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**Letter dated 19 May 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to transmit herewith the report on foreign terrorist fighters prepared by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team established pursuant to resolution 1526 (2004), which was submitted to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities in accordance with paragraph 23 of resolution 2178 (2014).

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

*(Signed)* Gerard **van Bohemen**  
Chair

Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities



**Letter dated 24 March 2015 from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities**

I enclose the report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, prepared pursuant to paragraph 23 of Security Council resolution 2178 (2014), on the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters.

The Team has received a great deal of information from Member States in response to visits and our written request for submissions. We hope to draw on this in further reports and in oral briefings for the Committee.

The Monitoring Team notes that the document of reference is the English original. For ease of reference, the 11 recommendations made by the Team appear in bold.

*(Signed)* Alexander **Evans**  
Coordinator  
Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team  
established pursuant to resolution 1526 (2004)

## **Analysis and recommendations with regard to the global threat from foreign terrorist fighters**

### *Summary*

More than half the countries in the world are currently generating foreign terrorist fighters. Among the various Al-Qaida (QDe.004) associates around the world, including the splinter group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq under QDe.115), there are more than 25,000 foreign terrorist fighters involved, travelling from more than 100 Member States. The rate of flow is higher than ever and mainly focused on movement into the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, with a growing problem also evident in Libya.

Such individuals and their networks pose an immediate and long-term threat. Those that have returned or will return to their States of origin or to third countries may pose a continuing threat to national and international security. Many may reintegrate, abandoning violence. Some have already gone on to organize further terrorist attacks and others will do so in the future.

There is no single, simple solution to this multifaceted problem. Disrupting the flow of foreign terrorist fighters and the threat that they pose presents an unprecedented challenge and will involve significant expense for Member States. Preventing radicalization in the first place and successfully screening, monitoring or rehabilitating returnees are at the heart of an effective global response. So too is the immediate need to improve analytical understanding of the problem and operational information and intelligence sharing within national Governments and between Member States, in particular by taking further steps to share watch list information on individuals of interest. Privacy, data protection and sensitivity of information concerns complicate this vital priority.

The full implementation of preventive measures under Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) would be a major step forward. Intensified efforts with regard to prevention and returnee policies, including further work in relation to the Internet and social media, are crucial. So too is accelerating the establishment of operational information links between Member States, including in relation to persons of interest and passenger data.

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## **I. Evidence base and context**

### **A. Evidence base**

1. The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team has been examining foreign terrorist fighters for a number of years as part of its mandate under the Al-Qaida sanctions regime. The threat from such fighters was flagged as a strategic issue in the Team's sixteenth report (S/2014/770), issued in October 2014, and its report on ISIL and the Al-Nusra Front for the People of the Levant (QDe.137) (S/2014/815), issued in November 2014. For the present report, which is, inevitably, provisional, the Team drew on a robust and detailed evidence base. This included six months of intensive engagement with Member States, including 21 country visits and bilateral meetings with 27 intelligence and security services since 2013. Its engagement included visits to most affected Member States, key transit States and States generating large and small populations of foreign terrorist fighters. The Team wrote to all 193 States Members of the United Nations and received responses from 42. In addition, it discussed foreign terrorist fighters with international and regional organizations, including the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union. The analysis here draws primarily on Member State information.

2. The challenge posed by foreign terrorist fighters is complex and multifaceted. There are no bullet-point solutions or quick fixes. Data remain variable in quality for good reasons. First, not all foreign terrorist fighters are known to national authorities. Second, estimates are by nature provisional. In numerous cases, all that is known is that someone appears to have departed from his or her country of residence, potentially to join a terrorist group associated with Al-Qaida. Confirming information is difficult, principally when foreign terrorist fighters enter territory lacking effective government control (as with parts of Iraq, Libya, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic) where the intelligence and law-enforcement picture is incomplete. Member States may also have differing methodologies for counting those who have been killed or have left a conflict zone.

3. There are equal challenges in assessing the drivers of radicalization and recruitment, where evidence is often inconclusive and can generate differing conclusions by case and by country. Many Governments would like to have a risk model or typology of a foreign terrorist fighter to guide screening, preventive action and disruption, but such typologies remain elusive. A similar challenge applies when assessing the risks posed by returnees. No current model can correctly predict whether a returnee is likely to pose a risk.

### **B. Context**

4. Individuals have been travelling to other States to fight for groups unaffiliated to their own country for centuries, whether as mercenaries, volunteers or terrorists. Civil wars and international armed conflicts have attracted individuals, whether motivated by ideology, greed or thirst for adventure.

5. In paragraph 6 (a) of its resolution 2178 (2014), the Security Council defines foreign terrorist fighters as:

Nationals who travel or attempt to travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality, and other individuals who travel or attempt to travel from their territories to a State other than their States of residence or nationality, for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts, or the providing or receiving of terrorist training.

6. The first generation of terrorists associated with Al-Qaida came from various countries and included foreign terrorist fighters. They were not just the wave of individuals drawn to Afghanistan during the 1980s, but veterans who travelled to Algeria, Somalia, Tajikistan and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s and those who later went to Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen during the 2000s.

7. Afghanistan is often thought of as the original zone of foreign terrorist fighters. There, Al-Qaida constructed an ideological and organizational framework for foreign terrorist fighters in 1998 through the declaration of a “World Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders”. Before 2001, Al-Qaida maintained a network of terrorist training camps in Afghanistan that housed a significant number of foreign terrorist fighters, possibly several thousand. Owing to a symbiotic relationship with the Taliban movement, most of those Al-Qaida-trained fighters were allocated to the military fighting forces of the Taliban<sup>1</sup> and only a small group were incorporated into the core terror structure of Al-Qaida. The ousting of the Taliban regime in late 2001 and the destruction of the Al-Qaida camp network in Afghanistan resulted in the first wave of returnees associated with Al-Qaida.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, those so-called “Afghanistan veterans” constituted the nucleus for future entities associated with Al-Qaida. One Member State explained to the Team that they were seen as “heroes” within the radical community, very differently to the way in which the current returnees from ISIL are predominantly viewed. Given that this particular conflict is continuing, returnees do not enjoy the same reputation among their peers.

8. Even in the past, the problem was not exclusive to a single geographic region. There are myriad examples of how such “veteran” foreign terrorist fighters were involved in later terrorist attacks during the 1990s. For example, Khaled Khelkal<sup>3</sup> (not listed), a French-Algerian national linked to the Armed Islamic Group (QDe.006), was involved in multiple terrorist attacks in France in 1995. A year earlier, three French residents participated in an attack on the Atlas Asni Hotel in Marrakech, Morocco.<sup>4</sup> One of the perpetrators of the attacks of 11 September 2001, Khalid al-Mihdhar (not listed), had previously travelled to fight in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and the Russian Federation. Kyrgyzstan was affected by foreign terrorist fighters affiliated to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (QDe.010) in August 1999.

9. Since the 1990s, India has faced multiple terrorist attacks linked to individuals who had trained or fought with Al-Qaida associates in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A

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<sup>1</sup> They were placed under the command of Juma Namangani, then the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (QDe.010).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Thomas Hegghammer, “The rise of Muslim foreign fighters: Islam and the globalization of jihad”, *International Security*, vol. 35, No. 3 (Winter 2010/11).

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Loup Reverier and others, “Kelkal: les réseaux apparaissent”, *Le Point*, 7 October 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Millet, “Attentat de Marrakech: un procès sur fond de banlieue française”, *Libération*, 10 January 1995.

number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan were conducted by veterans of terrorist networks in Afghanistan. Foreign terrorist fighter veterans were at the heart of the threat posed to South-East Asia by extremists linked to Al-Qaida in the early 2000s. Zulkarnaen (QDi.187), a member of Jemaah Islamiyah (QDe.092) and one of the first South-East Asian militants to travel to Afghanistan for training, led a training camp in the region established for fighters from South-East Asia.<sup>5</sup> Returnees helped to plan major terrorist attacks such as the bombing in Bali in 2002 that killed more than 200 people from more than 20 countries. Al-Shabaab (SOe.001) has attracted foreign terrorist fighters from Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Kenya suffered an attack linked to foreign terrorist fighters at the Westgate shopping mall in 2013. Even in the contemporary campaign of ISIL and the Al-Nusrah Front, veterans play a disproportionate role, as evidenced by the numerous senior commanders who are ethnic Chechens from the Russian Federation and Central Asian fighters.<sup>6</sup>

10. What has changed over the past three years is the scale of the problem. The overall numbers have risen sharply, from a few thousand foreign terrorist fighters a decade ago to more than 25,000 today. The number of countries of origin has also significantly increased. During the 1990s, fighters came from a small group of countries. Today, however, they come from more than 100 Member States, including countries that have never experienced problems with groups associated with Al-Qaida.

11. The problem has become an urgent global security matter. Given the globalization of travel, the chance of a national of any country becoming a victim of an attack relating to foreign terrorist fighters is growing, especially with attacks targeting hotels and public spaces and venues. It is, however, important to maintain a sense of perspective. Generating public panic is a long-standing terrorist goal, and Al-Qaida and its associates have often used demonstrative, extreme violence in order to provoke overreactions by Member States that they can then seek to exploit. National and international responses need to be measured, effective and proportionate.

12. The long-standing and complex problem posed by foreign terrorist fighters requires long-term, sustained and coordinated responses. Member States have led the way, given that counter-terrorism is the domain of national security. Increasingly, however, international cooperation, whether bilateral or multilateral, is pivotal to effective responses. Member States and the international community are not facing a fundamentally new threat, but responding to a greater level of threat from foreign terrorist fighters. Some Member States have worked for decades on how to prevent radicalization, identify potential fighters before they travel, collect and analyse appropriate data, design and legislate for an appropriate counter-terrorism strategy, screen returnees and deradicalize former terrorists. Nevertheless, even countries with extensive experience, existing policy frameworks and resources have found themselves challenged by the current scale and depth of the problem.

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<sup>5</sup> Narrative summary of the reasons for listing Zulkarnaen.

<sup>6</sup> "Militants from Central Asia forming new ethnic groups in Syria: political expert", Tengri News, 17 September 2014.

## II. Threat assessment

### A. Scale of the current threat

13. The Team believes, on the basis of credible information received from Member States, that there are today more than 25,000 foreign terrorist fighters from more than 100 Member States involved with groups associated with Al-Qaida. Some remain on the front lines, working directly with terrorist groups. Others have been killed. Some may have returned home or moved to third countries. Some may have retired from terrorism; others may be — or be en route to being — rehabilitated, whether by government action or through their own disillusionment. Arriving at an accurate global number is therefore impossible, but it is possible to point to rough estimates.

14. The Team arrived at its global estimate by beginning with those believed to have travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq alone. Two Member States with global assessment capabilities have reported more than 22,000 and more than 20,000 foreign terrorist fighters in that conflict zone alone. The variation is understandable, given that some Member States are reluctant to acknowledge their foreign terrorist fighters publicly; the estimates of others vary according to the government agency concerned. A number of Member States have underlined their low-to-medium confidence in overall estimates. The estimates are constantly being adjusted. There may be inconsistent methodologies for counting nationals, residents or dual nationals. One Member State was unable to confirm any fighters, although open sources strongly suggest that there is at least one such fighter from that country. Several Member States gave ranges instead of a definitive figure in their confidential assessments. Nevertheless, the threat comes from some countries having generated large numbers of foreign terrorist fighters. Open-source analysis by the Team shows that 6 Member States have generated more than 1,000 foreign terrorist fighters each, 42 have generated more than 100 such fighters each and a further set of countries have generated between 1 and 100 known cases each.

15. Afghan security forces estimated in March 2015 that some 6,500 foreign terrorist fighters were active in Afghanistan. Most are associated with the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (QDe.132), 300 with the Tehrik-e Nefaz-e Shariat-e Muhammadi (not listed), 200 with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, 160 with Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (QDe.118) and 150 with the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (QDe.088).<sup>7</sup> Incorporating foreign terrorist fighters operating in other countries such as Afghanistan (6,500), hundreds in Yemen, Libya and Pakistan and around 100 in Somalia, the total number of foreign terrorist fighters associated with Al-Qaida (including ISIL) likely exceeds 25,000, originating from more than 100 Member States.

16. The trend line remains worrying. Open-source analysis by the Team indicates an increase of 71 per cent in reported foreign terrorist fighters worldwide between the middle of 2014 and March 2015, in part owing to more comprehensive internal reporting by Member States and greater open-source data. There has also been a sharp increase (from 70 to 733 per cent) in fighters from a number of European and Asian Member States.

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<sup>7</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

## B. Human dimension

17. Counting foreign terrorist fighters is one thing, but assessing their impact on human lives is another. In the short term, such fighters increase not only the threat posed to people living in areas in which terrorist groups operate, but also the human resources available to those groups, including fighters, suicide bombers, guards, propagandists, technologists and bomb-makers. Those who come with previous military experience, whether gained from national military service<sup>8</sup> or through prior terrorism, are highly valuable. Foreign terrorist fighters have also raped and abused women, helping to terrorize civilians. They often have limited connections to local populations, so may be more brutal, as has repeatedly been seen in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Yemen. Many fighters are also fuelling aggressive sectarianism. It is striking that fighters are frequently treated as “cannon fodder” by terrorist groups, used expendably in suicide bombings or on the front lines.

18. In the medium to long term (and sometimes already), foreign terrorist fighters pose a threat to their countries of origin or to third countries, including through terrorist attacks and ancillary activities, such as radicalizing others, recruiting, generating social media content, raising funds and providing training, logistical support or courier services. Historic experiences with foreign terrorist fighters from the 1980s until recently provide two key lessons.

19. First, most former foreign terrorist fighters did not go on to be directly involved in later terrorist activities. In the case of those who were not killed and did return home, or to a third country, most did not remain active as terrorists or terrorist facilitators. However, some did. Overall, less than 15 per cent of former foreign terrorist fighters were later involved in terrorist activities.<sup>9</sup> The most obvious recent example was the attack of May 2014 on a Jewish museum in Belgium by Mehdi Nemmouche (not listed), who had reportedly been in the Syrian Arab Republic with ISIL.

20. Second, the fact that a person is a former foreign terrorist fighter is nonetheless a major risk factor. Some veterans may later be involved in terrorism. They may return with a range of dangerous skills, beliefs and relationships. They may have learned to use weapons, make bombs and prepare credible attack plans. They may have been further radicalized, or indeed traumatized, by their experiences. Many develop intense social associations, generating friendship networks and perceived mutual loyalties that could be the basis of autonomous, transnational terrorist cells in the future.

21. The strategic threat is even greater in 2015 and the years ahead. For the thousands of foreign terrorist fighters who travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, primarily to associate with ISIL but also those who joined the Al-Nusrah Front, they live and work in a veritable “international finishing school” for extremists, as was the case in Afghanistan during the 1990s. In that country, a considerable degree of ethnic separation existed among foreign terrorist fighters. The Arabs fought

<sup>8</sup> Information provided by Member States.

<sup>9</sup> The number draws on briefings from Member States and from Thomas Hegghammer, “Should I stay or should I go? Explaining variation in Western jihadists’ choice between domestic and foreign fighting”, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 107, No. 1 (February 2013). Open-source and academic numbers are slightly different.

together, but Uzbek, European and Chinese militants tended to operate in ethnic silos, mutual ties to Al-Qaida notwithstanding.

22. Those who eat together and bond together can bomb together. The globalization of Al-Qaida and its associates, particularly visible with ISIL, but also evident with Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (QDe.129), creates a deepening array of transnational social networks. In essence, one medium-term threat from the new generation of foreign terrorist fighters is that they will bring “plug-and-play” social networks for future attack planning, linking diverse fighters from different communities worldwide. The newly emerging diaspora of fighters also presents a broad talent pool from which Al-Qaida core and ISIL leaders can pick, potentially increasing the risk of more capable terrorists engaging in future attack planning. Meanwhile, the call by ISIL for “lone wolf” operations, from attacks on tourists to brutal murders, raises the risk of ideologically committed fighters being at the vanguard of a new wave of loosely associated attacks.

### **C. Most affected regions**

23. The global flow of foreign terrorist fighters to Al-Qaida and associated entities is unevenly distributed and appears to be influenced by factors such as the operational emphasis of the respective group, the ease of access to the operational area and the effectiveness of the group’s propaganda and recruitment machinery.<sup>10</sup>

24. The emphasis of Al-Qaida core lies on attacks on the far enemy through “elite” terror cells. Consequently, core Al-Qaida targets for recruitment a small number of well-selected individuals who are fully dedicated to an international terrorist agenda. Al-Qaida associates with a regional emphasis, such as Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, offer additional possibilities for foreign terrorist fighters. In addition to terror specialists, such groups accept the recruitment of “general” fighters to their ranks. ISIL currently attracts most global foreign terrorist fighters, a situation that can partially be explained by the potent combination of Al-Qaida ideology, a regional agenda and the project of a so-called “caliphate”.

25. Ease of access, such as through visa-free zones, and the appeal of an operational area also affect the number of foreign terrorist fighters that a group can recruit. The border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Sahel are regions that are remote, hard to access and less hospitable. Gaining access to regionally active groups, such as Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen, is less difficult. ISIL operations cover large urban areas and border several Member States that are well connected to the global travel infrastructure.

26. The greatest contemporary concentrations of foreign terrorist fighters are in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan, with smaller numbers present in Yemen, Libya, Pakistan, the Sahel countries, Somalia and the Philippines. The direct threat that they pose is most immediate in those countries. The most affected countries, however, include States of origin and potential return (or destination) of fighters. On that basis, the some 100 countries from which fighters have originated are all affected, some more than others. In some countries, the sheer numbers are high (as with, for example, Tunisia, Morocco, France and the Russian Federation).

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<sup>10</sup> The Monitoring Team has already analysed the basic difference between the effectiveness of the propaganda of core Al-Qaida and that of ISIL. See [S/2014/815](#), paras. 29-30.

In others, the scale is new (as with Maldives, Finland and Trinidad and Tobago). In yet others, the entire problem is relatively new (as with selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa). A focus on countries of origin and destination obscures the fact that countries of transit are also at high risk and face a major burden. Most foreign terrorist fighters heading to join ISIL have travelled through Turkey, which has had the unenviable burden of endeavouring to simultaneously coordinate with dozens of countries while dealing with its own foreign terrorist fighters and managing a 911 km border with the Syrian Arab Republic and a 311 km border with Iraq amid a major refugee influx.<sup>11</sup>

#### **D. Radicalization trends**

27. Radicalization appears to be occurring more rapidly, although it continues to rely largely on direct social contact. Increasingly, however, the Internet and social media strengthen and shorten the process. In several cases, radicalization has occurred within a few weeks to a few months. For most foreign terrorist fighters, it appears to take place before they arrive in a conflict zone, although in very few cases individuals travelling for humanitarian purposes have later been radicalized once in the Syrian Arab Republic. The sophistication and production style of ISIL propaganda are deliberately targeted at young people from many societies and present a heady combination of idealism, excitement and gore. ISIL messaging centres on a new society for committed ideologues and their families, training and combat (and potential celebrity) for the bored and disaffected. The use of blockbuster and horror-inducing videos of murders and attacks is significant.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, foreign terrorist fighters in the field influence peers and potential sympathizers remotely through social media postings.

#### **E. Demographic trends**

28. It is necessary to appreciate the sociology of foreign terrorist fighters going to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Most are young males between 15 and 35 years of age, although there are also older fighters (including veterans of other terrorist campaigns). Member States are endeavouring to develop typologies, but there is no clear profile given the diversity of such fighters. Some are motivated by extremist ideology, as with networks of fighters associated with some extremist preachers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Belgium. Some appear more driven by alienation and boredom than by ideology. In some countries, including France and Austria, there appears to be a stronger link to prior petty crime,<sup>13</sup> but that does not appear to be the case in Morocco or Saudi Arabia. There are a small number of converts, marginal in most Member States but significant in a few. There are a growing number of women and girls in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic after calls for female volunteers.<sup>14</sup> A number have travelled to the region, either to accompany their family or volunteer and find fighter husbands.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>12</sup> For example, *The Flames of War*, released by Al-Hayat Media Center in September 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

Compared with previous generations of foreign terrorist fighters, there is a significant proportion of minors, even among active militants.<sup>16</sup>

## F. Recruitment trends

29. There is no single model of recruitment for foreign terrorist fighters, with experiences varying by Member State. Human contact remains important, which is why there are clusters of recruitment around towns or schools (as seen in the United Kingdom), prisons (as seen in France) and criminal networks (as seen among ethnic Chechens resident in Austria). However, the appeal of the ISIL triple campaign of an idealized society, intervention in a very public conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and emphasis on the immediate has also helped to generate recruits. The reported payment of salaries by ISIL may be a financial incentive for some fighters. One Member State even reported that some groups provided support to relatives of foreign terrorist fighters at home.

30. In some European Member States, it has been reported that violent extremists who dominate some religious institutions, reportedly both government-run and non-government-run, use religious gatherings to recruit. Networks based around particular schools, communities and colleges show how reliant on community-based social networks recruitment remains.<sup>17</sup> What is comparatively new is the number of females being recruited as, or more often to accompany, foreign terrorist fighters. Concerns exist over the significant use of minors as fighters, in particular by ISIL.<sup>18</sup> This will create complex challenges for Member States when it comes to countering fighters while giving primary consideration to the best interests of the child. Meanwhile, Libya is increasingly becoming a base for incoming fighters to receive military-style training (including in attack planning, evasion, bombing and psychological warfare). Since the beginning of 2015, there has even been a new reverse flow from the Middle East to Libya.

## G. Facilitation networks

31. There is some evidence that a range of facilitators, including organizations and individuals, advise foreign terrorist fighters on travel routes and smuggling networks to shuttle fighters into the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq from neighbouring countries. For example, fighters from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were received in Istanbul by facilitators, while fighters from a Maghreb State were aided by Syrian facilitators operating in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> The language and other barriers for such recruits are overcome by an underground network of support. Some Member States report the supply of false or illicitly obtained documents (such as the use of secondary identification documentation to support untracked travel).

32. Government officials emphasized the importance of identifying and disrupting facilitators. The long-standing facilitation route for foreign terrorist fighters used by

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<sup>16</sup> Elise Vincent, Soren Seelow and Piotr Smolar, "Ce que l'on sait de la vidéo de l'EI mettant en scène un enfant bourreau", *Le Monde*, 11 March 2015.

<sup>17</sup> One striking example is the Sharia4Belgium network (not listed).

<sup>18</sup> For example, Kate Brannen, "Les enfants du califat: comment l'Etat islamique est en train de soulever une armée de petits soldats", *Slate*, 10 November 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

Al-Qaida first led to Afghanistan and, after the events of 11 September 2001, to the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Later, multiple channels emerged as Al-Qaida affiliates gained ground in Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel. For fighters in neighbouring countries, movement across borders is often illegal and exploits the vulnerabilities of border systems. For those farther away, air travel is usually the preferred option. Most fighters heading to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq today travel by air.

33. The primary movement routes of foreign terrorist fighters today run to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, not least because this is where the vast majority of new (and veteran) fighters wish to go. Most run to, and then through, Turkey, simply by virtue of the long border that it shares with both countries.<sup>20</sup> Some foreign terrorist fighters enter through Lebanon or Jordan. As national and international action to interdict foreign terrorist fighters has increased, fighters have diversified from direct travel to conflict zones and have increasingly opted for indirect or “broken” travel. Broken travel is the use of separate itineraries for each air leg, or mixing air, land and sea travel, in an effort to obscure their intentions. That method has been used by European, Arab and South-East Asian fighters.

## H. Financing trends

34. Foreign terrorist fighters finance their travel in two major ways: self-funding (the predominant method) or funding from a third party, including a recruitment network. In both cases, the sums involved tend to be small and complicate effective policy and operational interventions to restrict that funding flow. According to a Member State, self-funding was also used by the first generation of foreign terrorist fighters to travel to the conflict zones of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen or Somalia. While financial structures existed, and assistance was sometimes extended, most fighters funded their own travel.

35. The sources of self-financing vary, but include various forms of legal and illegal income. Legal sources include savings, wages, loans from relatives and acquaintances and the sale of personal assets.<sup>21</sup> The low cost of travel to the Syrian Arab Republic/Iraq region for many Europeans and Arabs reduces the barriers to entry. For those farther afield, however, the cost of reaching the conflict zone can be higher. One foreign terrorist fighter from South-East Asia reportedly sold his possessions to raise the equivalent of about \$10,000 to finance his and his family’s travel to the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>22</sup>

36. Illegal sources of income include embezzlement, tax fraud, misuse of government benefits, robbery and theft, taking out loans from banking and non-banking institutions (short-term loans from small credit institutions that charge higher interest rates) without intention to repay or using fraudulent documents, and opening numerous bank accounts and abusing the bank overdraft limit to withdraw

<sup>20</sup> Member States reported the following travel routes to the Team: air and land routes via countries neighbouring Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic; land routes via European countries, in particular Balkan routes; and a maritime route via Greece.

<sup>21</sup> Information provided by Member States.

<sup>22</sup> Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, “The evolution of ISIS in Indonesia”, IPAC report No. 13 (September 2014).

cash.<sup>23</sup> Other methods include the establishment of small companies to obtain loans and support from other foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>24</sup> Illegal means were being actively promoted by ISIL members on social media as recently as February 2015.<sup>25</sup>

37. To summarize, information from Member States indicates that foreign terrorist fighters will seek to obtain money to travel in any way that they can. Given the small amounts necessary, it is not difficult to put together sufficient funds. While financial activity by foreign terrorist fighters usually relates to small amounts and thus may be difficult to detect, activities such as emptying bank accounts and taking out high-interest loans could serve as indicators to detect potential travel.

38. Third-party financing, including through diaspora and community support,<sup>26</sup> is also in evidence for foreign terrorist fighters, as has been reported by a number of Member States. There are concerns about small numbers of non-profit organizations being used to finance foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, trusted volunteers are paid to recruit foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>28</sup>

## I. Movement of funds

39. According to Member States, individuals have carried cash across borders for themselves or to support foreign terrorist fighters or listed groups. The sums involved appear mostly modest, rarely involving more than \$5,000 and usually much less.<sup>29</sup> Several Member States have reported cash couriers, including the transfer of cash by fighters and their spouses. For example, in a British case (*R v Amal El-Wahabi*), a woman was convicted of terrorist offences for asking a friend to smuggle €20,000 at the behest of her husband in the Syrian Arab Republic in exchange for €1,000. The friend was stopped at the airport trying to leave for Turkey with €20,000 in large notes hidden in her clothing. Another method for transferring funds across borders involves the use of automated teller machines, from which foreign terrorist fighters are able to withdraw funds from their national bank accounts in or near the conflict zone.<sup>30</sup> According to multiple Member States,

<sup>23</sup> Information provided by Member States and the Financial Action Task Force 2015 report, “Financing of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)” (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Financial Action Task Force, February 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>25</sup> SITE Intelligence Group, “Jihadists encourage stealing money for migration, offer private advice in doing so”, 23 February 2015.

<sup>26</sup> See also Financial Action Task Force, “Financing of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)”.

<sup>27</sup> For example, according to the narrative summary of the reasons for listing Hilal Ahmar Society Indonesia (QDe.147), a non-governmental organization, the organization “has engaged in a number of activities to support the recruitment and travel of [Jemaah Islamiyah] foreign terrorist fighters to Syria. ... [Jemaah Islamiyah] has used [Hilal Ahmar Society Indonesia] to raise funds, and together the two groups have cooperated on fundraising”. See also Dan Bilefsky and Maïa de la Baume, “Charity in France is accused of being a front for financing terrorism in Syria”, *New York Times*, 4 December 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>29</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>30</sup> Information provided by a Member State and Financial Action Task Force, “Financing of the terrorist organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)”.

formal and informal remittance systems<sup>31</sup> have been used. For example, a money transfer business owned by the sister and brother-in-law of an Australian foreign terrorist fighter, Khaled Sharrouf, was shut down. It is suspected that the business was sending up to \$A 20 million to countries neighbouring the conflict zone to finance terrorism.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, families may travel lured by the promise of financial support from ISIL, “attracted by the promise of stipends, furnished apartments and free medical care as described by friends over Facebook and Twitter”.<sup>33</sup>

## J. Future threat

40. It is also worth briefly considering future lines of possible threat. The sheer number of foreign terrorist fighters travelling to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq stands out. Although a continuation of the past practice of Al-Qaida and its associates, it has taken place in a starkly different international environment. Technology has demolished distance. Foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan during the 1980s often lacked telephone connectivity, whereas fighters in Iraq today can use mobile Internet to communicate instantly with friends, family and potential recruits. The regional crisis anchored around the Syrian Arab Republic, along with sectarian tensions in Iraq, has also intensified international attention.

41. First, there is no reason to assume that this level of focus on the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq will endure indefinitely. It may be that the focus of the threat morphs, with another State coming to the fore as a venue for foreign terrorist fighters. Al-Shabaab had numerous foreign terrorist fighters and then purged many of them. Boko Haram (QDe.138) operates across borders, risking the regional recruitment of fighters. In the future, Africa could suffer greater problems with and from fighters, although to date the continent has been less attractive for fighters than the Middle East.

42. Second, while the primary focus is on the security threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters as they leave and if they return, radicalization and terrorist attacks are not the only threat. It is possible that some fighters, especially those with direct exposure to conflict or atrocities, may be traumatized by what they see. Even for those fighters who may return disillusioned with violent extremism, the emotional and psychological scars may persist and those individuals may not easily reintegrate into normal life. They may exhibit or generate other social problems not linked to terrorism.

43. Third, foreign terrorist fighters may also become a resource for criminal networks, in particular in the Sahel where there are growing ties between terrorist groups and networks smuggling people, arms and drugs.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> According to the SITE Intelligence Group, in a recent posting on Ask.fm, an alleged ISIL fighter maintained that there was a method for fighters to send funds back to their families; see SITE Intelligence Group, “IS fighter encourages lone wolf attacks, claims method for fighters to send money to families”, 7 January 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

<sup>33</sup> Sidney Jones, “Counter-terrorism and the rise of ISIS in 2014”, Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict.

<sup>34</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

44. Fourth, the military defeat of ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, which is not impossible in the medium term, could have the unintended consequence of scattering violent foreign terrorist fighters throughout the world, further complicating the response.

### **III. Challenges**

45. The issue of foreign terrorist fighters creates challenges for Member States, societies and the international community.

#### **A. Prevention, in particular countering violent extremism**

46. The most effective policy against foreign terrorist fighters is to prevent their radicalization, recruitment and travel. Member States explained that, in many cases, those who travelled to become foreign terrorist fighters were not previously known to the national security authorities. The principal strategic challenge is how to prevent individuals from becoming radicalized, which would therefore reduce the overall problem. This is a long-term agenda and difficult. Results are difficult to measure and State intervention can be both counterproductive and useful. There are three major themes that apply. First, there is no one-size-fits-all universal model. What may work with potential foreign terrorist fighters in the Maghreb may have little resonance in Central Asia. A community policing programme may work in one city but not in another. Second, it is crucial that no social spaces be left to be colonized by radicalizers. Counter-messaging, whether by Governments or civil society, is essential.<sup>35</sup> Today, much of this activity relates to the digital space, including ever-evolving forms of social media. The third is that best practices need to be shared, as do policy failures given that there is as much to learn from failure as from success. The vast majority of Member States flagged countering violent extremism as a vital strategic issue.

#### **B. International and domestic information-sharing**

47. More immediately, the flow and return of foreign terrorist fighters pose a national security threat. Operational disruptions frequently depend on detailed intelligence, much of which may rely on input from other countries or the private sector. A number of Member States noted that there remained problems with effective inter-agency and cross-border sharing of information, including simple and vital information on the identities of suspected foreign terrorist fighters (usually held on national watch lists) and what they might be about to do (usually from intelligence and law-enforcement agencies). A number of Member States said that international sharing of information had improved, especially since late 2014, but others flagged issues of timeliness and openness, even regarding bilateral intelligence channels. Moves to populate multilateral databases, such as the INTERPOL foreign terrorist fighter database, are essential, yet even here some Member States have been slow to provide even selected basic identities from their watch lists.

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<sup>35</sup> The initiatives of France in this area are worth tracking, in particular in relation to generating innovative digital content.

48. As one Member State put it, “slow exchange of information and data on foreign fighters is one of the major obstacles to international counter-terrorism cooperation”. Less than 10 per cent of basic identifying information has made it into global multilateral systems to date: this needs to increase where national legal, data-sharing, privacy and operational constraints permit.<sup>36</sup> As a national official emphasized, “as countries share bilaterally they need to think multilaterally”. There are ways of bridging the bilateral to multilateral gap and drawing on sensitive intelligence without circulating too much information. One Member State maintains a global database of foreign terrorist fighters and offers other States’ intelligence services access to those names. Any further information on individuals has to be sought through bilateral channels, however.

49. Significant work remains to be done in this area, in particular among some European States. Much of this, as another national official observed, is about “getting countries to use the tools that they have”. This remains a vital area and the Security Council has already underlined what needs to be done, including for States to intensify and accelerate the exchange of operational information and for airlines to provide advance passenger information to the appropriate national authorities (see resolution 2178 (2014), para. 9). Transit countries emphasize that, in addition to being timely, operational information needs to be as specific as possible in terms of identity, travel routes, photographs, court records, international search warrants and links to terrorist groups.<sup>37</sup> Some Member States of origin, however, argue that legal and human rights constraints may prohibit the sharing of such detailed information on individuals, especially in the absence of judicial authorization. Others have pointed to the fact that many cases involve individuals not previously known to the security authorities, which explains why case information may arrive only after a foreign terrorist fighter has moved to a transit country.

### C. Intelligence collection and liaison

50. Security and intelligence agencies are intimately involved in the response. Their intelligence supports analysis, while their international liaison channels are often the most trusted when it comes to sensitive case work. Human and signal intelligence collection is invaluable. Intelligence and security agencies prefer to operate unilaterally or bilaterally, however, and even then with caution. Multilateralism is not a natural reflex, largely for operational reasons. The international and regional intelligence groupings, of which there are better-known and less-known examples, do provide valuable opportunities for collective analytical exchanges. The issue of foreign terrorist fighters has been on their agenda for several years, with the 2013 annual counter-terrorism meeting organized by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation leading the way in identifying foreign terrorist fighters as a global strategic issue. It is positive that many agencies with often fractious bilateral relations manage to cooperate on the issue of foreign terrorist fighters. Here, a strategic challenge may lie with those countries whose agencies have not had experience of countering terrorism or whose liaison networks

<sup>36</sup> This challenge is also present within Governments, when laws and policies prevent law-enforcement and counter-terrorism information from being used by border and immigration agencies and create serious vulnerabilities.

<sup>37</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

may be less extensive. A number of States have deployed additional liaison staff to key capitals in order to improve information flows, which is to be commended.

#### **D. Border controls and effective control mechanisms**

51. Border control capacity is crucial in disrupting the departure of foreign terrorist fighters and the cross-border movement of funds and weapons. While some Member States have taken strict measures in that regard, many others are seriously challenged and some lack even basic equipment, given their vast land borders and poor control capacity. Transit countries face enormous difficulties in disrupting access to conflict zones in the absence of reliable intelligence. That situation places strain on some countries' resources. Poorly controlled land borders allow facilitation networks to operate without difficulty. Most foreign terrorist fighters entering the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq use land borders. Biometrics, passenger name data, the INTERPOL database of stolen and lost travel documents and Yellow Notices (notices issued by States within the INTERPOL system concerning missing persons) can be important tools for data mining and stronger screening to track potential foreign terrorist fighters at border crossings. The capacity gaps here are enormous, and it may make sense to accord priority to assisting those countries with the weakest systems compared with the number of current foreign terrorist fighter cases.

#### **E. Internet and social media**

52. For most foreign terrorist fighters, the Internet has always been part of their social experience. They are comfortable using technology and communicating through social media and, in some cases, are proving to be early adopters of new forms of technology. An array of Internet, mobile phone and social media tools are actively used by foreign terrorist fighters, their sympathizers and facilitators. From the high volume of online video and social media postings by foreign terrorist fighters, including imagery and videos, related propaganda is extensive and spans many platforms. The Internet is also used for communicating and planning, together with facilitation, recruitment and propaganda.

53. Although most Member States indicate that direct personal contact remains a core ingredient of most radicalization and recruitment processes for foreign terrorist fighters, the Internet and social media play a crucial role. Some Member States have reported instances of Internet-only radicalization or so-called "self-indoctrination". In many cases, in particular those associated with ISIL, the use of social media strengthens relationships between foreign terrorist fighters, a situation that may lay dangerous foundations for future transnational networks among veteran fighters. Social media has also been used as a vehicle for radicalizing and recruiting fighters, not least because it means that there is no social distance between fighters online in conflict zones and potential recruits worldwide. Tackling the misuse of the Internet for and by fighters is essential, but complicated by legal, privacy, data and regulatory variations among Member States. Data access, data retention, appropriate bulk data collection and analysis are important ingredients for operational and preventive responses.

## F. Prosecutions relating to foreign terrorist fighters<sup>38</sup>

54. Member States have employed varied law-enforcement responses to the problem of foreign terrorist fighters. Law enforcement can be used to disrupt the travel plans of would-be fighters, stop their facilitators and other supporters and prosecute fighters upon their return.<sup>39</sup> Some Member States rely on laws that are currently in place to tackle terrorism-related offences, including those previously used to prosecute fighters who joined other groups, such as Al-Shabaab. Terrorism-related laws include those that prohibit participation in terrorist activity (which may be more difficult to use because they require a link to specific terrorist activity) and those that criminalize support to designated terrorist organizations, which can be used to prosecute those offering support to listed groups without showing a specific link to terrorist activity. Other Member States rely on existing criminal offences that are not specific to terrorism, sometimes in innovative ways, such as by charging individuals with offences relating to immigration violations, unauthorized military training and participation in foreign conflicts. Some have enacted laws that are more specific to the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon and explicitly address travel. For example, the Australian Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Act 2014 makes it an offence to enter a “declared area” without a legitimate purpose.<sup>40</sup> Of course, those measures are not mutually exclusive and some Member States rely on a combination of those approaches. Furthermore, each approach has its advantages and disadvantages.

55. The complexities observed in a recent report by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (see footnote 38) and by Member States include problems relating to generating admissible evidence to support cases. Such issues include the challenge of converting intelligence information into evidence that can be introduced in court. The scale of the challenge varies by Member State and includes fears of disclosing intelligence sources and methods or a formal prohibition in a State’s legal framework on using intelligence information in criminal cases, meaning that Member States must recreate through investigative means information gathered through intelligence.

56. Another major challenge involves proving criminal intent, especially given that would-be foreign terrorist fighters can claim to be travelling for humanitarian purposes or tourism.<sup>41</sup> Even when criminal intent can be determined by investigators, it may be difficult to prove it to the requisite legal standard in court.

<sup>38</sup> In the present section, the Team draws extensively on the comprehensive report prepared by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate entitled “Bringing terrorists to justice: challenges in prosecutions related to foreign terrorist fighters”, prepared after a prosecutors’ seminar on the same topic held in December 2014 (S/2015/123, annex), as well as on information provided by Member States.

<sup>39</sup> By paragraph 6 of resolution 2178 (2014), Member States are required to ensure that their national laws and regulations establish serious criminal offences sufficient to provide the ability to prosecute and to penalize in a manner duly reflecting the seriousness of the offence: (a) their nationals who travel or attempt to travel for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts, or the providing or receiving of terrorist training; (b) wilful financing relating to such travel; and (c) the wilful organization or other facilitation of such travel.

<sup>40</sup> Division 119 states that the Minister for Foreign Affairs may declare such an area in a foreign country when a listed terrorist organization is engaging in a hostile activity in that area of the foreign country.

<sup>41</sup> For example, in the guide entitled “Hijrah to the Islamic State”, would-be foreign terrorist fighters are coached to assert, if intercepted, that their purpose is humanitarian or tourism.

Furthermore, laws need to be sufficiently robust to allow for the prosecution of preparatory offences before the would-be foreign terrorist fighter actually departs for the conflict zone and commits crimes there. For example, the United States of America has disrupted would-be foreign terrorist fighters endeavouring to board aeroplanes in the United States on the way to the conflict zone by charging them with attempting to provide material support to a designated terrorist organization. Meanwhile, according to the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate report, prosecutions of foreign terrorist fighters in the Netherlands have involved “charges of preparation or training to fight, preparation to kill and preparation to make explosives” (see [S/2015/123](#), annex, para. 21).

57. Another noted obstacle is obtaining evidence from the conflict zone. It may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to gather physical evidence. In such cases, the Internet can provide evidence for prosecutors in addition to generating intelligence leads. Many foreign terrorist fighters boast about their crimes online, including by posting incriminating pictures, which could prove useful to prosecutors when the individuals return. Of course, countries need to have practices in place to be able to effectively present such evidence in court. The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate report gives the example of Jordan, where the prosecutor’s office brings experts in social media to testify in court (see *ibid.*, para. 26).

## **G. Returnee policy**

58. When efforts to counter violent extremism fail to prevent individuals from becoming foreign terrorist fighters, the returnee policy is as important as operational work. Returnees leave conflict zones for various reasons, and Member State information here is mixed. Some Member States report that there are disillusioned foreign terrorist fighters who lose faith in Al-Qaida or ISIL. Others argue that returnees may be motivated by other drivers, including wishing to take a break from a conflict, treat injuries, raise funds or further ideological goals or attack planning elsewhere. There are three major themes to returnee policies: how to screen returnees to assess risk adequately, how to develop and implement deradicalization policies to detoxify radicalized returnees and how to reintegrate returnees into society. Examples of Member State initiatives worth noting include programmes by Australia, Belgium and Saudi Arabia on countering violent extremism, which have taken varying approaches and had mixed results. While the Australian programme combines both prevention and rehabilitation aspects, with a focus on community engagement, the Belgian programme focuses on early detection of radicalization signals and a better understanding of the radicalization process and factors. The Saudi Arabian programme is rehabilitation oriented and reported to be reasonably successful, despite a low recidivism rate.

## **H. Role of the private sector**

59. One broader response, not yet addressed by the Security Council, is the role of the private sector in aiding Member States to combat the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. Effective private-public partnerships between the security authorities and private sector stakeholders, such as Internet service providers, airlines and travel agencies, could meaningfully complement other action by Member States.

## IV. Responses

### A. Response to date

60. Member States, the international community, the United Nations and the private sector have all been active in identifying the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters and developing responses. To respond more effectively, some Member States have either strengthened existing laws or have enacted or are enacting new laws, while others have relied on existing laws to prosecute would-be foreign terrorist fighters, their supporters and returnees. Policies to counter violent extremism are being refined in Member States that already have them and developed in those that do not.

61. Coordination within and between Governments, along with effective sharing of information, is at the heart of successful policy and operational responses. The role of Turkey, whose national screening programmes have been developed at key points of entry and whose watch list now includes 12,500 individuals,<sup>42</sup> is an example of a Member State that has identified the problem and sought to find effective ways to work with others to share information and tackle it. At the regional level, the European Union has developed tools to share analysis and watch list data. In Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization are sharing relevant information.

62. The introduction of exit controls, along with stronger capability to collect and share biometrics and advance passenger information, as is being done by a number of Member States, is very welcome. Closer collaboration between communities (intelligence, law enforcement, the military and the judiciary) is also worth promoting. Some European Member States have set up task forces and some Asian Member States have established inter-agency fusion centres.

63. The international community has been working multilaterally on the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, whether on countering violent extremism (as with the summit convened by the President of the United States in February 2015), work being led by INTERPOL to develop better shared analysis and resolutions adopted by the Security Council, not least resolution 2178 (2014). A significant gap was the lack of an international obligation to establish criminal offences to enable the prosecution of would-be foreign terrorist fighters before they arrived at their destination. Greater action by States of origin and transit depended in some cases on a stronger international legal obligation, which was put in place by resolution 2178 (2014). Tracking the implementation of that obligation across all Member States and identifying and responding to capacity gaps in key Member States are vital follow-on work.

64. In the United Nations, the work is largely the domain of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. The Team strongly endorses its work on building a systemic response to the foreign terrorist fighter problem, especially in the legal and regulatory domains. The United Nations system can also play a valuable supportive role in building capacity through the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and through the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. Support in countering violent extremism and work to improve the

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<sup>42</sup> Information provided by a Member State.

coherence of United Nations efforts should lie predominantly with the Chair, members and working groups of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force.

## B. Internet and social media

65. Major social media companies have been responding to the challenge of the use of the Internet by foreign terrorist fighters, Al-Qaida, ISIL and other terrorists. After a slow start, a range of companies are now actively working to revise policies and terms and conditions and establish new standard operating procedures with Governments. Member States informed the Team of various experiences with social media and Internet companies. The companies are aware of the threat and are ready to help to respond and cooperate on many cases (sometimes extremely swiftly, even across borders). At times, Member States have also noted difficulties in securing access to user and relational data from social media firms when those data are held outside national boundaries. Data retention and privacy constraints also complicate access by law-enforcement agencies to social media data, in particular user data, although that issue is specific to some jurisdictions. Usefully, increasing regulatory and commercial action by companies is disrupting social media use by foreign terrorist fighters. Excluding foreign terrorist fighters from social media is difficult, but the fact that ISIL supporters sought to establish their own social media platform, “Khelafabook”, in 2015 may be a sign of success.

66. In January 2012, Twitter announced that it would change its content policy, blocking tweets in countries in which tweets risked breaking local laws.<sup>43</sup> In late 2014, Twitter reportedly suspended at least 1,000 accounts linked to ISIL,<sup>44</sup> which reportedly led to threats against it from ISIL in 2015.<sup>45</sup> Facebook accounts have also been widely used by foreign terrorist fighters, both to post extremist content and to attempt to sell ISIL merchandise.<sup>46</sup> Facebook has been actively responding to the challenge, deleting hundreds of accounts for sharing violent extremist material and intensifying monitoring.<sup>47</sup> YouTube has long been used to promote material relating to Al-Qaida, including videos made by listed associates. In 2010, it added a “promotes terrorism” option in the category “violent or repulsive content” to allow users to flag offensive content.<sup>48</sup> In 2014, Ask.fm also added an “extremist” category allowing users to flag such content.<sup>49</sup>

67. A uniform international approach to Internet and social media regulation is unlikely. Differing views on freedom of speech, legal rights to block or censor

<sup>43</sup> Twitter, “Tweets still must flow”, 26 January 2012.

<sup>44</sup> J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, “The ISIS Twitter census: defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter”, Brookings Institution, No. 20 (Washington, D.C., March 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Michael Isikoff, “Twitter under pressure to act more aggressively against terrorists”, Yahoo News, 18 February 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Stephanie Burnett, “Sorry, jihadis, but you won’t be able to buy ISIS T-shirts on Facebook”, *Time*, 25 June 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Shiv Malik and others, “Isis in duel with Twitter and YouTube to spread extremist propaganda”, *Guardian*, 24 September 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Craig Kanalley, “YouTube gives users ability to flag content that promotes terrorism”, *Huffington Post*, 13 December 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Caitlin Dewey, “Inside the battle for Ask.fm, the site where Islamic State recruited three American teens”, *Washington Post*, 12 December 2014.

content and issues of extraterritoriality over offshore data all make a single collective approach difficult. More can and should be done in the area, even if responses vary depending on national legislation.

## V. Recommendations

68. The main way in which the Security Council can further international action against foreign terrorist fighters is through the effective implementation of recent resolutions. Resolution 2178 (2014) established an important new global obligation under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, under which all Member States must establish criminal offences to be able to prosecute and penalize foreign terrorist fighters.

69. The three essential ingredients for responding to the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters are information, disruption and countering violent extremism.

70. With information, the challenge is in generating, using and sharing actionable information on potential and known foreign terrorist fighters. This includes advance passenger information, material from national watch lists and analytical information that can help officials to understand the threat posed by and the policy options around such fighters.

71. Effective disruption depends on having in place adequate legislative frameworks, developed national strategies and the inter-agency ability within Governments to act speedily. Some foreign terrorist fighters are unknown to their own Government or other government authorities. In a number of cases, information on planned or actual travel may be received only just before or after movement. That state of affairs challenges national authorities to be swift, efficient and coordinated in their actions. Team discussions with transit countries repeatedly showed that national officials needed information swiftly from other Governments, and indeed from their own, if they were to act sufficiently speedily to disrupt proposed travel by fighters.

72. Countering violent extremism remains at the heart of any successful policy response to foreign terrorist fighters. At the preventive end, it includes developing a full analytical picture of the identities of foreign terrorist fighters and why they become radicalized. It means assessing potential typologies and identifying individuals who may be at risk. Most fighters appear to be radicalized or recruited in part through their links to other people. The Internet, including video and social media content, also plays an important role, although many countries report that personal contact remains crucial in most cases. The new generation of Al-Qaida associates, including ISIL, are very comfortable in the digital space. They seek to make parts of the social media world their own, whether by generating thousands of Twitter accounts or plurally posting radicalizing content that includes atrocities. While Internet companies, in particular social media companies, have been responding, still more needs to be done to effectively identify, disrupt or remove Internet material used to radicalize, recruit and facilitate fighters.

73. More broadly, developing comprehensive strategies to counter violent extremism at the national level is essential, not just to countering radicalization and recruitment (a major part of which is around counter-messaging), but also to properly assessing and reintegrating, where possible, returning foreign terrorist

fighters. Assessing returnees and developing appropriate national strategies to rehabilitate, prosecute or monitor them, depending on national assessments, remains an equally crucial part of the effort.

74. Lastly, national capacity remains a significant strategic challenge. The current challenge is not to raise awareness of the threat, but to build and develop national and international capability to help to counter it. Here, many Member States will grapple with the legal, infrastructural and wider policy challenges of how to deal with the problem of foreign terrorist fighters. Donors, both Member States and international organizations, need to be ready to step up to help those most in need of assistance.

75. The Team is therefore making 11 recommendations that directly respond to the threat. The Team believes that the intensive efforts by the Security Council in 2014 filled major gaps that existed by creating new international obligations in relation to countering foreign terrorist fighters. Much still needs to be done, however, to understand the threat, implement the obligations that all Member States now have following resolution 2178 (2014) and build sustained capability to deal with a complex, multifaceted problem that is likely to persist for decades to come.

76. The Team recommends:

(a) **That the Security Council systematically track the implementation of international obligations under resolution 2178 (2014);**

(b) **That the Committee issue a public call to competent international, regional and subregional organizations and donors to encourage them to provide further financial and technical assistance to concerned Member States with the aim of reinforcing border control capacity to address the flows of foreign terrorist fighters;**

(c) **That the Committee remind Member States of the crucial value of effective information-sharing on foreign terrorist fighters at the national and international levels, including the timely sharing, where possible, of passenger information, national watch list material, analysis and good practices. Depending on the sensitivity of information, intelligence, law enforcement, military or other bilateral channels may be used; equally, there should be the maximum openness towards using multilateral tools such as the INTERPOL foreign terrorist fighters database, where possible;**

(d) **That the Committee encourage Member States to propose for listing under the Al-Qaida sanctions regime individuals and entities who have a key role in mobilizing, recruiting or facilitating foreign terrorist fighters, including through the Internet and social media;**

(e) **That the Committee write to Member States to encourage them to design and implement programmes to counter violent extremism that emphasize a preventive approach that will be most appropriate to their State and society and further share and disseminate best practices, including counter-messaging with other Member States. Prevention is the crucial policy area and, given that it is challenging, sharing evidence on successful and unsuccessful policies is important;**

(f) **That the Committee write to Member States to underline the value of developing screening and rehabilitation programmes for returning foreign**

terrorist fighters, given the importance of successfully reintegrating those who have broken with terrorism and of minimizing the threat posed by those who remain committed to violent extremism;

(g) That the Committee write to Member States to encourage them to engage in a dialogue with Internet service providers and social media companies, with a view to exploring ways, in accordance with their national legislation, to disrupt the use of the Internet and social media by those associated with Al-Qaida to deliver propaganda and communicate with and recruit foreign terrorist fighters;

(h) That the Committee write to Member States, encouraging those that have not yet done so and in accordance with their national legislation, to raise the awareness of private sector stakeholders, such as travel agents, airlines, financial institutions and non-profit organizations operating in their jurisdiction, of the importance of vigilance against the misuse of their products and services by foreign terrorist fighters and highlight the important role that the private sector could play in countering the global threat of such fighters by proactively engaging with relevant authorities;

(i) That the Committee write to Member States to encourage them to work in close collaboration with all relevant national stakeholders to develop red flag indicators to assist financial institutions and other relevant sectors to detect and report possible cases of foreign terrorist fighters;

(j) That the Committee write to Member States to highlight the risks of abuse of non-profit organizations, informal/alternative remittance systems and the physical trans-border movement of currency and draw the attention of Member States to paragraph 12 of resolution 2161 (2014) and strongly encourage Member States to implement the relevant international standards designed to prevent the abuse of non-profit organizations, informal/alternative remittance systems and the physical trans-border movement of currency, while working to mitigate the impact on legitimate activities through those mediums;

(k) That the Security Council address specific capacity gaps that Member States may experience in countering foreign terrorist fighters and encourage donors, including the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, to direct capacity-building support to areas and Member States with the greatest need.