

29. Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

During the period under review, the Council held one meeting under the item entitled “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts”, which took the form of a briefing.⁷⁷³ More information on the meeting, including on participants, speakers and outcomes, is given in table 1 below. Council members also held five open videoconferences in connection with the item and the Council adopted two resolutions, including one under Chapter VII of the Charter.⁷⁷⁴ More information on the videoconferences is given in table 2 below. In addition, the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution in connection with the item because of the negative vote of a permanent member.

Whether in the context of the meeting or the videoconferences, Council members continued to focus on several issues under the item, including the threat posed by returning and relocating fighters, the countering of terrorism financing and the introduction of a gender perspective in counter-terrorism efforts, as well as the linkages between terrorism and organized crime and the threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da’esh). In 2020, Council members also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of terrorism. Council members heard three briefings by the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism. In addition, Council members were briefed twice by the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, once by a civil society representative and once by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The Under-Secretary-General briefed Council members on 7 February and 6 and 24 August. Two of those briefings concerned the tenth and eleventh reports 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.⁷⁷⁵ On 7 February,⁷⁷⁶ the Under-Secretary-General reported that ISIL (Da’esh) had lost its last stronghold in the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2019 and had seen a

change in leadership after the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2019, although the Secretary-General’s report showed that the group remained at the centre of the transnational terrorism threat. He noted that ISIL (Da’esh) had continued to seek resurgence and global relevance online and offline and its regional affiliates had continued to pursue a strategy of entrenchment in conflict zones by exploiting local grievances. The Under-Secretary-General further stated that owing to their high number, foreign terrorist fighters who had travelled to Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic were expected to continue to pose a threat, with estimates of those alive ranging from 20,000 to almost 27,000. He noted that the situation of ISIL (Da’esh) fighters and associated family members in detention and displacement facilities in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic had worsened since his last presentation to the Council, adding that their fate remained a major challenge for the international community. In closing, he urged the Council and Member States to maintain and reaffirm their unity in the face of the persisting threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida and their affiliates, as well as terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

At the same meeting, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate highlighted that thousands of women and children associated with ISIL (Da’esh) remained in makeshift camps in appalling conditions. She noted that leaving them to fight for survival, and the threat of further radicalization, would not only be contrary to principles of humanity but also detrimental to counter-terrorism efforts. Women associated with ISIL (Da’esh) had often simultaneously had roles as victims and perpetrators and required gender-responsive, tailored prosecution and rehabilitation strategies that were consistent with international human rights standards, while children were primarily victims and had to be dealt with as such. The Executive Director called upon Member States to develop and implement comprehensive repatriation strategies in line with international law. Furthermore, she stated that bringing ISIL (Da’esh) perpetrators to justice continued to be of critical importance and stressed that its institutionalization of sexual violence and slavery required special attention. The international community had an opportunity to prosecute the perpetrators, rehabilitate the victims and facilitate reconstruction and community development in places destroyed by ISIL (Da’esh) violence. Ms. Freij, a civil society representative from the north-east of the Syrian

⁷⁷³ For more information on the format of meetings, see part II, sect. II.

⁷⁷⁴ Resolutions [2557 \(2020\)](#) and [2560 \(2020\)](#). For more information on the procedures and working methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.

⁷⁷⁵ [S/2020/95](#) and [S/2020/774](#).

⁷⁷⁶ See [S/PV.8716](#).

Arab Republic, recounted her experience as a survivor of ISIL (Da'esh) rule and her work as an activist for women's rights in civil society institutions. She requested the Council to assist civilians in preventing another humanitarian disaster in Idlib, northern Syrian Arab Republic and the rest of the country and to make every effort to launch a process of transitional justice in the Syrian Arab Republic and end impunity so that all those responsible for perpetrating serious human rights violations would be held accountable. Following the briefings, speakers at the meeting emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism efforts and for the perpetrators of terrorist acts to be held accountable. Council members also reaffirmed the need for international cooperation in countering terrorism, with several speakers stressing the importance of a coordinating role by the United Nations system.⁷⁷⁷

On 6 August, at the initiative of Indonesia, which held the Presidency for the month,⁷⁷⁸ Council members held a high-level open videoconference⁷⁷⁹ in connection with the item on the theme "Addressing the issue of linkages between terrorism and organized crime". The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia presided over the videoconference, during which Council members heard briefings by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and by the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism. The Executive Director of UNODC presented a report of the Secretary-General,⁷⁸⁰ prepared jointly by UNODC and the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which provided an overview of measures taken by Member States and United Nations entities to address linkages between terrorism and organized crime.⁷⁸¹ Many States had reported that terrorists benefited from organized crime, while some States had observed that criminal organizations were increasingly disinterested in cooperating with terrorist groups, potentially to avoid additional scrutiny from national authorities. Many Governments had taken steps to counter those threats, through adopting legislative, policy and operational responses identified by the Council in resolution 2482 (2019). The COVID-19 pandemic posed several new challenges to national authorities as organized criminal groups and terrorists could seek to exploit new vulnerabilities, and transit patterns were shifting in view of travel restrictions and lockdown measures.

At the same videoconference, the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism stated that the report of the Secretary-General set out how the ability of terrorists to draw on organized crime, whether domestic or transnational, online or offline, could exacerbate the threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security. He reported on the first Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week held at the United Nations on the strategic and practical challenges of countering terrorism in a global pandemic environment, which had drawn over 1,000 participants from Member States, civil society and private sector organizations, international and regional organizations and United Nations entities. He warned that the COVID-19 pandemic had the potential to act as a catalyst in the spread of terrorism and violent extremism by exacerbating inequalities, undermining social cohesion and fuelling local conflicts. Council members discussed the evolving linkages between organized crime and terrorism and the threat that they could pose to international peace and security.⁷⁸² Several Council members also discussed how to address both phenomena, with some noting the changed context and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷⁸³

At an open videoconference on 24 August,⁷⁸⁴ Council members heard a briefing from the Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism. He noted that States needed to stay attuned to how the ISIL (Da'esh) threat had evolved during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and that in conflict zones the terrorist threat had increased as evidenced by the regrouping of ISIL (Da'esh) and its increasing activity in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and among some of its regional affiliates. In non-conflict zones, the threat appeared to have decreased in the short term because of measures related to COVID-19, such as lockdowns and restrictions on movement. Nevertheless, there was a continued trend of attacks by individuals inspired online and acting alone or in small groups. The pandemic's socioeconomic fallout could exacerbate conditions conducive to terrorism and increase the medium to long-term threat, both within and outside conflict zones. More than 10,000 ISIL (Da'esh) fighters were estimated to remain active in

⁷⁷⁷ South Africa, China and Viet Nam.

⁷⁷⁸ The Council had before it a concept note annexed to a letter dated 30 July 2020 (S/2020/764).

⁷⁷⁹ See S/2020/791.

⁷⁸⁰ See S/2020/754.

⁷⁸¹ See S/2020/791.

⁷⁸² Indonesia, Tunisia, Viet Nam, Belgium, China, Estonia, France, Niger and South Africa. In addition to Council members, other Member States submitted statements in connection with the videoconference. For more information on the discussion and the statements submitted, see part VII, sect. I.

⁷⁸³ See S/2020/791 (Indonesia, Viet Nam, Belgium, Dominican Republic, Niger and South Africa).

⁷⁸⁴ See S/2020/836.

Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and there had been a significant increase in ISIL (Da'esh) attacks in both countries in 2020 as compared with 2019. Noting that the global threat from ISIL (Da'esh) was likely to increase if the international community failed to meet the challenge of repatriation, he reiterated the Secretary-General's call on Member States to meet their obligations under international law and repatriate their nationals.

At the same videoconference, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate stressed that the dire situation faced by thousands of women and children associated with ISIL (Da'esh) in the detention camps of north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic remained a major challenge for the international community. The COVID-19 pandemic risked exacerbating an already untenable humanitarian, human rights and security situation. Pandemic-related restrictions, including social isolation measures, curtailed religious and cultural activities and the lack of employment opportunities could exacerbate existing grievances. She noted that ISIL (Da'esh) and its affiliates had taken the opportunity of the increased presence of people on the Internet to spread their propaganda. Member States had to ensure that policies adopted to curtail the spread of terrorist propaganda were human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive. Many Council members agreed that the issue of foreign terrorist fighters remained a challenge.⁷⁸⁵ Noting that the issues of relocation and returning foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members presented significant challenges for Member States, the representative of Indonesia stressed the importance of an effective comprehensive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategy, and called upon Council members to set their differences aside. In that regard, the United States expressed disappointment that Indonesia's efforts to draft a meaningful resolution on prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists had been stymied by the refusal of Council members to include repatriation.

The issues outlined above were also addressed by the Council in the draft resolutions proposed and adopted during the period under review. On 31 August, Indonesia submitted a draft resolution, which was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member, namely, the United States. Among other aspects contained in the draft resolution, the Council would have called upon Member States to assess and

investigate suspected individuals whom they had reasonable grounds to believe were terrorists, including suspected foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members. It would have also called upon all Member States to develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration measures for persons who were engaged in terrorism-related activity, including foreign terrorist fighters, and to develop and implement risk assessment tools to identify individuals who demonstrated signs of radicalization to terrorism. In addition, the Council would have encouraged all Member States to cooperate in efforts to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, including by bringing them to justice and preventing radicalization to terrorism and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and accompanying family members, particularly accompanying children, including by facilitating the return of the children to their countries of origin, as appropriate and on a case-by-case basis.⁷⁸⁶ In the explanation of its vote submitted to the Council, the Permanent Mission of the United States indicated that while the draft resolution was meant to address the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members, it failed to "even include reference to the crucial first step – repatriation to countries of origin or nationality". The Permanent Mission further submitted that failing to address head-on the importance of repatriation would inevitably perpetuate the problem of terrorism.⁷⁸⁷

On 18 December, the Council unanimously adopted resolution [2557 \(2020\)](#) under Chapter VII of the Charter, extending for a period of 12 months, until December 2021, the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in support of the Committee established pursuant to resolution [1988 \(2011\)](#).⁷⁸⁸ In the resolution, the Council welcomed efforts by Afghanistan and the Taliban in facilitating intra-Afghan negotiations and encouraged the parties to make rapid progress on a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire and a political settlement that would end the conflict in Afghanistan and ensure that Afghanistan would never again be a safe haven for international terrorism.⁷⁸⁹

On 29 December, the Council unanimously adopted resolution [2560 \(2020\)](#) in which it stressed the important role of the Committee pursuant to

⁷⁸⁵ Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Tunisia, United States and Viet Nam.

⁷⁸⁶ See [S/2020/852](#), paras. 3, 8, 12 and 18.

⁷⁸⁷ See [S/2020/870](#).

⁷⁸⁸ Resolution [2557 \(2020\)](#), para. 2.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, eighth preambular paragraph. On the situation in Afghanistan, see part I, sect. 16.

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 identifying possible cases of non-compliance with the measures pursuant to resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#).⁷⁹⁰ The Council also encouraged Member States to more actively submit to the Committee listing requests of individuals, groups, undertakings and entities that met the listing criteria in paragraph 2 of resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#) and to submit to the Committee “additional identifying and other information set out in paragraph 85 of resolution [2368](#)

(2017)” in order to keep the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list reliable and up-to-date.⁷⁹¹ Moreover, the Council requested the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team⁷⁹² to study the basic and extraordinary exemptions procedures set out in paragraphs 81 (a) and (b) of resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), and to provide recommendations to the Committee to determine whether or not updating those exemptions was required.⁷⁹³

⁷⁹⁰ Resolution [2560 \(2020\)](#), fifth preambular paragraph.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, para. 1.

⁷⁹² For more information on the mandate of the Monitoring Team, see part IX, sect. I.B.

⁷⁹³ Resolution [2560 \(2020\)](#), para. 2.

Table 1

Meeting: threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

<i>Meeting record and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
S/PV.8716 7 February 2020	Tenth 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 (S/2020/95)			Under-Secretary-General of the Office of Counter-Terrorism, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, civil society representative	All Council members, all invitees ^a	

^a Ms. Freij participated in the meeting by videoconference from Istanbul.

Table 2

Videoconferences: threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

<i>Videoconference date</i>	<i>Videoconference record</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Decision, vote (for-against-abstaining) and record of written procedure</i>
6 August 2020	S/2020/791	Letter dated 11 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council	
24 August 2020	S/2020/836	Letter dated 26 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council	

<i>Videoconference date</i>	<i>Videoconference record</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Decision, vote (for-against-abstaining) and record of written procedure</i>
31 August 2020	S/2020/870	Letter dated 31 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council	Draft resolution S/2020/852 (not adopted) 14-1-0 ^a S/2020/865
18 December 2020	S/2020/1266	Letter dated 19 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council	Resolution 2557 (2020) 15-0-0 (adopted under Chapter VII) S/2020/1254
29 December 2020	S/2020/1311	Letter dated 29 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council	Resolution 2560 (2020) 15-0-0 S/2020/1305

^a *For*: Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Viet Nam; *against*: United States; *abstaining*: none.

30. Briefings

As with previous supplements, briefings by various speakers not explicitly connected to a specific item under the Council's agenda are featured in the present section. In 2020, the Council held one such meeting in the form of a briefing. More information on the meeting, including on participants and speakers, is provided in table 1 below. In addition, Council members held three open videoconferences to hear briefings that were not explicitly connected to any specific item on the agenda of the Council. More information on the videoconferences is provided in tables 2 and 3 below.

Consistent with prior practice, the Council held one meeting under the item "Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe". At the meeting, held on 6 February, ⁷⁹⁴ the Council heard a briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on contemporary security challenges. He explained that Albania's strategic goal at the helm of OSCE would be to defend multilateralism at a time when it was felt to be under attack. He elaborated on the three main priorities of OSCE under the chairmanship of Albania. With regard to the first priority, namely, making a difference on the ground, Albania would be promoting the work of OSCE where it was closest to the people and, in that connection, conflict resolution efforts would be at the top of the agenda. He specifically addressed the situation

in Ukraine, ⁷⁹⁵ the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the situation in Georgia and the Transnistrian settlement process in the Republic of Moldova. ⁷⁹⁶ Women continued to be disproportionately affected by conflicts in the OSCE area and were being unjustly excluded from peace efforts. Inspired by the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), Albania would inject a new momentum into promoting the role of women in peace processes. Albania's second priority was to implement its commitments. In that regard, he mentioned immediate and urgent priorities such as promoting freedom of expression and freedom of the media, safeguarding the rights of national minorities and combating violence against women. The third priority of Albania's chairmanship was dialogue. In that connection, the Chairperson-in-Office announced that he would make it his personal commitment to advance dialogue among OSCE States and among and within OSCE States' societies, also noting that risk reduction, incident prevention and environmental protection would feature in debates among OSCE States, international organizations and civil society. He signalled, however, that a major obstacle to dialogue was the rise of intolerance, hate crimes and hate speech and expressed the intention to redouble efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination.

Following the briefing, members of the Council noted the importance of cooperation with regional

⁷⁹⁴ See [S/PV.8714](#).

⁷⁹⁵ For more information on discussions relating to Ukraine, see part I, sect. 19.

⁷⁹⁶ See [S/PV.8714](#).