



## Security Council

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### **Letter dated 15 July 2021 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council**

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

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

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



[Original: English]

**Letter dated 25 June 2021 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-eighth comprehensive report, pursuant to annex I to resolution 2368 (2017). The Monitoring Team notes that the document of reference is the English original.

*(Signed)* Edmund **Fitton-Brown**  
Coordinator  
Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team

**Twenty-eighth 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*

The first half of 2021 saw broad continuity in terms of the nature and source of the threats posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al-Qaida and their affiliates, along with heightened threats emerging in some regions. This is especially true in parts of West and East Africa, where affiliates of both groups can boast gains in supporters and territory under threat, as well as growing capabilities in fundraising and weapons, for example, in the use of drones. The picture in Europe and other non-conflict zones stands in contrast: closures brought on by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have slowed the movement and gathering of people while increasing the risk of online radicalization.

In Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, the core conflict zone of ISIL, the group has evolved into an entrenched insurgency, exploiting weaknesses in local security to find safe havens and targeting forces engaged in counter-ISIL operations. Attacks in Baghdad in January and April 2021 underscore the group's resilience despite heavy counter-terrorism pressure from Iraqi authorities. Groups aligned with Al-Qaida continue to dominate the Idlib area in the north-west region of the Syrian Arab Republic, where terrorist fighters number more than 10,000. Although there has been only limited relocation of foreign terrorist fighters from that region to other conflict zones, Member States are concerned about the possibility of such movement, in particular to Afghanistan, should the environment there become more hospitable to ISIL or groups aligned with Al-Qaida.

In Central, South and South-East Asia, affiliates of ISIL and Al-Qaida continue to operate notwithstanding key leadership losses in some cases and sustained pressure from security forces. The status of Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is unknown. If alive, several Member States assess that he is ailing, leading to an acute leadership challenge for Al-Qaida.

Conditions for residents of displaced persons facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic remain dire, with ever-present concerns about the levels of radicalization and its risks to minors. The repatriation of the families of foreign terrorist fighters remains an issue that the international community has been slow to confront.

Funds assessed to be readily available to ISIL have declined from estimates in the hundreds of millions of dollars to between \$25 million and \$50 million, still leaving the group with significant resources. Terrorist finance facilitators in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and neighbouring States continue to operate despite international efforts to locate and eliminate their activities through the pressure of sanctions.

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## I. Overview and evolution of the threat

1. The threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)<sup>1</sup> and Al-Qaida (QDe.004) during the reporting period was characterized by elements of continuity from 2020. Both groups continued to gloat over the harm done by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to their enemies, but were unable to develop a more persuasive narrative. While ISIL contemplated weaponizing the virus, Member States detected no concrete plans to implement that idea. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect terrorist activity, especially in non-conflict zones, where the threat remains artificially suppressed by limitations in travelling, meeting, fundraising and identifying viable targets. Lockdowns in many areas were more comprehensive in early 2021 than in 2020. Attacks that will be executed when restrictions ease may have been planned in various locations. In conflict zones, however, the threat has already increased, given that the impact of the pandemic has been greater on legitimate authorities, who are responsible for tackling the pandemic and keeping personnel safe from it, than on terrorists and insurgents, who can decide for themselves what level of risk they are prepared to take.

2. ISIL continued to suffer attrition to its senior personnel in the Iraqi-Syrian core conflict zone. Its leader, Amir Muhammad Sa'id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla (QDi.426), remains reluctant to communicate directly with supporters. ISIL command and control over its provinces has loosened, although it still functions in terms of the provision of guidance and some financial support. Delegation of authority to the provinces continues, and the group is progressively fleshing out its regional structures, such as those in West Africa and the Sahel region, East and Central Africa, Afghanistan and South Asia. Member States judge that the success of that evolution will be an important determinant of the extent of the future global impact of ISIL. They also note, however, the fundamentally Iraqi and Syrian nature of ISIL and assess that the group will continue to prioritize consolidating and resurging in its core area, encouraged by the political difficulties that inhibit stabilization and recovery in both countries.

3. Al-Qaida has suffered even more severe leadership attrition, calling into question its ability to bring about a succession. Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri (QDi.006) is assessed by Member States to be alive but unwell. An Al-Qaida attempt to showcase him in a video threatening Myanmar in March 2021 but using dated footage only added to rumours of his decline or demise. Member States report that his probable successor is Mohammed Salahaldin Abd El Halim Zidane (alias Sayf-Al Adl – QDi.001), who is currently located in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The leadership succession calculations of Al-Qaida are complicated by the peace process in Afghanistan where, under the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban of February 2020, the Taliban is committed to suppressing any international terrorist threat. It is unclear whether Sayf-Al Adl would be able to travel to Afghanistan to take up the position of leader of Al-Qaida. Some Member States point to his history of living and operating in Africa and assess that he might choose to base himself there.

4. The most striking development of the period under review was the emergence of Africa as the region most affected by terrorism, and in which the largest numbers of casualties inflicted by groups designated under Security Council resolution [1267 \(1999\)](#) occurred. Several of the most successful affiliates of ISIL (its Central Africa and West Africa Province) and Al-Qaida (in Somalia and the Sahel region) are located in the continent, where they are spreading their influence and activities, including across national borders. Instances of contagion from Mali into Burkina Faso, Côte

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

d'Ivoire, the Niger and Senegal and incursions from Nigeria into Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, from Somalia into Kenya and from Mozambique into the United Republic of Tanzania are all concerning. One of the most troubling events of early 2021 was the deterioration of the security situation in Cabo Delgado Province in northern Mozambique, where the local ISIL affiliate stormed and briefly held a strategic port near the border with the United Republic of Tanzania before withdrawing with spoils, positioning it for future raids in the area.

5. The principal variable that Member States expect to complicate the global threat picture remains the human legacy of the ISIL "caliphate", in particular foreign terrorist fighters, other ISIL fighters and activists, and dependants stranded in the core area. Of most concern in that regard are the camps for internally displaced persons and detention facilities in the north-east region of the Syrian Arab Republic. From a counter-terrorism perspective, delaying the processing and rehabilitation and reintegration of residents who are not candidates for prosecution risks radicalizing them and adding to the number of hardened extremists with the potential to multiply the future threat from ISIL, Al-Qaida and any successor groups.

## II. Regional developments

### A. Africa

#### North Africa

6. In Morocco, there is a growing threat from Al-Qaida and ISIL supporters. In April 2021, a cell was dismantled in a joint operation carried out by the United States of America and Morocco. Its members had planned to join ISIL in the Sahel region, but were instead directed by ISIL leaders to target Moroccan forces on the eastern border and the police headquarters in Oujda. Two other ISIL supporters in Missouri and Taza were arrested on 1 June, including a returnee from the Syrian Arab Republic. A total of 1,654 Moroccans joined ISIL and Al-Qaida in the conflict zone; 700 are believed dead while 241 remain detained, and 269 returned to Morocco.

7. ISIL in the Maghreb region is assessed to have a limited presence, with supporters inspired rather than directed to act in the name of ISIL. The security of Algeria is compromised by instability across its southern borders in Mali and the Niger. Approximately 700 Algerian nationals joined ISIL and Al-Qaida in the conflict zone. Some 140, including 95 dual nationals, remain active abroad; 445 have been reported as inactive, including 240 who are deceased. There remains a risk of returnees infiltrating from the South. Hassan Naamoudi, leader of the Algerian ISIL affiliate, Jund al-Khilafah in Algeria (JAK-A) (QDe.151), was killed with four other senior figures in an area west of Algiers in January.

8. The Tunisian Al-Qaida affiliate Uqbah ibn Nafi' Battalion recently lost five of its senior members, weakening its capability and forcing it further underground. On 6 January, authorities arrested Hamza bin Hussein bin Hamida al-Nawali, alias Abu Ubaida (not listed), who had travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic in 2012 to join Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)<sup>2</sup> in the Safirah area of Aleppo, before returning to Tunisia in 2014. Given that most of the senior leaders of Uqbah ibn Nafi' Battalion are Algerian nationals, the relationship between the group and the Algerian branch of The Organization of Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (QDe.014) is close.

9. In Libya, six ISIL members, including two in Tripoli, were recently arrested by the Counter-Terrorism Task Force of the Government of National Accord. Members

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

of this cell and other ISIL elements fled from southern Libya to coastal towns, including Harat al-Zawiyah, Misratah, Qasr al-Qarabulli and Tripoli. In addition, one Member State reported that 200 ISIL fighters had travelled to the Sahel region at the end of April. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (ISIL-Libya) (QDe.165) lost all its senior members and is greatly diminished in the country. One Member State noted that ISIL core had supplied ISIL-Libya with funding couriered by returnees.

10. The Libyan branch of AQIM has become a logistics platform for Al-Qaida affiliates in Mali, with the Fazzan area in the south-west continuing as the strategic crossroad for supplying other groups. AQIM affiliates in North Africa are isolated from one another and the group appears to be prioritizing the success of Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) (QDe.159). The decline of ISIL and Al-Qaida in Libya contrasts with the past appeal of the country to foreign terrorist fighters.

11. In Egypt, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), which pledged allegiance to ISIL in 2014, is assessed to be resilient, with 800 to 1,200 fighters, notwithstanding ongoing Egyptian military pressure. An ABM leader, Salim al-Hamadin, was killed in a security operation south of Rafah in March. He is believed to be one of the persons responsible for the Al-Rawda Mosque attack in November 2017.

### **West Africa**

12. The reported death in May 2021 of Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (Boko Haram) (QDE.138) leader, Abubakar Mohammed Shekau (QDi.322), during an assault by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (QDe.162) has left Boko Haram significantly weakened. Some Member States believe that Shekau may have escaped from the Sambisa Forest and that Ba Koura (not listed) launched a counterattack with remaining Boko Haram fighters. Nevertheless, Boko Haram is under heavy pressure from this offensive enabled by infiltrators and defectors. Its losses are assessed to likely strengthen ISWAP, which comprises 3,000 to 5,000 fighters in the Lake Chad basin and is expected to seek to extend its area of operations towards Maiduguri, Nigeria. Abu Musab al-Barnawi (not listed) was reportedly reinstated as ISWAP leader prior to the attack on Shekau's base. ISWAP launched repeated attacks on towns and military camps between February and May, challenging Nigerian security forces as well as confronting Boko Haram. On the Niger border in the Diffa area, ISWAP commander Abba Gana (not listed) is targeting foreign interests specifically.

13. The reported coup d'état in Mali on 24 May underscores the country's political instability. JNIM has consolidated its influence, increasingly claiming populated areas and engaging with local actors. Community leaders are forced to engage in dialogue with JNIM affiliates if they want to protect civilians from violence, as illustrated by the ceasefire agreement negotiated in March by traditional dozo hunters with Katiba Macina in the circle of Niono. The JNIM leadership continues to embrace the global objectives of Al-Qaida. All JNIM efforts to appeal to Touareg, Arab, Fulani and even Bambara communities appear to be a manoeuvre to control an extended territory with the support of Al-Qaida core and guidance from its Hittin Committee, which was formed in 2015 to facilitate operational and financial connections with Al-Qaida regional affiliates. The approach of ISWAP in the Lake Chad Basin is similar and benefits from support from ISIL core.

14. The succession of Abdelmalek Droukdel (QDi.232) by Abu Ubaydah Yusuf al-Anabi, also known as Yazid Mebrak (QDi.389), was announced by Abdelmalekould Sidi Mokhtar (not listed), emir of the JNIM religious committee. It followed a strict process based on recommendations, elections and an official appointment following approval by the Al-Qaida leadership. The group has made contingency plans for the loss of its most senior commanders to ensure operational continuity.

Al-Anabi provides combat, management, communications and AQIM network experience. Several Member States report that he remains in Algeria, while Iyad Ag Ghali (QDi.316) maintains delegated authority on the Sahel region. With Algerian affiliates of AQIM barely surviving and JNIM expanding, Ag Ghali may surpass Al-Anabi in seniority.

15. A JNIM cell recruiting for Katiba Macina was dismantled in Senegal in January. This, together with at least six attacks in northern Côte d'Ivoire in 2021, underscores the group's ongoing push toward littoral countries, with significant risks to Benin, Ghana and Togo. In Côte d'Ivoire, the use of improvised explosive devices has limited military movements. Radicalization and propaganda have spread faster than violence and are assessed by Member States to pose an equal threat to the region. Fighters continue to relocate from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. JNIM also makes extensive use of small arms and explosives and occasionally deploys drones for aerial reconnaissance.

16. On 2 April, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali killed a JNIM commander while defeating an attack on its Aguelhok base. On 5 June, Baye Ag Bakabo, who was responsible for the murder of two foreign journalists in 2013, was reportedly killed during the planning phase of another attack in the same area. In early 2021, multiple senior officers from the group were killed in Gourma as well, but Member States fear that military successes will be in vain in the absence of a comprehensive political and economic strategy for the region.

17. The approach of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) (QDe.163) differs from that of JNIM and leaves the group with limited political influence. Large-scale attacks by ISGS in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger killed several hundred civilians in early 2021. A lengthy propaganda posting on ISGS in the Niger was released by ISIL core in *Al-Naba* in May to justify the killings on the grounds that the victims had supported the local authorities. The group remains at war with JNIM; the death of its deputy commander, Salama Mohamed Fadhil, also known as Abdelhakim al-Sahraoui (not listed), is still unconfirmed.

18. One Member State highlighted ISGS cattle-rustling revenues as a source of income; another assessed that the interest of JNIM affiliates in the border area among Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo was motivated by access to artisanal gold-mining resources. Gold is a source of competition among local actors, including armed groups and terrorist affiliates. Authorities of Burkina Faso decided on 7 June to close artisanal gold sites in Oudalan and Yagha Provinces following the Solhan attack, which reportedly killed more than 130 people.

19. Kidnapping for ransom remained a primary source of funding for terrorist groups, and expatriate workers have been targeted. Recent mass kidnappings in north-western Nigeria were also confirmed as criminal for-profit activities. Violence in north-western Nigeria should not be understood as an attempt to connect the ISIL Lake Chad Basin and Sahel areas of operations. ISWAP and ISGS maintain a relationship and are linked by a shared ISIL regional structure, but they are geographically far apart and each deals primarily with local issues. In that context, criminals and terrorists may have opportunistic links. ISGS is supplying its fighters with motorcycles and weapons from north-western Nigeria, and JNIM, which is considering using the area as a safe haven with rest facilities, training activities and logistical capabilities, opened a corridor through Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin accordingly.

### **East Africa**

20. Al-Qaida-affiliated Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahidin (Al-Shabaab) (SOe.001) continued its operations in Somalia, exploiting the security vacuum created by the



preoccupation of Somali security forces with pre-election violence. In southern and central Somalia, the group encountered little resistance in capturing several towns and villages in areas that had previously been hostile to it. Heavily armed fighters moved into Mogadishu and occupied strategic positions from which they continue to plan and conduct attacks, forcing residents to flee. The United States military withdrawal and the partial drawdown of the African Union Mission in Somalia left Somali special forces struggling to contain Al-Shabaab without strategic support.

21. In April, Al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Omar Abu Ubaidah (not listed) renewed his call for operatives to attack foreign interests across Somalia as well as allies supporting the Government of Somalia and neighbouring countries, specifically Djibouti. In March, Al-Shabaab attacked Boosaaso prison in Puntland, which is outside its regular area of operations. More than 400 individuals escaped, most of whom were absorbed into the ranks of Al-Shabaab.

22. Al-Shabaab has significantly increased its use of drones to conduct reconnaissance flyovers and record the activities of security forces. Member States expressed concern about the threat from weaponized unmanned aerial vehicles and the group's intent and capacity to launch attacks on aircraft and civil aviation infrastructure. That concern was aroused by Al-Shabaab plans to target low-flying aircraft within Somali airspace and along the border between Kenya and Somalia, which is an important corridor for humanitarian flights and the main route for commercial aircraft landing in Somalia. Al-Shabaab possesses man-portable air defence systems and other conventional weapons that could damage aircraft. Member States also noted the prosecution in the United States of Cholo Abdi Abdullah (not listed), who was undergoing pilot training in the Philippines, as evidence of Al-Shabaab intent in that regard.

23. ISIL is also present in Somalia, in Puntland and, to a lesser extent, Mogadishu. The value of Somalia for ISIL lies in its hosting of the Al Karrar office, which supervises and supports the activities of Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### **Central and Southern Africa**

24. In Mozambique, the northern province of Cabo Delgado became emblematic of the influence of ISIL in Africa in March following the brief occupation by ISCAP of Palma, close to a major gas project led by a multinational company, despite early warning indicators of an imminent attack. Many foreigners were in the area, and a group was surrounded by fighters in a hotel, awaiting extraction for an extended period. Local authorities were unable to defend the city and provide security, as was also the case in Mocímboa da Praia, further south in the same province, which has been occupied by ISCAP since August 2020.

25. ISCAP attracts new recruits with promises of loans, employment and community. Its leadership consists primarily of nationals of the United Republic of Tanzania, including Ahmed Mahmoud Hassan (not listed); the group also attracts individuals from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya. As a destination for economic migrants, Cabo Delgado is an easy arena to which ISCAP can transfer personnel. The region also hosts numerous trafficking activities and is a major entry point to Africa for drugs from Asia. As in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mozambican branch of ISCAP does not rely on government services but benefits from the informal and illegal economy. Members live clandestinely and extort local populations.

26. The group collected between \$1 million and \$2 million from the looting of area banks. Official administrative buildings were raided, and identity cards, driver's licences and passports likely stolen. It also demonstrated the ability to operate at sea

in the vicinity of Matemo, Vamizi and Makalowe Islands, where it engaged in kidnappings, arson and extortion raids using dhows and speedboats.

27. The autonomy of ISCAP, the large number of small operational cells and the absence of significant counter-terrorist measures have effectively turned the group into a major threat with the potential to develop further, possibly west or north into the United Republic of Tanzania. ISCAP remains supported by a focused propaganda campaign from ISIL core.

28. Some South African and Kenyan members of ISCAP are reported to be former supporters of Al-Qaida. One Member State reported that some were part of the ISIL general directorate of provinces and might have played a role in inspiring the Mozambican groups to pledge allegiance to ISIL. The Congolese component of the group in North Kivu Province was reportedly instrumental in establishing a connection between ISIL core and the region to form ISCAP.

29. The extent of the relationship between ISCAP elements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique remains unclear. The Al Karrar office in Puntland, Somalia, is reported to coordinate ISIL operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Somalia. Musa Baluku (not listed), who leads ISCAP in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, diverted the group's resources for his own profit, prior to murdering the son of his main opponent to eliminate competition within the group. He now receives guidance from Al Karrar to recruit, expand the group and develop strategic attacks.

30. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ISCAP extended its area of operation in early 2021 outside Beni in North Kivu Province and the southern part of Ituri Province. The group appeared in South Kivu and Tanganyika Provinces, attacking military and civilian targets. Women and children were reportedly used as human shields to prevent counter-attacks. In order to expand, the Congolese branch of ISCAP will have to navigate other armed groups active in the region, possibly instrumentalize intercommunity disputes and likely attract further foreign terrorist fighters. Its model of insurgency will also require more revenues and possible connections with criminal groups who have control over extractive industries and illegal mining activities.

## **B. Iraq and the Levant**

31. ISIL remains active in wide swathes of the Syrian Arab Republic, where the group is seeking to rebuild its combat capabilities and complete its shift to an insurgency using guerrilla warfare tactics. From hideouts on both sides of the Euphrates River in Dayr al-Zawr, ISIL wages hit-and-run operations against checkpoints. It continues to target convoys and foot and mobile patrols with roadside improvised explosive devices. Its operations against Syrian government forces extend to Hamah and Homs Governorates. East of the Euphrates and "white desert" area, its reach extends well into Raqqah and Hasakah.

32. In response, Syrian government forces and allies launched combing operations against ISIL hideouts within the Syrian desert. In April 2021, Russian forces announced that they had eliminated 200 ISIL fighters in a training camp north-east of Tadmur (Palmyra). In April and May, Russian forces bombed several ISIL hideouts in the desert area between Aleppo, Hamah and Raqqah, including caves near Palmyra, where ISIL fighters are reported to train and shelter. ISIL maintains a significant presence in the desert area that covers southern Halab and northern Hamah Governorates, in particular between the villages of Khanasir and Ithriyah. Member States assess that the group has the intent and capability to sustain a long-term insurgency in the Syrian desert (Badiyah).

33. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by western coalition forces, engaged ISIL remnants near the Iraqi border and, in April and May, announced detentions of ISIL fighters from villages in south-eastern Dayr al-Zawr. ISIL remains able to counter-attack, extorting businesses and conducting targeted assassinations of SDF figures and tribal leaders supportive of SDF authority.

34. HTS regularly announces operations targeting ISIL fighters in territories under its control. In March, fighting was reported between HTS and an ISIL group near Atmah, in northern Idlib. However, Idlib remains a strategic location for ISIL fighters and family members, in particular as a gateway to Turkey. During the reporting period, Turkey announced the arrests of several ISIL members who had crossed the border illegally in an attempt to hide in Hatay Province.

35. HTS remains the predominant terrorist group in the north-western Syrian Arab Republic, still commanding approximately 10,000 fighters. HTS and allied Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) (QDe.088)<sup>3</sup> fighters are reported by one Member State to be seeking full control over the Idlib de-escalation area, clearing it of Hurras al-Din (HAD) and Ajnad al-Qawqaz (“Soldiers of the Caucasus”) groups. HTS raises revenue from taxation and levies. Recently, it has introduced fees for building permits and increased taxes imposed on telecommunications service providers, causing popular discontent. It also controls the general security service of the de facto local authorities in Idlib. In early 2021, HTS reportedly killed Abu Dujanah al-Daghestani, an ISIL senior, and two leaders of HAD, Abu Dujanah al-Liby and Abdulrahman “Safina” al-Tunisi. These killings were intended in part to settle scores with those who had themselves mounted attacks on local political allies of HTS. While HAD has responded to the campaign against it with growing hostility towards the HTS leadership, one Member State assesses that there is still potential for the two groups to cooperate at a tactical level under military pressure.

36. ETIM/Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) has between 1,500 and 3,000 fighters in Idlib. According to several Member States, while some members of the group may support the agenda of HAD, it largely defers to HTS in the Syrian Arab Republic. One Member State estimated that roughly 70 per cent of the group’s fighters were aligned with HTS, with 30 per cent following HAD. There may also be some movement of Uighur fighters between HTS and HAD, depending on the needs of the respective groups. Several Member States reported that the group had established corridors for moving fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic to Afghanistan to reinforce its combat strength. According to one Member State, the Uighur diaspora in Turkey is also an important recruitment source for ETIM/TIP. One Member State reported that direct ties between the group in the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan existed but faced challenges because of geographic distance and the difficulty of secure communication. During April and May, Russian forces conducted several strikes against ETIM/TIP positions in Ubin, Burnas and other villages in the western Idlib countryside. Several Member States reported that the group played a more active role in the Syrian Arab Republic than in Afghanistan, managing checkpoints, policing some towns on behalf of HTS and supplying fighters for HTS in its offensives against Syrian armed forces.

37. In Iraq, ISIL remains active, albeit under constant counter-terrorism pressure. The group’s leadership has now designated all of Iraq as a single *wilaya*, although active ISIL cells persist in the desert and remote areas of the country. They carry out hit-and-run operations with strategic intent to undermine critical infrastructure

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<sup>3</sup> Also known in the Syrian Arab Republic as the Turkistan Islamic Party.

projects, inflame sectarian divisions and grievances and sustain media coverage and relevance.<sup>4</sup>

38. ISIL reasserted itself somewhat in Iraq during the reporting period, with two strikes in the heart of Baghdad after a long gap in such operations. On 21 January, two suicide bombers killed more than 30 people in a crowded marketplace. On 15 April, ISIL was responsible for detonating a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in Sadr City. Member States assess that the group is likely to continue attacking civilians and other soft targets in the capital whenever possible to garner media attention and embarrass the Government of Iraq.

39. ISIL continues to threaten road links among Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk Governorates. Repeated roadside bomb attacks have occurred on the roads linking Kirkuk, Tikrit and Tuz Khurmatu, as well as ISIL hit-and-run attacks against checkpoints near these cities. Such attacks indicate that some ISIL fighters remain sheltered in the Hamrin mountain range and continue to exploit security gaps and inefficient security coordination in some areas of these governorates.

40. Iraqi government forces have had success in increasing pressure against ISIL. In late January, Prime Minister Kadhimi announced the killing of ISIL deputy leader Jabir Salman Saleh Al-Issawi (aka Abu Yasir) in an operation south of Kirkuk. In February, Kadhimi confirmed the death of Jabbar Ali Fayadh (aka Abu Hasan al-Gharibawy), the leader of ISIL in southern Iraq, as well as Ghanem Sabbah, who was responsible for training the suicide bombers who carried out the Baghdad attacks in January.

41. As in the Syrian Arab Republic, the trajectory of ISIL operations is not clear. According to one Member State, it is too soon to say whether early 2021 will come to be viewed as a period of stagnation before decline or consolidation before resurgence, but the political outlook in each country warrants concern.

### C. Arabian Peninsula

42. There are conflicting reports regarding the status of Khalid Batarfi (not listed), the current leader of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (QDe.129). Batarfi did not publish any visual or audio material during Ramadan 2021, which runs contrary to his practice in previous years and raises questions about his ability to freely communicate with his followers. Some Member States expressed the view that Batarfi had been detained, at least temporarily, in late 2020, but that his status might have changed since that time. There is insufficient information to draw firm conclusions on this question.

43. Following a period of relative inactivity in January, AQAP began a steady pace of operations aimed against Security Belt Forces and other groups affiliated with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in Shabwah and Abyan Governorates. It has also clashed with Houthi forces in Bayda Governorate. AQAP remains the most combat-ready terrorist group in Yemen and is well established in the central and

<sup>4</sup> One Member State provided the Monitoring Team with information regarding foreign terrorist fighters from a number of States, including those who were deported, as follows:

France: 1,910; 261 returnees

Jordan: 3,000; 250 returnees

Russian Federation: 3,417; 400 returnees

Saudi Arabia: 3,244; 670 returnees

Tunisia: 2,926; 800 returnees

Turkey: 1,500; 900 returnees

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: 850; 425 returnees

eastern provinces. Its priority is to establish control over ports along the Gulf of Aden and oil and gas infrastructure facilities.

44. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Yemen (QDe.166) is weak by comparison, having suffered losses in fighting with the Houthis and AQAP. It has been in decline for an extended period and is assessed to be preoccupied with stabilizing itself and regrouping. One Member State put its fighting strength at just a few hundred. Its most likely future attacks are expected to take place in the south of Yemen, especially against Government of Yemen figures located in or moving to Aden. Outside Yemen, ISIL aspires to conduct operations in Saudi Arabia, but there is little activity at present.

## **D. Europe**

45. The first half of 2021 saw a reduced threat level in the region, with fewer successful terrorist attacks. Member States do not expect this to continue in the coming period. Counter-terrorism authorities in several Member States reported difficulties in identifying and ascribing attacks as being motivated by terrorism given the complex relationship between radicalization and mental illness among some perpetrators, among other factors contributing to terrorism. The attack in Loire-Atlantique on 28 May involved an individual diagnosed with schizophrenia who was also on the terrorist prevention watch list of France after being radicalized in prison while serving an eight-year sentence. On 23 April, a police officer was killed in Rambouillet by another individual with a history of mental illness, who was connected to the perpetrator of the July 2016 attack in Nice. One Member State assesses that the risk associated with this combination could be mitigated at least in part if law enforcement had better access to medical records of individuals with established histories of posing a threat to themselves and others.

46. The threat from organized individuals planning complex attacks remains. In February 2021, 14 people were arrested in Denmark and Germany for planning attacks with explosive chemicals. Authorities in France arrested individuals of Chechen and Pakistani origin with profiles similar to the individuals who had perpetrated or planned attacks in France in 2020. They were not found to be acting under direct orders from ISIL or Al-Qaida leadership, but were inspired by propaganda and local community members who promoted radical ideology. Two cells consisting of individuals of Chechen origin were dismantled in eastern France in April and May 2021.

47. Authorities in Europe highlighted the challenge of teenagers being especially vulnerable to online propaganda, as well as conspiracy theories. There have been cases involving teens as young as 14 years old in which the child expressed willingness to conduct or facilitate terrorist attacks. Such individuals are susceptible to purveyors of extreme guidance in cases of perceived instances of blasphemy. One 14-year-old spent several hours with the man who beheaded high-school teacher Samuel Paty in France in 2020 (see [S/2021/68](#), paras. 48 and 51). In March 2021, a 17-year-old was identified on social media and Telegram as planning an attack on uniformed personnel. An 18-year-old with a similar profile was arrested by French authorities on the same day in a different case. False information and accusations are also used online to pressure individuals or entities that are considered enemies. In one case in France, a 17-year-old girl is accused of involvement in a foiled plot for which she assembled chemicals, including triacetone triperoxide, which is often used in more complex attacks.

48. Radicalization in European prisons remains a challenge. The isolation of terrorist inmates is not sustainable over the long term, and there are resource limits on post-incarceration monitoring. In some cases, prisoners reported approaching detention as a divine ordeal that allowed them time and space to deepen their

commitment. Some reportedly profile and recruit impressionable prisoners who are soon to be released and will therefore have more freedom of action to plan and carry out attacks independently. One Member State reported a specific concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in prisons, many of which had been on 23-hour lockdown for extended periods, leaving prisoners little interaction with prison authorities and visitors and rendering officials blind to any incubating threats. One Member State reported the difficulty of monitoring individuals deported from European countries after serving a sentence for terrorism.

49. There remains no evidence of collaboration between ISIL and Al-Qaida and organized criminal networks in Europe. One Member State noted that extremists in one large city were denied access to black market arms by criminals who were alert to the risk posed to their activities should law enforcement and intelligence agencies flag them as facilitators. They refused to sell at double the asking rate. Criminals also recognized that sentences were longer in terrorism cases.

## E. Asia

### Central and South Asia

50. The security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, with uncertainty surrounding the peace process and a risk of further deterioration. As reported by the Monitoring Team in its twelfth report to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) (see S/2021/486), Al-Qaida is present in at least 15 Afghan provinces, primarily in the eastern, southern and south-eastern regions. Its weekly *Thabat* newsletter reports on its operations inside Afghanistan. Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) operates under Taliban protection from Kandahar, Helmand and Nimruz Provinces. Since the death of Asim Umar in 2019, AQIS has been led by Osama Mahmood (not listed). The group consists mainly of Afghan and Pakistani nationals, but also individuals from Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. On 30 March, AQIS commander Dawlat Bek Tajiki (alias Abu Mohammad al-Tajiki) was killed by Afghan Forces in Gyan district of Paktika Province. Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is assessed by Member States to be alive but ailing in Afghanistan. Sayf-Al Adl, his most likely successor, is reported to remain in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Member States differ as to what Al Adl's options would be if he was called upon to succeed al-Zawahiri, but most assess that he would have to move and that basing himself in Afghanistan might not be an option.

51. Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (QDe.132) continues to pose a threat to the region with the unification of splinter groups and increasing cross-border attacks (see *ibid.*, paras. 76–79). TTP has increased its financial resources from extortion, smuggling and taxes. According to one Member State, Mufti Khalid, one of the leaders of TTP, was killed by Jamaat ul-Ahrar (QDe.152) in an internal dispute over resource allocation in Kunar Province, Afghanistan in May.

52. Despite territorial, leadership, manpower and financial losses during 2020 in Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161) has moved into other provinces, including Nuristan, Badghis, Sari Pul, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Kabul, where fighters have formed sleeper cells. The group has strengthened its positions in and around Kabul, where it conducts most of its attacks, targeting minorities, activists, government employees and personnel of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. Most recently, ISIL-K claimed responsibility for the brutal attack of 8 June, when 10 humanitarian deminers working with HALO Trust in Baghlan Province were killed and 16 were injured.

53. In its efforts to resurge, ISIL-K has prioritized the recruitment and training of new supporters; its leaders also hope to attract intransigent Taliban and other militants

who reject the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban and to recruit fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and other conflict zones. Estimates of the strength of ISIL-K range widely, with one Member State reporting between 500 and 1,500 fighters and another stating that it may rise to as many as 10,000 over the medium term. One Member State stressed that ISIL-K was largely underground and clandestine. Its leader, Shahab al-Muhajir, alias Sanaullah (not listed), cooperates with Sheikh Tamim (not listed), head of the al-Sadiq office. Tamim and his office are tasked by ISIL core to oversee the network connecting ISIL-K with ISIL presences in the wider region.

54. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (QDe.010) faces financial difficulties and a Taliban that is less accommodating than it used to be. The group's leader, Abdulaziz Yuldash, was killed in November 2020 by unidentified assassins. Disagreement as to whether the attack was the result of internal betrayal or an external attack organized by a state or other terrorist group has created a rift within the group. One mainly ethnic Uzbek wing is led by Yuldash's brother, Jaffar Yuldash (not listed), who has declared himself the new head of IMU. This is contested by "Ilhom" alias Usmoni Khon (not listed), Yuldash's former deputy, who leads a second, mainly ethnic Tajik faction, which also collaborates with the mainly ethnic Tajik Jamaat Ansarullah. Some 20 IMU fighters have defected to another Central Asian group, Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) (QDe.158). Jaffar Yuldash is reported to be considering pledging his fighters to ISIL-K should he receive assurances of adequate financial support, but he is concerned about retaliation from the Taliban, which killed a previous IMU leader, Usman Ghazi, for pledging allegiance to ISIL in 2015.

55. KIB receives financial support in Afghanistan through *hawala* channels from its leadership in Idlib. This incentivizes the Afghan affiliate to grow its numbers and undertake more high-profile attacks using suicide bombers. KIB leader Dilshod Dekhanov alias Jumaboi (not listed), an Uzbek national, requested that the Taliban leadership unite all Central Asian groups in Afghanistan under his leadership. Ilhom's Tajik wing of IMU stated that it would support unification only under the leadership of Ilimbek Mamatov (also known as Khamidulla, not listed), the leader of Islamic Jihad Group (IJG) (QDe.119), who enjoys significant authority among Central Asian fighters. The Taliban has yet to rule on the matter but has reduced its financial allowances to the groups to a level that they consider insufficient. In recent months, however, the Taliban has involved the Central Asian groups in its expanding combat operations in the north. IJG participates in operations in Imam Sahib district of Kunduz Province, providing expertise in military tactics and the manufacture of improvised explosive devices.

56. According to Member States, ETIM consists of several hundred members and remains active in Badakhshan, Faryab, Kabul and Nuristan Provinces of Afghanistan (see *ibid.*, para. 80). The group is aligned primarily with Al-Qaida. It maintains close links with Jamaat Ansarullah and Katiba al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. One Member State reported that the leaders of the group, Abdul Haq (QDi.268) and Hajji Furqan (not listed), as well as its headquarters, were currently located in Hustak ravine, Jurm district in Badakhshan Province. According to another Member State, Abdul Haq often moves between Helmand and Badakhshan Provinces. A propaganda video was recently released showing the group in weapons training in Badakhshan Province, with the aim of demonstrating the combat readiness of the group. Many Member States assess that ETIM seeks to establish a Uighur state in Xinjiang, China, and towards that goal, facilitates the movement of fighters from Afghanistan to China. One Member State also noted that ETIM in Afghanistan had focused primarily on actions targeting China, while the group in the Syrian Arab Republic had a more global outlook.

57. In Maldives, on 6 May, Mohamed Nasheed, Speaker of Parliament and former President, was severely injured by a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device in Male. The blast also wounded one member of his security team and two bystanders. Four suspects have been arrested, two of whom are linked with Maldivian extremists. The sixteenth issue of the ISIL English-language magazine *Sawt-al-Hind (Voice of Hind)* (see S/2021/68, para. 69), dated 16 May 2021, introduced a regular column “From the Brothers in the Maldives”, urging supporters to stage attacks in the country.

### South-East Asia

58. Sporadic attacks by groups affiliated with ISIL and Al-Qaida in Indonesia and the Philippines reflect the persistence of the terror threat in the region, notwithstanding counter-terrorism pressure from government forces. Malaysia has attributed the downgrading of its terror threat in part to side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

59. Two supporters of Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) (QDe.164), a young married couple, attacked a church in Makassar, Indonesia, on Palm Sunday, 28 March 2021, detonating a pressure cooker bomb carried on their motorcycle, killing themselves and injuring 20 others. This is the most recent in a series of attacks attributed to ISIL affiliates in South-East Asia targeting churchgoers. Previous attacks include the suicide bombings of churches in Surabaya, Indonesia, in May 2018 (see S/2018/705, para. 66) and the attacks against worshippers attending Sunday services at a Catholic cathedral in Jolo, Philippines, in January 2019 (see S/2019/570, para. 68). The blast in Makassar was timed to coincide with parishioners departing one service and arriving for the next. Indonesian authorities report a link between one of the attackers and the cathedral bombing in January 2019; reportedly, the blast was to avenge the killing by police of their religious teacher and JAD member, who was also the brother of one of the Jolo cathedral attackers. On 30 March 2021, the Security Council issued a statement condemning the attack as “heinous and cowardly”.<sup>5</sup>

60. On 20 March, Philippine forces rescued a group of hostages held by Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) (QDe.001) for approximately one year. An ASG leader, Majan Sawadjaan, also known as Apo Mike, notorious for masterminding maritime kidnap-for-ransom operations in the region, was injured by government forces during the hostage rescue and later died of his injuries. The encounter with Philippine security forces occurred while the boat carrying ASG militants and their hostages capsized in rough seas. The death of Sawadjaan marks the elimination of a key ASG leader and tactician. The group suffered another setback in April when two members were killed in a clash with Philippine soldiers in Patikul. One Member State estimated the group’s current strength as being as low as approximately 100 fighters, even though it is responsible for 75 per cent of the terror attacks in the region. Mundi Sawadjaan (not listed) is reported to be an ASG leader expected to rise in prominence.

61. In February, Philippine security forces arrested nine women on Jolo Island who were reportedly preparing suicide bomb attacks targeting soldiers. Three of the women are the daughters of the late ASG leader Hatib Hajan Sawadjaan, who masterminded the Jolo cathedral attack.<sup>6</sup> As reported previously by the Monitoring Team (see S/2021/68, para. 70), women continue to play a role in the planning and execution of attacks in the region.

62. The Government of Malaysia’s assessment of the country’s terror threat has dropped to “possible” from “probable” for the first time since 2014. This is in part a consequence of the stay-at-home mandates imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic but also a reflection of the country’s success against would-be terrorists, who are

<sup>5</sup> See [www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14482.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14482.doc.htm).

<sup>6</sup> “Philippines army says nine women arrested over bomb plots”, *Alarabiya News*, 23 February 2021.



assessed as currently lacking the capability to launch physical attacks. Malaysian law enforcement reports success in monitoring social media accounts for signs of support for terrorism and for any nexus between crime and terrorism.

63. Member States expressed ongoing concerns regarding abuse of the charitable or non-profit sectors in South-East Asia by ISIL affiliates and their supporters. According to the World Giving Index, Indonesia ranks first globally in charitable giving. The generosity of Indonesians has been exploited by certain charities, which have raised funds to support ISIL fighters in the Syrian Arab Republic as well as local groups, including Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (MIT) (QDe.150). One example that has been highlighted is the Muslimah Bima Peduli Mama Charity, which collects donations primarily from Indonesians under the guise of supporting natural disaster relief both in Indonesia and globally. In fact, funds raised were channelled to the Abu Ahmed Foundation, which used them to support Malhama Tactical, an entity in the Syrian Arab Republic known for training foreign terrorist fighters.

### III. Impact assessment

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

64. Several Member States revised downward assessments of financial reserves available to ISIL in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, with estimates currently ranging between \$25 million and \$50 million. One Member State assessed most of these funds to be in Iraq, making the ISIL Syrian network partially dependent on its counterparts in Iraq for financial support. ISIL fighters in the Syrian Arab Republic are believed to have received several million dollars in 2020 from ISIL in Iraq. ISIL is also assessed to have lost tens of millions of dollars as a result of both mismanagement and successful counter-terrorism operations.

65. In mid-April 2021, Iraqi officials announced the discovery in Mosul of \$1.7 million in buried dollars and Iraqi bank notes, as well as gold and silver. The gold appears to have been intended for the production of ISIL currency. The discovery underscores the extent of ISIL cash reserves that may remain hidden.

66. One of the largest ongoing ISIL expenditures remains salaries for fighters and payments to families of imprisoned or deceased fighters. ISIL also draws on its reserves to secure the release of ISIL fighters and family members from prisons and camps for internally displaced persons in the region. The group raises funds through extortion, kidnapping for ransom and looting. Supporters in the camps continue to receive donations from sympathizers, family members and friends abroad. They use social media, including crowd-funding websites, to reach audiences beyond the region.

67. Money service businesses and *hawala* networks remain the group's primary method for sending and receiving funds. One Member State highlighted the role of the Al-Fay Company (not listed) in facilitating the distribution of funds on behalf of ISIL and connecting the group to overseas donors. Idris al-Fay (not listed) is currently in Iraqi custody. According to one Member State, his brother, Ibrahim al-Fay (not listed), remains in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Al-Fay Company in a neighbouring State.

68. According to one Member State, Sami Muhammad al-Jaburi (not listed) retains a leadership role in ISIL. He is responsible for the group's finances and has sought to increase its revenues in part through a small group of oilfields in eastern Syrian Arab Republic. The same State also asserted that the Iraq-based al-Rawi network of ISIL

financial facilitators continues to function both in the conflict zone and in nearby States.

69. The Monitoring Team has previously highlighted fund flows to ISIL fighters and their families in Syrian detention facilities or camps for internally displaced persons through financial institutions, money service businesses and cash couriers in neighbouring states. Member States continue to cite this as a persistent means of financing ISIL and supporters in the conflict zone. The financial intelligence unit of one Member State reported multiple instances of funds traveling from a European country through money service businesses to pay for the smuggling of women and children out of facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. According to the same Member State, one individual has facilitated the travel of women with links to Belgium, Brazil, Finland, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago and Uzbekistan out of camps. These women have subsequently fled to the Idlib area, neighbouring countries or, in some cases, their countries of origin.

70. Suspicious transactions involving so-called neobanks (banks that operate exclusively online) were cited by several European Member States which raised concerns that such institutions had facilitated the transfers of large sums in support of ISIL and Al-Qaida supporters in Europe and abroad. These financial institutions reportedly lack effective sanctions-screening capabilities and are used by malign actors who seek to evade counter-terrorism sanctions listings that may differ across jurisdictions.

71. Member States highlighted concerns about growth in the use of cryptocurrencies by terrorists, and an evolution in tactics, now with training in how to send funds using certain privacy-enhancing methods. The case prosecuted in France and cited by the Monitoring Team in its previous report (see *ibid.*, para. 81) represents one of the first successful prosecutions of a terrorism finance case using cryptocurrencies. One Member State also cited the recent case of an Al-Qaida bounty offered for the killing of police officers with the reward to be paid in bitcoin.<sup>7</sup>

72. Several Member States report that ISIL and Al-Qaida seek to exploit a lack of oversight and regulation in areas where artisanal gold mining is prevalent, effectively monetizing the illegal practice. Customs officers report a lack of tools to identify and track such trade, noting that existing regulations focus on gold of extremely high purity. The terrorist-financing threat involving artisanal-mined gold merits further attention from the Monitoring Team.

**73. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States to highlight the terrorist-financing threat posed by artisanal gold mining in conflict zones in which Al-Qaida- or ISIL-affiliated insurgencies control or benefit from such activity, recalling paragraph 14 of resolution 2462 (2019), in which Member States were urged to identify economic sectors most vulnerable to terrorist financing.**

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

74. In its previous reports (see [S/2020/53](#), para. 82, and [S/2021/68](#), para. 84), the Monitoring Team noted that ISIL and HTS continued to engage in illegal excavations, looting and thefts from archaeological sites and museums in conflict zones. The gradual lifting of COVID-19 restrictions on international travel is expected to increase the flow of artefacts illegally removed from Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. To improve Member State capabilities in stemming the illicit traffic of

<sup>7</sup> “Jihadist magazine offered \$60,000 bounty for the killing of Western police officer”, *The Arab Weekly*, 6 May 2021.

cultural property, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) developed the public mobile application ID-Art. The application supports access to the INTERPOL database containing stolen and missing artefacts, allowing law enforcement and customs officers to search via any mobile device the objects currently reported as stolen or missing. ID-Art is able to record images, details, status and geographical location of cultural, archaeological and underwater sites. This function allows users to establish the general state of cultural sites after natural disasters, armed conflicts or massive looting.

**75. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States recalling the utility of the INTERPOL Stolen Works of Art Database and the need to continue to contribute to it, while considering the recent efforts by INTERPOL to enhance the capabilities of the database through the ID-Art tool.**

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

76. The related issues of foreign terrorist fighters and other displaced and/or detained persons in the ISIL core conflict zone, including the dependants of foreign and other fighters, remain of acute concern to Member States and international organizations. Aside from the humanitarian, legal and human rights dimensions, and although contained from an international counter-terrorism point of view in the short term, this population represents a latent threat that will manifest itself over the medium-to-long term. How effectively it is addressed now will determine how large a factor it will become in the future global threat landscape. This concern centres around the camps for internally displaced persons and detention facilities in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. One Member State estimates that there are more than 120,000 people, including 30,000 children under the age of 13 years, currently held in these locations.

77. The pandemic has aggravated the issue both by slowing progress towards a coherent international approach to it and by introducing the additional risk factor of COVID-19 outbreaks in crowded facilities. Member States report that this latter concern has not yet manifested as seriously as was feared, with limited instances of the virus having been recorded and the virus having been managed in camps without apparently getting out of control. Even so, it remains a motivating factor for unrest in the various camps and for escape attempts. Encouragement by ISIL of jailbreaks has been reflected in incidents around the world, including the Al-Shabaab jailbreak in Boosaaso in March. In addition to regular escapes from these facilities, which are usually effected by bribing the camp authorities, larger orchestrated operations may be mounted to release more inmates. Fugitives often make their way to Idlib as a staging post for returning home or otherwise relocating. Some stay in contact with those still in camps or prisons and are active online raising funds for them.

78. Member States cite the Hawl camp, 13 kilometres from the Iraqi border, as a major security threat owing to its visible ISIL presence and the ongoing indoctrination of residents, including children. It is also by far the largest facility of its kind, with a population that is being gradually reduced but remains around 60,000. The security situation in the camp has deteriorated, with more than 60 murders having been reported since the beginning of 2021. SDF, which controls Hawl and other camps, launched a major operation in March to purge Hawl of active ISIL fighters and militant women. It announced the capture of 70 ISIL members in the operation, and the rate of murders fell steeply in April before increasing in May to a rate that nevertheless remains much lower than in the period from January to March. One Member State has described Hawl camp as an increasingly permissive environment

for extremist activities not dissimilar to those previously seen in the so-called caliphate”.

79. Member States continue to report that informal money transfers continue unabated to the inhabitants of Hawl camp, in part to pay off smugglers and local officials who can get them out. During the reporting period, the local authorities stated that a driver of a water tanker contracted by an international non-governmental organization was arrested for attempting to smuggle an ISIL family out of the camp, concealed inside his tanker. Efforts to decrease the number of the camp’s inhabitants, in order to improve the humanitarian and security situation, were also hampered by the pandemic. However, some of the most disruptive women inmates have been moved to the nearby Rawj camp, a location that is better equipped, more comfortable and more secure, with the capacity for counter-radicalization programmes, thereby mitigating the risk from dangerous residents.

80. Meanwhile, in late May, Iraq managed to transfer 95 Iraqi families (381 individuals, primarily children) from Hawl to Al-Jad’ah camp in Ninawa, Iraq. Such Iraqi internally displaced person camps also present challenges: while the Iraqi government has closed 47 camps over the past few years, some camps with problematic residents are proving difficult to vacate and shut down.

81. Efforts by Member States to repatriate some of their nationals from the ISIL core conflict zone have continued. In February, a group of four men, one woman and seven children, including two orphans, were returned by Kazakhstan from the Syrian Arab Republic, adding to the more than 700 Kazakh nationals (33 men, 187 women and 490 children) who had been repatriated since 2019. In 2021 to date, Uzbekistan has repatriated 24 nationals from Afghanistan and 93 nationals from the Hawl camp (117 altogether: 29 women and 88 children, including 13 orphans), bringing its total number to 435. Kyrgyzstan also has brought back 79 children born to Kyrgyz parents in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. These repatriated individuals are being assisted with reintegration in society and given access to educational and other social programmes. Central Asian countries assess that the repatriation of citizens from conflict zones has become a significant factor in preventing their nationals from becoming further involved in the ranks of terrorist organizations abroad.

82. The Monitoring Team continues to highlight Security Council resolution [2396 \(2017\)](#) to Member State interlocutors and to support United Nations policy on the issues of foreign terrorist fighters, detainees, displaced persons and dependants by emphasizing the threat implications of failing to address such issues proactively. Many minors, including foreign nationals, have already spent formative years in the Syrian Arab Republic in an environment of extremism, abuse and normalized violence. This runs the risk of increasing the complexity and danger of future efforts to deradicalize and reintegrate returnees in society. One Member State assesses that the difficulty of individual cases varies according to age, gender, exact location and time spent in the Syrian Arab Republic.

**83. The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee write to Member States drawing attention to the issue of foreign terrorist fighters remaining at large in the core conflict zone or elsewhere, recalling the provisions of resolution [2396 \(2017\)](#) requiring Member States to develop a database of known and suspected terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters, and encouraging them to share relevant information and to propose terrorists, especially foreign terrorist fighters among their own nationals, for designation on the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list.**

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

### **A. Travel ban**

84. Travel ban measures continue to play an important role in combating terrorism. The COVID-19 pandemic has effectively slowed cross-border movement, and most Member States remain reluctant to reopen borders fully. Current international priorities remain focused on addressing the pandemic and its economic consequences, which could divert resources from needed investments in border controls in the near term. No travel ban exemption requests were submitted to the Committee during the reporting period. Similarly, the Monitoring Team has received no information from Member States regarding the attempted travel or interdiction of individuals designated on the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list.

### **B. Asset freeze**

85. The Monitoring Team received no information during the reporting period regarding the freezing of assets under resolution 2368 (2017) and related resolutions. In fulfilment of its mandated task under resolution 2560 (2020) to examine the basic and extraordinary asset freeze exemption procedures set out in paragraphs 81 (a) and (b) of Security Council resolution 2368 (2017), the Monitoring Team issued a questionnaire to Member States involved in the designation of individuals and entities under the 1267 sanctions regime. A report with recommendations will be submitted to the Committee by the end of September 2021.

### **C. Arms embargo**

86. Improvised explosive devices remain a preferred method of attack by ISIL in the Iraqi-Syrian core conflict zone and beyond. In the core conflict zone and Afghanistan, the pandemic has not had a noticeable impact on the number of attacks conducted by ISIL. Ammonium nitrate and ammonium nitrate fuel oil remain the predominant precursor explosives in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of trinitrotoluene in improvised explosive devices is also on the rise in Afghanistan. Trinitrotoluene and ammonium nitrate fuel oil are reportedly being sourced illegally from neighbouring countries, underlining the need for stronger border protection and prevention of the smuggling of precursor materials.

87. ISIL is adept at reconfiguring unexploded ordinance into explosive devices. In Libya, there has been a rise in reported incidences of ISIL repurposing anti-tank mines (more specifically the PRB M3 model with the pressure plates removed) into improvised explosive devices. The continued use of roadside bombs, and the possibility that ISIL may take the opportunity to attack more soft targets as pandemic restrictions ease, underline the importance of Member States enhancing their detection, disposal and investigation capabilities.

88. In April, HAD leader Abu al-Abd Ashedaa' (not listed) reported that HTS had discussed a plot to use fixed-wing drones to retake Aleppo from Syrian government forces in 2017. Ashedaa' noted that despite the availability of the requisite know-how, the plot could not be funded.

89. Several drone attacks occurred in Iraq during the reporting period against coalition forces and facilities under the control of the Kurdistan Regional Government, although there is no indication that the attacks were conducted by groups within the mandate of the Monitoring Team.

90. The Monitoring Team remains concerned at the interest of ISIL in other non-conventional weapons. Recently, a report from the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant highlighted the group's achievement in developing the ability to produce and deploy chemical weapons during the time it had control over university laboratories in Mosul (see S/2021/419, paras. 31–33). This has been previously documented by the Monitoring Team on the basis of information from Member States, most recently in the its twenty-fourth report (see S/2019/570, para. 94). While the Monitoring Team reaffirms that ISIL retains the knowledge of weaponizing chemical weapons, particularly sulphur mustard gas, there is no information to indicate that the group currently has the requisite capabilities to deploy such weapons.

91. A group of Member States agreed with the Monitoring Team at a conference in June that the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan in particular suffered from a glut of weapons, especially small arms. Consequently, it would be difficult to prevent terrorists in those areas from arming themselves, and the approach to enforcing the arms embargo would need to be tailored in each arena to items and components in short supply.

## **V. Monitoring Team activities and feedback**

92. During the reporting period, travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic continued to restrict the ability of the Monitoring Team to hold in-person meetings with Member States abroad. Between January and June 2021, the Monitoring Team held the Middle East and North Africa regional meeting in person and also conducted meetings with national authorities in their capitals. In addition, the Team undertook alternative arrangements using virtual meetings or in-person consultations with national authorities in New York.

93. The Monitoring Team continues to promote the sanctions regime through participation in virtual meetings, including those organized by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, INTERPOL, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre, the African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism, the Financial Action Task Force and its regional bodies, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the European Union, the World Customs Organization, the Anti-Terrorism Centre of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Tech Against Terrorism, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Team also engaged with entities in the financial, antiquities, defence and information technology sectors. During the reporting period, the Team participated in virtual meetings organized by the Office of Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, cooperating closely with them in the production of mandated reports of the Secretary-General. The Team remains a member of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, participating in virtual meetings of its working groups.

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