that HTS had been able to craft locally 120 mm mortar shells, as well as 12.7 mm x 108 mm anti-materiel rifles. One Member State reported that Harim, Idlib, was evolving into a hub for the assembly and customization of weapons. An increase in imported thermal optics was also highlighted. HTS is reported to concentrate on training night-sniping units deployed against Syrian government forces on Idlib's frontlines. These units are equipped with a wide range of thermal optic scopes from different manufacturers, including Dedal-NV, Saim and Pulsar Apex, all intended originally for hunting and civilian use and bought off the shelf abroad and smuggled in small batches into Idlib.

102. In its previous report (see [S/2020/717](#), para. 95) the Monitoring Team had highlighted an increase in the use of imported commercial radio-controlled transmitters and passive infrared switches in the construction of improvised explosive devices in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The demand created by terrorists for these transmitters, switches, thermal scopes and other dual-use items intended originally for civilian use underscores the continued need for diligence in training national authorities on the detection and interdiction of dual-use items.

103. Dual-use items and locally manufactured materiel do not diminish the prevalence of illicitly imported arms in conflict theatres and the need to address sources of supply through enhanced information-sharing and national controls as per Security Council resolutions [2370 \(2017\)](#) and [2482 \(2019\)](#). In this regard, the Monitoring Team notes the agreement signed between the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the World Customs Organization in 2020 that provides the latter with real-time access to the INTERPOL Illicit Arms Records and Tracing Management System database, as well as access to the INTERPOL Firearms Reference Table, which contains information on firearms identifiers. The agreement could improve Member State interdictions of illicitly exported and illegally diverted small arms and light weapons intended for terrorist organizations and other malign actors.

## V. Monitoring Team activities and feedback

104. Between July and December 2020, the Monitoring Team conducted four meetings with national authorities in their capitals, as well as undertook 33 alternative arrangements using virtual meetings or in-person consultations with national authorities in New York. These arrangements do not fully obviate the need for in-person discussions in the capitals, in particular when sensitive matters are discussed. The Team looks forward to resuming official travel as soon as possible.

105. The Monitoring Team continued to promote the sanctions regime through participation in 32 virtual meetings, including those organized by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, INTERPOL, the Financial Action Task Force and similarly styled regional bodies, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the European Union, the Anti-Terrorism Centre of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Tech Against Terrorism, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Team continued its engagement with entities and associations in the financial, natural resources, antiquities, defence and information technology sectors. During the reporting period, the Team participated in virtual meetings organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, cooperating closely with them in the production of mandated reports of the Secretary-General. The Team remains a member of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, participating in virtual meetings of its working groups.

106. The Monitoring Team welcomes feedback on the present report at [1267mt@un.org](mailto:1267mt@un.org).

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**Annex****Litigation by or relating to individuals and entities on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list**

1. Legal challenges involving individuals and entities on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list, or whose names the Committee has removed therefrom, that are known to be pending or to have been recently concluded are described below.

**Pakistan**

2. The action brought by the Al Rashid Trust (QDe.005) regarding the application of the sanctions measures against it remains pending in the Supreme Court of Pakistan, on appeal by the Government of an adverse decision in 2003. A similar challenge brought by Al-Akhtar Trust International (QDe.121) remains pending before a provincial high court.<sup>1</sup>

3. In addition to the two cases mentioned above, the challenge by a trustee of the Pakistan Relief Foundation (listed as an alias of Al-Akhtar Trust International) of the freezing of his bank account remains pending.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided by Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> Information provided by Pakistan.