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Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council

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

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

(Signed) Dian Triansyah **Djani**
Chair

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



Letter dated 26 June 2020 from the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team in accordance with paragraph (a) of annex I to resolution 2368 (2017) addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities

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

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

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

Summary

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remains resilient; and Al-Qaida has ingrained itself in local communities and conflicts. Both organizations and their global affiliates and supporters continue to generate violence around the world, whether through insurgency tactics, the direction and facilitation of terrorism or providing the inspiration for attacks.

ISIL operations have increased in the core conflict zone of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, a cause of concern for Member States. Behind this trend lies a more complex picture, in which ISIL maintains the ambition to control territory and populations but, for the moment, represents an entrenched rural insurgency without the reach to threaten urban areas on a sustained basis.

The impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on terrorism has varied between conflict zones and non-conflict zones and between short- and longer-term threats. Groups are using the outbreak to advance propaganda and fundraising and, in some regions, are seeking to take advantage of perceptions that the attention of security forces is diverted elsewhere. At the same time, the pandemic has made cross-border travel more difficult and targets more elusive, and the operational tempo of attacks has slowed discernibly in some regions. Should the pandemic lead to a severe global recession, the international community may be faced with further headwinds in countering terrorism and extremist narratives.

Both ISIL and Al-Qaida suffered leadership losses in recent months, and although both organizations have proved adept at surviving such transitions, the deaths provide an opportunity for Governments and other groups to take advantage of power vacuums. The new leader of ISIL, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla, has not visibly asserted himself in communications, which may prove to be a limiting factor in his influence and appeal, and perhaps that of the group.

Al-Qaida is further entrenching in regions beyond its historical stronghold in Afghanistan, where it faces a serious challenge if the peace process develops momentum. It exploits the tarnished ISIL brand and societal fractures to enhance legitimacy and gain local traction and recruits. The relationship between ISIL and Al-Qaida remains fraught and idiosyncratic, depending on regional dynamics. Those dynamics are most troubling in West Africa and the Sahel, where the various terrorist groups and affiliates appear to aim systematically at undermining fragile jurisdictions, and stabilization and development are proving challenging.

The international community continues to struggle with whether and how to return and reintegrate fighters from the conflict zone and their family members into their countries of origin and/or nationality. The global pandemic has further complicated efforts to provide the relevant consular and screening services and presents additional challenges to a range of counter-terrorism efforts.

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I. Overview and evolution of the threat

1. The reporting period began with a continuation of trends from 2019, seeing Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)¹ consolidating in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and showing confidence in its ability to increasingly operate in a brazen manner in its former core area. The number of ISIL attacks in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic increased significantly in early 2020 as compared with the same period in 2019. Tensions between some of the key international partners in the fight against ISIL grew, complicating the counter-terrorism challenge and increasing ISIL self-belief. From approximately March 2020, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic became a factor in ISIL operational, propaganda and fundraising activities, having a different impact on them in different regions.

2. The international community has sought to address the legacy issues of the so-called caliphate in terms of ISIL Iraqi, Syrian and foreign terrorist fighters, supporters and dependants. In the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic in particular, detainees and other refugees and displaced persons are recognized as an urgent challenge on both security and humanitarian grounds. There is general acceptance that failing to address those issues will increase the medium- to long-term terrorist threat; various political, legal and practical complexities meant that only limited progress had been made before international attention became dominated by COVID-19. One effect of the pandemic has been to increase the obstacles to the repatriation of foreign elements, setting back the prospects for mitigation of this latent threat.

3. COVID-19 curfews and restrictions imposed by Member States have limited freedom of movement and may disrupt terrorist planning. Restrictions on international travel significantly constrain terrorist mobility, networking and finance-related activity. The same restrictions have reduced the number of potential targets available globally. Travel to tourist destinations has dried up and tourists already abroad have been repatriated. With public gatherings discouraged and venues closed, there are few targets available to terrorists looking to undertake ISIL-inspired attacks. This highlights the operational limitations of ISIL since it gave up its external operational capability. Member States believe that the group has increased the urgency with which it is seeking to reconstitute that capability, although there is no evidence that it has succeeded as yet.

4. The impact of the virus differs between conflict zones and non-conflict zones. Authorities in conflict zones cannot impose meaningful restrictions on movement for public health reasons. Major cities with effective restrictions also differ from remote areas, including porous border regions, where terrorists still enjoy freedom of movement. In general, the short-term terrorist threat has risen in conflict zones and fallen in non-conflict zones. Where access to health care is limited, especially in conflict zones, the feeling of vulnerability may fuel extremism, as may economic distress caused by the pandemic. Even where the short-term threat is lower, the long-term impact of COVID-19 may increase it.

5. ISIL propaganda and media output have been largely unaffected by COVID-19, but the group's commentary on it has broadly covered four areas. First, ISIL has urged attacks on its enemies while they are weakened and distracted. Second, the pandemic has been presented as divine punishment of the West and a cause for celebration. Third, the group has recognized that the virus could be weaponized (though Member States report no attempts to do so in practice). Fourth, seeking to protect its members from COVID-19, ISIL has embraced social distancing and, in mid-March 2020, advised against travel to Europe.

¹ Listed as Al-Qaida in Iraq (QDe.115).

6. ISIL has had a captive audience during the lockdown and, if it has successfully used this for planning and recruitment purposes, it is possible that the easing of restrictions in non-conflict zones will see a spike in attacks once targets become available again. Another motivation is fear of irrelevance: COVID-19 largely eclipsed terrorism from the news. The ISIL media products most accessed in early 2020 were a video from April 2019 and audio broadcasts from September 2019 of the late leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (QDi.299). This highlights the contrasting silence of the new leader, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla (QDi.426), also known as Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, whose caution with regard to communicating directly is a limiting factor. The current ISIL media strategy is focused on continuing to launch campaigns in the so-called “war of attrition”, in which routine ISIL branch operations are explicitly dedicated to the core. The latest campaign was announced as lasting from 14 to 20 May 2020.

7. Member States continue to assess that the strategic direction of ISIL is unlikely to change significantly under al-Mawla, although he will have to steer the group to address evolving global challenges, including the COVID-19 crisis. The delegation of authority from the core to the remote provinces and the loosening of command and control within ISIL are expected to continue and perhaps accelerate in present circumstances. This is also true of Al-Qaida (QDe.004). It is likely that affiliates will increasingly take on their own distinct regional characteristics and objectives.

8. ISIL has suffered further severe reverses in its former Afghan strongholds of Nangarhar and Kunar Provinces, but it is too soon to discount it as a threat. It hopes to exploit changing dynamics between the Taliban, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161) and Al-Qaida in the context of the Afghan peace process, rallying rejectionist elements to its flag. In the agreement between the United States of America and the Taliban it is envisaged that the Taliban will continue to fight ISIL-K and suppress any threat from Al-Qaida. Should the poor health of Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri (QDi.006) force a leadership succession, it will be challenging for Al-Qaida in the context of a peace process.

9. ISIL franchises in West Africa and the Sahel continued to enjoy operational success in early 2020, as have those of Al-Qaida, heightening international concern about stability in the region. The strength of the Al-Qaida franchises in and around Idlib in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic and the fragility of the situation there is also troubling. ISIL also enjoys safe haven in that region.

II. Regional developments

A. Iraq and the Levant

10. The combined number of ISIL fighters in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic is estimated at more than 10,000, with regular movement between the two, especially where Anbar and Ninawa Provinces border the Syrian Arab Republic. Fighters are dispersed in small cells with the capacity to carry out targeted hit-and-run operations. ISIL has attempted to exploit gaps between Iraqi and Kurdish forces and has established safe havens in the Hamrin mountain range of north-eastern Iraq.

11. ISIL wages its “war of attrition” in Iraq by targeting security forces and other communities, as well as members of its own community who are deemed to be collaborators. It has exploited security gaps caused by the pandemic and by political turbulence in Iraq to relaunch a sustained rural insurgency, as well as sporadic operations in Baghdad and other large cities.

12. ISIL has increased the use of political assassination of government and security officials. It also attacks businesses in territories it previously occupied, in retaliation against local residents who support the Government. Attacks on farms and the burning of crops in fields have become increasingly common tactics. Hundreds of acres of crops were destroyed in Makhmur, Erbil Province, in April and May 2020, aggravating an already difficult economic situation.

13. ISIL has recently lost some significant leaders. In May 2020, Iraq announced the death of Moataz al-Jubouri (also known as Hajji Taysir), who reportedly headed the ISIL delegated committee and held the nominal title Wali of Iraq. Also in May, coalition forces in the Syrian Arab Republic announced the death of Ahmad Ismail al-Zawi (also known as Abu Ali al-Baghdadi) and Ahmad Hasan al-Jughayfi (also known as Abu Ammar), who was responsible for logistics and movement of weapons, improvised explosive device materials and fighters across the border between Anbar and Dayr al-Zawr. Iraq announced the arrest of Hajji ‘Abd al-Nasir (QDi.420), a previous head of the delegated committee, although the actual time of his capture could not be confirmed.

14. In the Syrian Arab Republic, despite a relative improvement in the security situation in the first quarter of 2020, a surge in terrorist activity was witnessed between March and May and the overall situation remains precarious. COVID-19 highlighted the vulnerability of holding facilities and camps for internally displaced persons, particularly those in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces. In March, a prison break attempt by ISIL prisoners in Hasakah began with a riot over fears of the virus spreading throughout the prison. The pandemic is also used as a rallying call in social media campaigns launched to raise money to support foreign terrorist fighters’ families in the Hawl camp; in addition, a steady stream of ISIL-affiliated women are reported to have escaped the camp into Turkey with the aid of corrupt guards and smugglers. Poor nutrition, a shortage of medical supplies and interruptions of the water supply from Aluk Water Station were cited by one Member State as reasons to fear the spread of the disease in Ra’s al-Ayn Camp.

15. Between March and May 2020, there was an increase in the number of attacks against the Syrian Democratic Forces and coalition forces east of the Euphrates River as part of the “war of attrition”. ISIL fighters in the region engage primarily in attacking energy, transport and communications facilities. West of the river, ISIL has sleeper cells in eastern Homs, south of Sukhna and in the south-western area of Dayr al-Zawr. It attacks power installations and oil facilities in those desert areas, and military convoys and civilian traffic along the Dayr-al-Zawr Tadmur (Palmyra) Road. It also assassinates Syrian military and security personnel.

16. ISIL attacks abated in the south-west between February and mid-April. Since then, ISIL has claimed several assassinations of Ba’ath Party officials and security officers, as well as ambushing military convoys in Suwaydah, Dar’a and Qunaytirah. ISIL cells in Suwaydah are assessed to be 100 strong and there are reportedly 400 ISIL fighters active in Dar’a.

17. In Idlib, Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)² is the dominant militant group, assessed as controlling between 8,000 and 10,000 fighters. It coordinates military activity with other terrorist groups and non-State armed groups in the area. Through its control of territory and commercial routes, HTS raises approximately \$13 million per month. Most of those funds come from the taxation of businesses, public utilities and customs and tolls gathered from crossings over the Turkish border and internal Syrian lines of control. The Bab al-Hawa crossing is reported to generate \$4 million for HTS every

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

month. The group also has a monopoly over sales of petroleum derivatives in its area of control and benefits from payments by charity organizations operating in Idlib.

18. Despite the killing of some of its senior leaders, Hurras al-Din (HAD) retains its role as an Al-Qaida-favoured affiliate in the Syrian Arab Republic. The group remains committed to preparing for external attacks despite its current focus on targeting Syrian forces. HAD coordinates military activity with HTS and a number of other groups composed predominantly of foreigners. These include Ajnad al-Qawqaz (approximately 500 fighters from the North Caucasus), Jama'at al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad, Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) (QDe.158) and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (QDe.088), also known in the Syrian Arab Republic as the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP). Lacking HTS resources, these groups fund themselves partly by looting public utility installations and selling parts across the border, as ETIM did in May when it destroyed the Zayzun Power Station in the western countryside of Hama.

19. Member States assess that ETIM controls between 1,100 and 3,500 fighters, mostly located in the Jisr al-Shughur area of Idlib, led by Kaiwusair (not listed). Having recently suffered significant losses, some fighters and dependants are reportedly seeking to transit through Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran to the northern provinces of Afghanistan to join the ETIM affiliate there. The group conducts joint operations with other armed groups, under the umbrella of HTS. It uses guerrilla tactics, avoiding direct confrontation with Syrian government forces. It reportedly receives funds from the Uighur community in Turkey.

B. Arabian Peninsula

20. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (QDe.129) continues to operate actively in the Yemeni governorates of Bayda', Shabwah, Ma'rib, Abyan, Hadramawt, Aden and Lahij. The Monitoring Team assesses that the group's strength remains at approximately 7,000 fighters. Significant internal AQAP attacks in early 2020 (one in January against Rashad Village in Wadi'ah Directorate and one in April in the Hadramawt Valley targeting local security officials) were less frequent than during the same period in 2019. For fundraising, AQAP has turned increasingly to kidnap-for-ransom; it also raises funds through the sale of looted small arms and light weapons.

21. Air strikes targeting the leadership have weakened the group's operational capabilities. The elimination on 7 February 2020 of its commander Qasim al-Rimi (QDi.282), an experienced tactician and strong military leader and trainer, was a significant blow to the group. On 23 February 2020, Khalid Batarfi (also known as Abu Miqdad al-Kindi) (not listed) was announced as the new leader. Member States doubt that Batarfi enjoys strong support within the group and therefore assess that al-Rimi's death may have a lasting impact on AQAP and Al-Qaida in general. AQAP remains worried about infiltration of its ranks and is also distracted by concerns about rival Yemeni militant groups.

22. AQAP nevertheless remains determined to mount external operations. The group claimed responsibility for the Pensacola Naval Air Station shooting on 6 December 2019, perpetrated by Mohamed Alshamrani, a lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Defense Forces who was studying aviation at the military base in Florida. He killed three people and injured eight with a handgun he had purchased in Florida in July 2019. Investigations have now revealed that Alshamrani was radicalized in 2015, influenced by the teachings of AQAP ideologue Anwar al-Aulaqi. During his time at Pensacola and up to the day of the attack, Alshamrani was in direct contact with Abdullah al-Maliki, an AQAP media and Internet recruitment operative who was

killed in Yemen on 13 May 2020. The Pensacola attack is believed to have been planned prior to Alshamrani's arrival in the United States.

23. AQAP priorities include elimination of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (ISIL-Yemen) (QDe.166), which was listed on 4 March 2020. AQAP still considers ISIL-Yemen its key competitor in the recruitment of veterans and new fighters and seeks to boost recruitment through youth outreach and the provision of public services in areas under its control.

24. Member States assess that ISIL-Yemen operates primarily in Bayda' and Dali' Governorates under the leadership of Yemeni nationals Mohammed Saleh al-Sayari, also known as Nashwan al-Adani (not listed), Khalid Omar al-Marfadi, (also known as Abu Anas) (not listed), Khalid al-Yazidi (not listed), Radwan Qan'an Alsayari (not listed) and Saudi national Naser Mohammed Alghaidani al-Harbi (also known as Abu Bilal Alharbi) (not listed). In early February 2020, ISIL-Yemen attempted to wrest control of strategic logistics lines in Jumaydah and Taghout areas in Yakla, Bayda', from AQAP. Tentative offers by ISIL-Yemen of a truce have thus far been rejected by AQAP. One Member State reports recent Houthi cooperation with ISIL-Yemen, including in the form of an exchange of prisoners in April 2020.

25. The only ISIL-Yemen stronghold in Yemen is in Qifah Rada' in Bayda', where it maintains training camps, ammunition and arms stores, and is able to mount operations despite ongoing harassment from AQAP. Besides its weakening military capabilities, the group suffers from a lack of financial resources and struggles to pay fighters. Member States assess that the ISIL core may lose interest in ISIL-Yemen if it cannot improve its performance.

C. Africa

North Africa

26. Assessments of the number of fighters belonging to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (ISIL-Libya) (QDe.165) generally remain in the low hundreds, although one Member State put it as high as 1,400. The group continues to represent a threat to the stability and security of Libya and its environs, exacerbated by the ongoing Libyan conflict. Libya is integral to overall ISIL strategic objectives in Africa as it remains an important outreach post between the core and ISIL affiliates on the continent. Persistent lawlessness and a preoccupation with interfactional fighting will create opportunities for ISIL-Libya to thrive further.

27. After a relative hiatus between February and April 2020, ISIL-Libya resumed activity in the south, coinciding with surging ISIL activity in the core conflict zone. ISIL-Libya continues to target military checkpoints, police stations, small businesses belonging to individuals aligned with local authorities, and the Libyan National Army. During the reporting period, ISIL-Libya perpetrated attacks in Fuqaha', Ghadduwah, Taraghin, Tmassah, Umm al-Aranib and Zawilah. The group remains focused in Fazzan, south of the Sabha-Awbari road and in the central region of Haruj. It maintains sleeper cells in the coastal cities, including Tripoli.

28. ISIL-Libya is reported to exploit tensions between the Tuareg, Tebu and Arab tribes for the purposes of recruitment. It maintains a cold peace with foreign militants from Chad, the Niger and the Sudan who are present in the south of Libya. It raises funds by extorting small businesses and kidnapping local dignitaries for ransom.

29. The Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (QDe.014) maintains a presence further south-west, near Uwaynat, where it controls smuggling and trafficking routes of arms and people. The group does not directly undertake smuggling but collects fees and in-kind services from criminal organizations in return

for protection. The Al-Qaida-affiliated Ansar al-Charia Derna (QDe.145) and Ansar al-Charia Benghazi (QDe.146) are considered mostly defunct; however, some individuals previously belonging to those groups joined militias belonging to the anti-Libyan National Army coalition during the battle for Tripoli.

30. Member States expressed concerns that an illicit market for excess weapons would develop in Libya owing to the influx of arms, despite the embargo established in Security Council resolution 1970 (2011) and the authorizations to enforce it, which were most recently extended by the Council in its resolution 2526 (2020). ISIL-Libya and other designated terrorist groups on the continent are in a position to exploit this market. Several Member States also expressed concerns over an estimated 7,000 to 15,000 fighters brought in from the north-west Syrian Arab Republic to Tripoli, via Turkey, to take part in the Libyan conflict. It remains unclear whether those Syrian fighters originally belonged to designated terrorist groups in the Syrian Arab Republic. However, Member States reported that the HTS-dominated “Salvation Government” assembled and vetted the individuals in exchange for material support.

West Africa

31. The reported death of AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel (QDi.232) on 3 June 2020 was a major setback for Al-Qaida. Al-Qaida central lost a prominent historic figure among the group’s top five global leaders and AQIM was directly disrupted. Droukdel’s killing in north-eastern Mali, together with Toufik Chaib (not listed), head of the Jama’a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159) media foundation Al-Zallaqa, underscored the shift of AQIM from North Africa and the prioritization of the Sahel.

32. Without Droukdel’s direct connection with Aiman al-Zawahiri, JNIM chief Iyad Ag Ghali (QDi.316) may be temporarily isolated. However, JNIM affiliates are sufficiently autonomous to ensure continuity and have proved themselves resilient despite the death of a number of AQIM senior officers since 2019. Abu Yahya al-Jazairi, successor of Djamel Akkacha (QDi.313) in the Emirate of Timbuktu, was killed on 6 April 2020 and was rapidly replaced by Sidi Mohamed Ould Ahmed Salem, also known as Talha al-Libi (not listed).

33. The combination of JNIM terrorist and insurgency capabilities and the spread, throughout the region, of radicalization agents able to shape the environment, transform society, fuel intercommunal tensions and undermine national authorities, represent a major long-term threat to stability. Recent activity in Kayes (western Mali), Sikasso (southern Mali), south-western Burkina Faso and northern Côte d’Ivoire illustrates the ability of JNIM to expand its influence to the borders of Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal and replicate the Katiba Macina model of grassroots penetration. The Senufo community in Côte d’Ivoire is now a specific recruitment target, in the same way as the Fulani in the Macina area were in the past.

34. In Burkina Faso, JNIM and Ansarul Islam still support each other through socioreligious dialogue, logistical exchanges and joint tactical operations, facilitated by the relationship between Abdoul Salam Dicko (also known as Jafar) (not listed) and JNIM Fulani groups.

35. However, the peaceful coexistence of JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (QDe.163) has ended. Katiba Macina first registered some defections to ISGS in November 2019 and then observed significant increases in ISGS troop numbers and expansion into JNIM areas of operations. When ISGS reached strategic parts of the Gourma, Iyad Ag Ghali and Amadou Koufa (QDi.425) decided to push the group back. Major clashes started in March 2020 and JNIM was reinforced by Tuareg groups and self-defence militias from northern Mali. Abu Hamza

al-Chinguetti (not listed), official successor of Al-Mansour Ag al-Kassam in Katiba Gourma, actively participated in those engagements.

36. ISGS exploited the situation in increasingly sophisticated propaganda materials. In its newsletter al-Naba, ISIL condemned the flexible implementation of the sharia by JNIM and its willingness to negotiate with the Government of Mali. As a result of sustained operational pressure from JNIM and successful counter-terrorism operations, ISGS returned to the Liptako area and deployed along the border of Burkina Faso with the Niger. Nevertheless, ISGS remains the most dangerous group in the tri-border area, where it benefits from the support of family members within local communities and reported financial agreements with some armed groups in Mali that were signatories to the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Process in 2015.

37. ISGS can build on its direct contacts with the ISIL core and is less isolated than in previous years. The group also has a logistical relationship with the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162), although the groups currently remain operationally distinct.

38. In the Sahel, terrorist groups benefit from artisanal gold mining in their deployment areas. Financing of terrorism occurs when they receive funding for protection or collect zakat, as observed in Burkina Faso and Tin Zaoutène, In Tebezas and Talahandak, north of Kidal in Mali. Kidnapping for ransom likely remains their main source of financing.

39. On 23 March 2020, Ba Koura (not listed), Boko Haram³ emir in the lake Chad region, led an attack in which approximately 100 Chadian soldiers were killed in Bohoma. They were forced back to Nigeria, together with some ISWAP combatants, by mid-April 2020. However, those successful security operations will not necessarily have a long-term impact on the groups.

40. ISWAP, which claimed a series of attacks in Borno and Yobe States in Nigeria, as well as in the southern Niger and north-western Cameroon, apparently remained operationally effective despite its latest power struggle. Abu Abdullah Idris Ibn Umar al-Barnawi (also known as Ba Idrissa) (not listed), who succeeded Abu Musab al-Barnawi (also known as Habib) (not listed) in 2019, was replaced by Abu Hapsa (also known as Malam Lawan) (not listed) in January 2020. Ba Idrissa may have been deposed and possibly killed with the blessing of the ISIL core following his execution of his deputy, Mustapha Kirimima. Despite this turmoil, ISWAP and its 3,500 members are still a major focus in ISIL global propaganda.

41. Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (also known as Ansaru) (QDe.142) was reactivated in October 2019 and claimed attacks on Nigerian troops in January 2020 outside Boko Haram and ISWAP areas of operations. Nigeria counter-attacked and inflicted significant losses on Ansaru, which since then has yet to claim further attacks.

East Africa

42. Al-Qaida affiliate Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (Al-Shabaab) (SOe.001) continued its activities and attacks across Somalia unabated and largely unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Al-Shabaab ideologues and clerics continued to disparage the COVID-19 threat and resisted lockdown attempts in various administrative areas under their control. The operational focus persisted and Member States observed that there had been no reduction in the momentum of attacks, mobilization and online presence (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 37).

³ Listed as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (QDe.138).

43. Mogadishu and its outskirts remained the focus for high-value attacks and foreign targets. The city witnessed an upsurge in complex attacks against civilian and military targets including markets, hotels and road construction projects. There were also attacks and attempted attacks on the United Nations camp and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) bases. Several ambushes on troop convoys, assassinations, shootings and low-scale hit-and-run incidents were conducted. In addition, numerous Al-Shabaab attacks occurred across Somalia, including in Bakool, Bari, Bay, Gedo, Juba and Shabelle regions.

44. Beyond Somalia, emboldened by the January attack on a United States military base on Manda Island in Kenya, Al-Shabaab leadership urged its fighters to conduct attacks abroad. Low-scale cross-border incursions into Kenya and other neighbouring countries continued during the reporting period. There was a resurgence of kidnapping for ransom and attempts at abductions of professionals including health-care workers, security personnel, teachers and administrators, with Al-Shabaab planning to deploy them to provide services in Al-Shabaab-controlled territories.

45. Meanwhile, Member States and AMISOM continued military operations targeting Al-Shabaab leaders and their bases in Jilib, Bu'aale, Janale, Jamame and Sakow. As a result, Al-Shabaab suffered attrition among its ranks, but remained focused. The military operations created suspicion within the group, as the top leaders took cover and restricted their movements, while some fighters were dislocated or moved to other regions where they lay low or continued their activities. Al-Shabaab demonstrated its capacity to adapt in the face of sustained operations.

46. Member States informed the Monitoring Team that Al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Diriye (SOi.014) had been indisposed for some time. Some senior commanders have been expelled by the leader following wrangling over biased distribution of resources to the various clans. For now, the implications of the expulsion of the commanders for the Al-Shabaab leadership and activities are unclear.

47. Alongside known sources of Al-Shabaab funding (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 42), a Member State observed that Yemen continued to be the external source of small and light weapons, ammunition and explosives which are readily available on the open market. The conduit is through a network of intermediaries who deliver consignments every two months to agreed points off the coastline of Somalia for onward transmission to Al-Shabaab operatives.

48. In the first half of 2020, the ISIL affiliate in Somalia recorded an upsurge in small-scale improvised explosive device attacks and assassinations in Puntland, Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle, where the group maintains small pockets of presence and a training camp with some recruits. Meanwhile, ISIL contended with intense military operations and airstrikes in Boosaaso, Bari region, where it incurred casualties, the loss of weapons and vehicles and the arrest of some of its operatives, including the driver of Abdikadir Mu'min (not listed), the leader of the ISIL affiliate in Somalia. Member States continued monitoring activities and communication between ISIL in Somalia and Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) affiliates and their loose networks (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 44).

Central and Southern Africa

49. During the reporting period, Member States observed that ISCAP continued to mutate, as its operatives remained resolute in their focus to establish a caliphate despite incurring losses and casualties. Member States observed improved improvised explosive device capability and use of asymmetrical methods of attack (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 43). The group managed to organize and intensify attacks against the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

positions, as well as reprisals against the civilian population. In the process, several bases were destroyed and several ISCAP operatives and fighters were incarcerated. As a result, one Member State observed movement of some ISCAP elements to the north-eastern Ituri Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where several attacks took place that led to the arrest of fighters associated with ISCAP in May 2020.

50. A Member State reported an influx of suspected foreign terrorist fighters attempting to conceal their identities through requests for refugee status. There is ongoing tracking of several Somali and other nationals who applied for refugee and asylum status but later disappeared. Some are suspected ISCAP operatives.

51. In early 2020, ISCAP activities in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, gained momentum as the group launched complex attacks on several locations. The attacks were concentrated in the three districts of Mocimboa da Praia, Muidumbe and Quissanga. ISCAP operatives briefly took over some villages and they openly addressed inhabitants while displaying ISCAP banners. In a communiqué issued on 23 April 2020, the Mozambique authorities acknowledged the role of ISIL in the attacks and links to foreign terrorist elements.⁴

D. Europe

52. In the first half of 2020, three ISIL-inspired attacks took place in France and two in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Other attacks were foiled. Most plans included simple courses of action by lone actors against random targets in public areas or symbolic law enforcement targets. The threat remains moderate across western and northern Europe, mainly from Internet-driven homegrown extremists (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 46) and rarely involving networks or the use of explosives for mass casualties. Radicalization in prisons and the release of dangerous individuals remain an acute concern (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 47).

53. The external threat still exists, with limited attempts by ISIL to develop cells in Europe from the Hawl camp. The arrest in Cyprus in May 2020 of nine individuals from the Syrian Arab Republic and one each from Egypt and Turkmenistan linked to either ISIL-or Al-Qaida-affiliated groups illustrates the ability of alleged terrorists to use illegal migration routes to reach Europe, and also the effectiveness of counter-terrorist cooperation using the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) Information System, International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) databases and the Federal Bureau of Investigation Terrorist Screening Centre.

54. Migrants are targeted by radicalizers through dedicated tutorials and online chatrooms in Arabic. Self-radicalization is also driven by homemade movies from returnees and a range of activities on social media. Tutorials also exist on methods to avoid detection by security services. The Europol operation to disrupt ISIL content on the messaging application Telegram in the fourth quarter of 2019 had a significant impact, but ISIL sympathizers have since returned to the platform; there was also an increase in the amount of ISIL-related propaganda being shared on Twitter during the pandemic.

55. In the Nordic region, propaganda has been fuelled by local grievances generated by the burning of Qur'ans in October 2019 and enduring references to the satirical cartoons crisis of 2005. Self-radicalized individuals support the idea of global terrorism regardless of whether it is in the name of ISIL or Al-Qaida. The growth of

⁴ Mozambique, Presidency of the Republic, Press Office, press release from the National Defence and Security Council (23 April 2020).

far-right extremism is now seen as the emerging threat in the region and in some other parts of Europe, resulting in intelligence services shifting operational and analytical priorities away from ISIL and Al-Qaida sympathizers. These, however, are seen by Member States as motivating and being motivated by far-right terrorists since the attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019.

56. Member States in the Nordic region and the western Balkans reported the influence of preachers sympathetic to ISIL or Al-Qaida as a challenge. In the Nordic region, some have moved their activities underground after authorities closed mosques or brought legal action against them. In Sweden, recent security operations led to the arrest of six imams involved in the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and the closure of a network of extremist schools that employed six individuals associated with ISIL. In the western Balkans, local imams engaged in radicalization continue their activities, keeping a low profile. These include Rexhep Memishi (not listed), Shefqet Krasniqi (not listed), Abid Podbićanin (not listed), Idriz Bilibani (not listed) and Nusret Imamovic (QDi.374). Member States report that the most prominent extremist imams in the Balkans support Al-Qaida over ISIL as a result of the influence of clerics with ties to terrorist organizations in Egypt. One of these imams, Sadullah Bajrami (not listed), had strong links with Al-Qaida and founded a non-governmental organization under a name that translates as “light of mercy”.

57. Central Asian and Chechen terrorist networks are emerging in Europe. A group of Tajik nationals that sought ISIL guidance on carrying out attacks and recruiting terrorists among migrants was recently arrested in Germany. Other groups comprising ethnic Chechen and Tajik nationals linked to organized crime are a source of ongoing concern. For example, Rakhmat Akilov, who perpetrated an attack in Stockholm in 2017, had links to at least one of the five Uzbeks and one Kyrgyz arrested in Sweden in April 2018 while in possession of chemical materials, military vests, knives, gas masks and maps of transit hubs. An Uzbek cluster composed of individuals involved in financial irregularities associated with organized crime and terrorist financing was also identified.

58. Repatriation of female foreign terrorist fighters and children from the core conflict zone remains a challenge for most European countries. Most European countries are opposed to repatriating women who are considered dangerous and face difficulties repatriating children without their mothers. By contrast, authorities in the western Balkans tend to see women as having travelled for family rather than ideological reasons. However, some female returnees to Kosovo⁵ were initially accepted by their communities but later rejected.

E. Asia

Central and South Asia

59. ISIL-K continues to suffer losses in Kunar Province, to where it moved from Nangarhar Province at the end of 2019. In April and May, the Afghan special forces conducted a series of countrywide operations that led to the arrest of leaders of the group, including Aslam Farooqi (also known as Abdullah Orokzai) (not listed), the head of ISIL-K, his predecessor Zia ul-Haq (also known as Abu Omar Khorasani) (not listed) and other senior members.

60. According to some Member States, ISIL-K is seeking to pursue “a global agenda” by implementing the ISIL core’s leadership approach, which considers Afghan territory a base for spreading terrorist influence across the wider region.

⁵ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Although in territorial retreat, ISIL-K remains capable of carrying out high-profile attacks in various parts of the country, including Kabul. It also aims to attract Taliban fighters who oppose the agreement with the United States. In case of further military pressure on ISIL-K in Kunar, the group is expected to retreat to Badakhshan and other northern provinces.

61. The Monitoring Team estimates the current ISIL-K membership in Afghanistan at 2,200.⁶ The leader is sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal (not listed), previously the head of ISIL-K in Kunar. The leadership also includes Syrian national Abu Said Mohammad al-Khorasani (not listed) and sheikh Abdul Tahir (not listed). The Team was informed that two senior ISIL commanders, Abu Qutaibah (not listed) and Abu Hajar al-Iraqi (not listed), had arrived in Afghanistan from the Middle East. Through foreign terrorist fighters, ISIL-K has maintained contact with new overall ISIL leader, al-Mawla, although the ISIL core is no longer assessed to play a key role in the internal decision-making of ISIL-K.

62. A number of other terrorist groups are active in Afghanistan, most operating under the umbrella of the Taliban but some aligned with ISIL-K. The death of Abdukholik, the head of the Uzbek fighters in ISIL-K, in January 2020, contributed to the departure of some of the Uzbek component of the group, in particular family members. One group of Central Asian fighters went to Faryab Province, where they joined the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (QDe.010). Another reportedly travelled to Kabul Province, planning to leave Afghanistan via the Islamic Republic of Iran for Turkey to join the local pro-ISIL Central Asian diaspora.

63. IMU membership has grown to 140 people, including family members, under the leadership of Abdulaziz Yuldashev (not listed). The main IMU locations are the Almar and Davlat Abad districts of Faryab Province. In Faryab, KIB operates under the umbrella of the Taliban while maintaining close contact with its core leadership in Idlib Province. On 29 February 2020, Abu Yusuf Muhajir (not listed),⁷ the head of KIB in the Syrian Arab Republic, was the first Central Asian terrorist leader to congratulate the Taliban on their agreement with the United States, describing it as “the great victory of the Islamic Ummah”.

64. According to Member States, Al-Qaida is covertly active in 12 Afghan provinces and Aiman al-Zawahiri remains based in the country. The Monitoring Team estimates the total number of Al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan at between 400 and 600. The leadership maintains close contact with the Haqqani Network (TAe.012). In February 2020, al-Zawahiri met with Yahya Haqqani (TAi.169), the primary Haqqani Network contact with Al-Qaida since mid-2009, to discuss ongoing cooperation.⁸

65. Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) operates under the Taliban umbrella from Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar Provinces. The group reportedly has between 150 and 200 members from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan. The current leader of AQIS is Osama Mahmood (not listed), who succeeded the late Asim Umar (not listed). AQIS is reportedly planning retaliation operations in the region to avenge the death of its former leader.

66. A large terrorist group present in Afghanistan, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (QDe.132), is led by Amir Noor Wali Mehsud (not listed), supported by his deputy

⁶ Member State assessments of ISIL-K strength vary.

⁷ One Member State assesses that the strength of IMU in Afghanistan is 1,500, including family members.

⁸ Detailed information regarding Al-Qaida activity in Afghanistan is available in the eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution [2501 \(2019\)](#) concerning the Taliban and other associated individuals and entities constituting a threat to the peace, stability and security of Afghanistan ([S/2020/415](#)).

Qari Amjad (not listed) and TTP spokesperson Mohammad Khorasani (not listed). TTP has claimed responsibility for various high-profile attacks in Pakistan and has facilitated others by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) (QDe.152) and Lahskhar-e-Islam. Many former TTP members have already joined ISIL-K and Member States expect that the group and its various splinter groups will align themselves with ISIL-K. The total number of Pakistani foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan, posing a threat to both countries, is estimated at between 6,000 and 6,500, most of them with TTP.

67. According to Member States, the ETIM presence in Afghanistan is mainly in Badakhshan, Kunduz and Takhar Provinces. Approximately 500 fighters of the group operate in Badakhshan, primarily in Raghistan and Warduj Districts. According to Member States, ETIM collaborates in Afghanistan with the Islamic Jihad Group (QDe.119), Lashkar-e-Islam and TTP.

68. One Member State reported that the ISIL Indian affiliate (Hind Wilayah), which was announced on 10 May 2019, has between 180 and 200 members. According to the report, there are significant numbers of ISIL operatives in Kerala and Karnataka States.

69. The Monitoring Team was informed that ISIL-K also works with networks of supporters in Maldives. On 15 April 2020, five government speedboats were damaged in an arson attack at Mahibadhoo Harbour on Ariatholhu Dhekunuburi, which ISIL claimed as its first attack in Maldives. According to Member State information, the attack was a retaliation against government investigations into extremism and drug trafficking. The attack was covered extensively in ISIL media networks in South Asia, with the *al-Naba* claim of responsibility also translated into Dhivehi. Member States remain concerned about radicalization and recruitment in Maldives.

South-East Asia

70. Indonesia continues to register successes against ISIL affiliates, reporting more than 80 arrests since January 2020 in 16 of the 32 provinces of Indonesia, and disrupting attacks while in the planning stages. Most of the individuals arrested were members of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) (QDe.164), which was added to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list in March 2020, and Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (MIT), also known as East Indonesia Mujahideen.

71. Notwithstanding sporadic activity directed against Indonesian law enforcement or government targets, there were no successful large-scale attacks by Indonesian ISIL or Al-Qaida affiliates over the reporting period. In late March, a group of JAD members was arrested in central Java for planning the bombing of a police station and a series of robberies with the aim of financing terrorist activities. An attack by members of MIT on a local police officer in central Sulawesi Province in April resulted in the death of two terrorists who were carrying ISIL flags. The group is currently assessed to be quite small, numbering fewer than 20. A suspected member of JAD killed an Indonesian police officer with a sword in south Kalimantan province on 1 June 2020. Although ISIL claimed responsibility for the attack, it was assessed by Indonesian authorities as being inspired and not directed by ISIL leadership.

72. Public opinion and official policy in Indonesia both remain opposed to the repatriation of Indonesian nationals detained in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. According to current assessments, approximately 1,500 Indonesians are assessed to have travelled to the conflict zone. Close to 700 are believed to remain in the region, primarily in detention or in camps for internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Of those 700, approximately 400 are minors, a number of whom were born to Indonesian parents abroad. Indonesian authorities are working to repatriate orphans under the age of 10 from the region. Officials acknowledge that the process of

determining whether the minor is in fact an orphan with parental ties to Indonesia is complex.

73. Four ISIL affiliates, some with their own factions, are assessed to be based in the southern Philippines, which continues to offer permissive space for training and operational planning. The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (QDe.001) is the largest of these affiliates. Others include the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and remnants of both the Maute Group and Ansarul Khilafah Philippines. Clashes between these groups and government military or security forces have been ongoing throughout 2020, with one of the deadliest attacks occurring on 17 April 2020, when 11 soldiers from the Philippine Army were killed in a firefight with ASG in Sulu Province.

74. One Member State highlighted the ongoing role of social media in fundraising, in particular for families of foreign terrorist fighters who remain in the conflict zone. These often take the form of charitable appeals and feature images of women and children living in Hawl Camp. Kidnap for ransom remains a preferred means of fundraising for groups in the southern Philippines, with Indonesian fishermen regularly targeted. A Filipino physician was abducted by ASG in February 2020 but was rescued by Philippine security forces in March with no ransom paid. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia circulated an advisory on 22 May 2020 warning of Abu Sayyaf Group members planning to conduct kidnappings in the waters near Sabah, Malaysia.⁹

75. Across the region, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have emboldened some ISIL affiliates to step up fundraising and propaganda activities, believing that the attention of security services may be focused elsewhere. As noted above, this has not translated into an increased tempo of attacks. One Member State observed that ISIL propaganda in the region was highlighting an “end-times” narrative, suggesting that COVID-19 represented divine punishment.

III. Impact assessment

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

76. ISIL financial reserves are currently assessed by Member States to total approximately \$100 million. The absence of populations under ISIL control limits the scale of revenue it is able to collect through extortion and illegal taxation. Nevertheless, the group continues to raise funds deemed sufficient for its ongoing operations in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic through kidnap for ransom, donations, some commercial activity and the extortion of individuals and businesses. ISIL assets are believed to take the form of cash, buried or stored in caches across the conflict zone or kept with financial facilitators in neighbouring countries. Some of the funds have been invested in legitimate businesses in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries. Networks of trusted couriers are relied upon to move and store those assets. As some financial facilitators are captured or killed in counter-terrorism operations, knowledge of the whereabouts of hidden funds may also be lost, or the funds themselves may become inaccessible with the loss of territorial control.

77. In its last report (S/2020/53, para. 75), the Monitoring Team highlighted the issue of remittances to individuals in camps for internally displaced persons in the

⁹ Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, “Warning 01-2020”, 22 May 2020. Available at [www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/alerts/2020/Warning%2001-2020%20\(22%20May\).pdf](http://www.recaap.org/resources/ck/files/alerts/2020/Warning%2001-2020%20(22%20May).pdf).

Syrian Arab Republic from family members abroad. Member States have recently informed the Team that some such transactions have in fact been reported to financial intelligence units that are seeking to monitor remittances from relatives or friends to foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. One Member State noted that transactions involving the transfer of funds from multiple, unrelated individuals to a single entity or individual in a neighbouring country have been observed. That entity or individual subsequently delivers the funds to the ultimate beneficiary in the conflict zone via informal remittance channels. In addition to funds from relatives, Member States also report funds flowing to foreign terrorist fighters and dependants via fundraising campaigns organized social media. These have been described as small, ad hoc campaigns that seek to aid “brothers and sisters” who use the funds both for supplies and to pay bribes with the aim of leaving camps for internally displaced persons or detention facilities.

78. This method of fundraising is illustrated by several recent cases in the Republic of Korea and the United Kingdom. In April 2020, a court in the United Kingdom convicted and sentenced two supporters of ISIL for financing terrorism, among other charges.¹⁰ According to published accounts, the men, both frustrated travellers to Iraq, responded to requests from an ISIL member in Iraq to support “brothers abroad,” ultimately sending some \$3,400 in several instalments. In the Republic of Korea, there have been two cases of Central Asians transferring \$960 and \$2,000 respectively to Al-Qaida affiliates in the Syrian Arab Republic. One was sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment in January 2020, and the other to 12 months in June 2020 by a court in the Republic of Korea.

79. The Monitoring Team has previously reported that the use of cryptocurrencies by terrorist financiers is anecdotal (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 78). The Team received information from a private sector entity that monitors the volume and value of cryptocurrency flows in and out of the conflict zone. This entity reported increases in such flows over the last year to beneficiaries associated with terrorist activity in the Syrian Arab Republic. A virtual asset currency exchange, identified as Bitcoin Transfer, based in the Syrian Arab Republic, maintains an active presence on social media, including WhatsApp and Telegram, where it provides instructions for establishing cryptocurrency wallets and using the service for the transfer of funds. Malhama Tactical, a group of Central Asian and Chechen fighters in Idlib engaged in training militant groups, including HTS, has solicited donations from sympathizers over this channel.

B. Resolution 2347 (2017) on cultural heritage

80. During the reporting period, the widespread lockdown arising from the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to an increase in illegal excavations and thefts from archaeological sites in conflict zones. As previously reported by the Monitoring Team (see [S/2018/705](#), para. 73), at the first level of trafficking in cultural property, local populations often participate in the looting to earn money. More people may have turned to looting as an alternative form of income as a result of the loss of regular employment because of the lockdown. In addition, as demonstrated by previous periods of crisis, criminal networks specializing in trafficking in cultural property could exploit the diminished deterrence capacity of the authorities, which are occupied with the pandemic. The Team has continued to engage with Member States and relevant international organizations with a focus on raising awareness of and keeping attention on looting and smuggling of cultural property from conflict zones as a source of terrorist financing.

¹⁰ Metropolitan Police, “Two men jailed for funding terrorism,” 24 April 2020.

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

81. Member States assume that the directive issued in September 2019 by al-Baghdadi, the late ISIL leader, on efforts to release its detainees and dependants remains in force. Meanwhile, the impact of COVID-19 on this issue has been unhelpful, with its strain on de facto authorities in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic adding to the precariousness of holding arrangements. There have been instances of escapes or other unauthorized departures, while organized repatriation efforts have been halted.

82. The pandemic poses an even greater challenge in the context of overcrowded facilities in the core conflict zone and elsewhere. The residents are at greater risk and certainly perceive themselves as being so, which adds to the difficulty of keeping order in the facilities. There are analogous concerns about the viability of keeping inmates in cramped detention facilities around the world, with Member States seeking to balance these issues against the need to avoid the premature release of dangerous convicts. Pul-e-Charkhi prison in Afghanistan was problematically overcrowded and difficult to control even in pre-pandemic times, and the Government is now under intensified pressure not to allow the virus to spread more than can be helped.

83. The Monitoring Team continues to raise Security Council resolution 2396 (2017) with Member State interlocutors at every opportunity, and to support the United Nations approach to the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, detainees, displaced persons and dependants by emphasizing the increase in the medium to long-term threat, which would inevitably result from leaving the problem to fester, unresolved. Repatriation of these people to their States of origin and/or nationality needs to be addressed again as soon as practically possible for threat mitigation, as well as other reasons. Foreign terrorist fighters associated with the ISIL so-called caliphate, and their dependants, continue to represent a challenge for preventing future violent extremism and terrorism, as well as a cross-cutting challenge for Member States' counter-terrorism efforts. As increasing numbers of returnees are released from short custodial sentences in the coming months and years it will be vital to examine this issue in conjunction with prison radicalization, probation and other related issues.

IV. Implementation of sanctions measures

A. Travel ban

84. The travel ban sanctions measures continue to play a vital role in preventing and disrupting the international movement of listed individuals and foreign terrorist fighters. They become vulnerable to detection at border crossing points where officials have an opportunity to screen their travel documents against international and national databases and watch lists when they attempt to enter or exit the territory of a Member State. This illustrates the importance of the accuracy and efficiency of the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list for positive identification of listed persons.

85. Since the last report (S/2020/53), the Monitoring Team has not received any information from Member States that individuals designated on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list attempted to travel or have been stopped at border points. In addition, no requests for exemptions to the travel ban were received from Member States.

86. Member States continue to have problems with false positive hits during travel checking and screening procedures, which may require further action from Member States to enhance the quality of the sanctions list. The Monitoring Team continues to urge Member States to provide additional information on listed individuals to address this challenge (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 90). The location and identifying details of listed individuals are essential data to mitigate the risk of terrorist travel and the Team continues to work through the annual review process and with Member States in order for the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities to be informed of any change in circumstances of any listed individual as soon as information become available to the relevant national authorities.

87. Cooperation between Member States and INTERPOL is a vital tool to strengthen counter-terrorism efforts and improve the implementation of sanctions measures, including the travel ban. Following the military defeat of ISIL in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, an increased number of foreign terrorist fighters, including listed individuals, attempted to leave the conflict zone either to return home or to relocate to other conflict zones.

88. Member States reported that ISIL had collected passports and other identification documents from arriving foreign terrorist fighters and had stored them for potential use for international travel. The Monitoring Team observes that keeping the INTERPOL Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database updated is one of the key elements to prevent terrorist movement (see [S/2015/441](#), paras. 61 and 62).

89. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States to commend their efforts in sharing relevant information on foreign terrorist fighters with INTERPOL and encourage them to provide further information without unreasonable delay in accordance with national legislation.

90. The Monitoring Team continues to promote Member State engagement with various international organizations and private sector stakeholders to update the Committee on its findings on travel ban implementation. The Team continues to interact with Member States, the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Air Transport Association regarding the incorporation of advance passenger information and passenger name record systems into national border control mechanisms (see [S/2019/570](#), para. 88). The Team actively participates in the Working Group on Border Management and Law Enforcement relating to Counter-Terrorism within the framework of the Office of Counter-Terrorism of the Secretariat and is involved in the ongoing Global Counterterrorism Forum watch listing guidance manual initiative.

91. The Monitoring Team has observed that COVID-19 has affected terrorists' ability to travel internationally as a result of many Member States deciding to close their national borders. As Member States begin to ease travel restrictions, foreign terrorist fighters and listed individuals may attempt to travel again, for the purpose either of finding refuge or of accelerating recruitment. The Team will urge Member States to continue sharing real-time information on foreign terrorist fighters, returnees and relocators, as well as listed individuals, between each other and with the Committee and INTERPOL.

B. Asset freeze

92. The Monitoring Team, in cooperation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, authored a report ([S/2020/493](#)) on measures taken by Member States to disrupt terrorist financing. The report, mandated by the Security Council in

paragraph 37 of its resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#), was based on information received from 112 Member States regarding, inter alia, implementation of resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#) and subsequent resolutions concerning the freezing of assets. The Team is in possession of current information provided by almost 60 per cent of United Nations Member States regarding the implementation of those measures.

93. Analysis of responses shows that approximately one quarter of responding States have identified and frozen assets of individuals and entities listed under resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#) and related resolutions; 10 per cent of responding States provided a monetary value for the financial assets frozen. The overall total value of assets reported was approximately \$61,318,000.¹¹ The Monitoring Team was encouraged to learn that the vast majority, approximately 90 per cent of responding States, communicate sanctions listings related to resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#) to their private sectors for implementation using electronic means with the aim of achieving implementation of the sanctions with as little delay as possible.

94. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States to recall the request set out in resolution [2462 \(2019\)](#) regarding asset-freezing actions and the need for implementation of the measures contained in paragraph 1 of resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), and to request that States share such information with the Monitoring Team. The Monitoring Team further recommends that the Committee, in such a letter, recall measures related to exemptions to the asset freeze, as detailed in paragraph 81 of resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#), and the Monitoring Team's willingness to provide support in the implementation of asset-freezing measures.

C. Arms embargo

95. Member States reported the continued threat posed by improvised explosive devices. In Iraq, ISIL is reportedly deploying improvised mines with home-made explosives and anti-lift switches that make mine detection on roads more difficult. The effect of these devices has been to impede the movement of security convoys in ISIL-ridden areas. A Member State specifically highlighted the difficulty of moving forces between Akashat and Rawah through Qa'im in Anbar Province, making it difficult to control the movement of ISIL in that area close to the border with the Syrian Arab Republic. Member States also reported an increase in the use of imported commercial radio-controlled transmitters and passive infrared switches for improvised explosive devices with almost no modification in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

96. In the core conflict zone, ISIL is also deploying improvised explosive devices with secondary and tertiary means of initiation, which complicate render-safe procedures. While listed terrorist groups are increasingly resorting to the use of improvised charges, the increased use of off-the-shelf initiators provides an opportunity for tracing ISIL logistical support networks. This opportunity is further enhanced if proper post-blast investigations are followed, and if inter-agency channels of information-sharing function effectively.

97. In sections of the present report, the continued use by ISIL of improvised explosive devices in all theatres, with varying degrees of sophistication, is underlined. In February 2020, the United Nations Mine Action Service launched the Smart IED Threat Mitigation Technology Road Map (SMiTMiTR), an information-exchange

¹¹ Several Member States included the value of assets belonging to entities and individuals that fall outside the scope of Security Council sanctions, therefore the total value of assets frozen strictly pursuant to resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#) could not be determined.

platform that compiles information on global improvised explosive device threats and on the technology available to mitigate them. The platform was designed in collaboration with Member States, research institutions and commercial companies. Its purpose is to connect users and field operation experts with available technology or research related to any specified type of improvised explosive device threat.

98. **The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States to inform them of the presence of the SMiTMiTR platform run by the United Nations Mine Action Service and to encourage their relevant agencies, as well as the private sector industries and research institutions under their jurisdiction, to contribute to the information available on the platform, in accordance with Member State legislation, and to avail themselves of this tool, which addresses some of the technical challenges in the prevention, detection and mitigation of existing and evolving improvised explosive device threats.**

99. ISIL and Al-Qaida remain active on social media, using platforms and messaging applications to share information and communicate with followers for the purposes of recruitment, planning and fundraising. Although the Europol operation in November 2019 to remove extremist content from Telegram appears to have had some impact on the ability of ISIL to disseminate its message, the group has found ways to mitigate the clampdown. To achieve a wide dispersal of video and audio messages in April and May 2020, ISIL used several smaller platforms and file-sharing services, including Dropbox, Files.fm, Internet Archive, Microsoft OneDrive, Nextcloud, Ok.ru, Rocket.Chat and Vimeo. For messaging, Member States reported that ISIL and Al-Qaida are looking for tenable alternatives to Telegram. In a May 2020 issue of *Ibaa*' magazine, HTS actively urged its followers and other militant groups in the Syrian Arab Republic to move permanently away from Telegram, Facebook Messenger and Viber and instead use other end-to-end encryption applications such as Conversations, Riot, Signal and Wire.

100. While ISIL propaganda characterizes COVID-19 as a divine weapon, there have been no indications that ISIL is systematically attempting to weaponize the virus. The Monitoring Team has seen reports of some preliminary thinking along these lines and other terrorist groups have looked at the option more seriously, which may itself prompt ISIL and/or Al-Qaida to do so because terrorists take an interest in each other's propaganda and tactics. This is a potential threat that needs to be kept under review.

V. Monitoring Team activities and feedback

101. Between January and June 2020, the Monitoring Team conducted 12 country and technical visits. In addition, the Team held two regional meetings, one for Member States in the western Balkans and another for Member States in the Nordic region. The onset of travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic cut short the Team's consultation and meeting schedule. To the best of the Team's ability, alternative arrangements were sought using virtual meetings. These arrangements do not fully obviate the need for in-person discussions, in particular when sensitive matters are discussed, and the Team looks forward to resuming official travel as soon as possible.

102. The Monitoring Team continued to promote the sanctions regime through its participation in four conferences, meetings and workshops, organized by the Financial Action Task Force, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the Arab Interior Ministers Council and the European Union. The Team continued its engagement with entities and associations in the financial, natural resources, antiquities, defence and information technology sectors. During the reporting period, the Team participated in

meetings organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, cooperating closely with them in the production of mandated reports of the Secretary-General. The Team remains a member of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, participating in meetings of its working groups.

103. The Monitoring Team welcomes feedback on the present report at 1267mt@un.org.

Annex

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

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

Pakistan

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

3. In addition to the two cases mentioned above, a trustee of Pakistan Relief Foundation (listed as an alias of Al-Akhtar Trust International) has challenged the freezing of his bank account.²

¹ Information provided by Pakistan.

² Information provided by Pakistan.