



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Statement by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism

Seventh “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”

23 August 2018

Mr. President,
Excellencies and Distinguished Representatives,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to start by expressing my condolences and solidarity with countries where terror attacks have recently taken place.

I would also like to thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the seventh “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.”

This report was prepared with inputs from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, and in close collaboration with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and other United Nations entities and international organizations.

As requested by Security Council resolutions 2253 and 2368, the report contains a strategic-level threat assessment as well as an update on the United Nations’ contributions in support of Member States efforts to counter this threat.

The report explains how ISIL continues to present a serious challenge, especially due to its transformation into a covert network, the activities of its regional affiliates, and the complex threat posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families.

It also elaborates on how Member States and the United Nations continue to strengthen, refine and promote the effective use of tools and measures to address the evolving transnational threat posed by ISIL.

Allow me to briefly touch on several key highlights of the report.

Firstly, the report notes that while the so-called ISIL “caliphate” has suffered significant losses, it remains a serious and significant concern. Since the end of 2017, ISIL has been defeated in Iraq and is in headlong retreat in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Overall current ISIL membership in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is estimated at more than 20,000, split fairly evenly between the two countries. Some ISIL fighters are fully engaged militarily, others concealed in sympathetic communities and urban areas. ISIL has also decentralized its leadership structure to mitigate further losses.

Therefore, an ISIL core is likely to survive in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic in the medium term, due to the ongoing conflict and complex stabilization challenges. In addition, significant ISIL-affiliated numbers also exist in Afghanistan, South-East Asia, West Africa and Libya, and to a lesser extent in Sinai, Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel.

Secondly, the challenge posed by returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) remains complex. The flow of FTFs towards ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic has essentially come to a halt.

However, the reverse flow, although slower than anticipated, remains a serious challenge. Moreover, the rising threat from ISIL’s global network, particularly from FTFs, will be diverse and hard to predict. For example, the report notes that one of the dangers posed by returning FTFs is expertise gained in the conflict zones such as skills to prepare improvised explosive devices and weaponize drones.

Thirdly, ISIL’s evolution from a proto-state structure into a covert network brings new challenges. For instance, ISIL’s finances in the Middle East are harder to detect and analyze now as administrative functions to manage finances have gone underground. After its structural changes, ISIL is still able to channel funds across borders often via intermediate countries, to their final destination.

Moreover, in examining ISIL’s activities in different parts of the world – from the Middle East, Africa, particularly North, West and East Africa, to Europe, Central, South and Southeast Asia, the report notes ISIL’s continuing presence and influence, particularly through its affiliates and intermediaries.

ISIL has also continued attempts to expand its presence in Afghanistan and the terrorist threat projecting from Afghanistan into Central Asia is perceived to be growing.

In Indonesia, Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, an ISIL-linked local network of cells launched a series of deadly suicide bombings in May, in a disturbing precedent of using families to launch attacks. In Europe, there are concerns over the high volume of commercially encrypted messages as well as radicalization in prisons.

(AS DELIVERED)

The report highlights that Member States and the international community must renew their efforts to effectively counter the rapidly evolving and transnational threat from ISIL. It also notes that the role of the Security Council has been instrumental in this regard, especially through the various resolutions it has adopted over the last few years on the different aspects of countering terrorism, as well as on the threat posed by ISIL. The ISIL and Al-Qaida Sanctions List also remains one of the key global instruments in this effort.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General's seventh Report also provides updates on how the UN system is strengthening the coordination, coherence and effectiveness of its counter-terrorism efforts in support of Member States.

It highlights the work being done by various UN entities, in particular the close partnership between my Office (UNOCT) and CTED, and in collaboration with other entities such as UNODC, UNESCO, OHCHR and UN Women.

Together, the UN system is striving to address critical aspects such as countering the financing of terrorism, organized crime, border management and law enforcement, international judicial cooperation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration, and countering terrorist narratives and engaging communities.

In particular, United Nations counter-terrorism bodies have continued to focus on the FTF phenomenon. The United Nations Foreign Terrorist Fighters Capacity Building Implementation Plan steered by UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and CTED has been updated and streamlined to reflect the priorities identified in Security Council resolution 2396. It now consists of 40 projects, to be implemented by 12 UN entities. Over 20 of the 40 projects focus specifically on returning and relocating FTFs.

To counter the threat posed by ISIL and terrorism more broadly, international cooperation, information sharing and capacity-building are critical. Moreover, the growing sophistication of methods used by terrorists, require countermeasures, particularly technological ones, that are similarly complex and advanced. All these topics were discussed by Member States at the High-Level Conference of Head of Counter-Terrorism Agencies held in last June on the initiative of Secretary-General Guterres.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General remains firmly committed to supporting Member States in the fight against terrorism, including ISIL and its affiliates. In particular, he welcomes the Security Council's continued attention to this matter as it is only through a sustained and concerted multilateral response that we can address the scourge of terrorism.

Mr. President,

(AS DELIVERED)

As discussed with the United Kingdom Mission in its capacity as President of the Security Council, I am also availing this opportunity to brief the Council on my visit to Afghanistan last week.

I travelled to Kabul on 14-15 August to participate in a conference organized by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism. The Government of Afghanistan played a leading role in establishing this annual International Day of Remembrance on 21 August, through a General Assembly resolution (72/165).

In my keynote speech at the conference, I emphasized the need for solidarity with terrorist victims in Afghanistan and around the world.

I reiterated the commitment of the United Nations to listen to the victims of terrorism, respect their rights and provide them with support and justice.

I also met with a large group of victims from across Afghanistan, who told me about the devastating impact of terrorism on their lives. They asked some simple questions, but difficult to answer. Why despite all preventive measures of international community terrorists are still able to collect money, arms and ammunitions to hire new supporters to continue their horrible acts. We must look into these and other critical questions and meet the expectations of the victims.

I am grateful that many of you were able to join the Secretary-General last Friday at the launch of an exhibition to commemorate the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism.

We must never forget the tens of thousands of people that have been injured, traumatized or lost their lives during terrorist attacks. 64 thousands were mentioned over the past 9 years.

Mr. President,

During the mission to Kabul, I also got an opportunity to hold high-level consultations with President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, Foreign Minister Rabbani, and other Cabinet members and senior officials of the Government of Afghanistan, responsible for countering terrorism.

They told me that counter-terrorism efforts should be considered in the context of Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation process taking a long-term and regional perspective. And they are very strongly in favor of the process.

To that end, they all as one proposed organizing a high-level conference in Kabul next year, with the support of the United Nations and regional and international partners, to develop a regional counter-terrorism strategy with a focus on Afghanistan. I shared this idea with P-5 and Central Asian Ambassadors as well as with Deputy Commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission during my meetings with them in Kabul. Of course, UNAMA and SRSG Yamamoto are involved in these discussions. They all expressed initial interest with regard to this idea.

(AS DELIVERED)

The Government of Afghanistan also discussed its counter-terrorism priorities, including addressing the evolving threat from foreign terrorist fighters, border management and aviation security, preventing violent extremism, and the links between terrorism and organized crime.

I will now consult further with UNAMA, DPA, CTED and other United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities to discuss how best to support Afghan counter-terrorism efforts.

United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism looks forward to continuing to work closely with the Security Council, the Government of Afghanistan and other key regional and international partners to ensure a safe and secure future for the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you, Mr. President.