



Security Council

Distr.: General
26 December 2023

Original: English

Letter dated 19 December 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism, I have the honour to refer to the non-binding guiding principles on threats posed by the use of unmanned aircraft systems for terrorist purposes (see annex), to be known and referred to as the “Abu Dhabi Guiding Principles”, prepared in accordance with the Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, in which the Committee decided to develop a set of non-binding guiding principles to assist Member States in countering the threat posed by the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes.

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex were issued as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**
Chair

Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1373 \(2001\)](#) concerning counter-terrorism



Annex

Guiding principles for Member States on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes¹

1. New and emerging technologies provide far-reaching potential benefits in multiple domains, including in public health, border control, law enforcement, transportation, humanitarian assistance and communication systems.
2. New and emerging technologies, while providing many benefits to society, are being used for terrorist purposes by ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, their affiliated groups, other terrorist organizations and their supporters. Member States already face a significant and growing threat from the exploitation of new and emerging technologies to facilitate a wide range of terrorist activities.
3. Mindful of the increasing threat posed by the misuse of new and emerging technologies, as well as the many beneficial uses of technologies for countering terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee held a special meeting on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes in India and adopted the Delhi Declaration on 29 October 2022.
4. The Counter-Terrorism Committee also expressed its intention to develop, with the support of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, a set of non-binding guiding principles with a view to assisting Member States to counter the threat posed by the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, including by compiling good practices on the opportunities offered by the same set of technologies to counter the threat, consistent with international human rights and international humanitarian law. To facilitate the development of the guiding principles, the Executive Directorate, on behalf of the Committee, undertook a comprehensive consultative process on each of the three themes with relevant experts from United Nations agencies and international and regional organization partners, as well as a range of relevant stakeholders from the Executive Directorate's Global Counter-Terrorism Research Network, including the private sector, academia and civil society.
5. The Security Council has reaffirmed that Member States must ensure that any measures taken to combat the threat posed by new and emerging technologies used for terrorist purposes comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law; underscored that effective counter-terrorism measures and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are complementary and mutually reinforcing, and are an essential part of a successful counter-terrorism effort; and noted the importance of integrating gender as a cross-cutting issue, in line with Council resolution [2617 \(2021\)](#).
6. The present set of non-binding guiding principles have been developed by the Counter-Terrorism Committee and are an effort to assist Member States to counter the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes in a manner consistent with international law.
7. The following guiding principles are intended to complement other materials in order to guide Member States and the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate to support States in their implementation of Security Council resolutions [1373 \(2001\)](#), [1624 \(2005\)](#), [2178](#)

¹ The purpose and focus of these non-binding guiding principles is to assist Member States in enhancing national measures and strengthening international cooperation; the non-binding guiding principles do not purport to impose any legal obligations upon States.

(2014), 2370 (2017), 2396 (2017), 2462 (2019), 2617 (2021) and other relevant Council documents on counter-terrorism.² Many of the guiding principles set forth in the present document build upon the work and recommended good practices of the Security Council and General Assembly, United Nations partner organizations and other key stakeholders.

Threats posed by the use of unmanned aircraft systems for terrorist purposes³

8. Global concern at the threats and risks posed by the use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) for terrorist purposes has grown rapidly in recent years. Incidents around the world clearly demonstrate the potential threat that terrorist use of UAS, including weaponized UAS, could pose, as well as the importance of adopting national legislation, if needed, to enhance the regulation of their manufacture, supply, transfer and use, to keep pace with technological developments in this area and to develop identification, threat prevention and detection mechanisms.

9. Terrorists have shown themselves to be capable of constructing sophisticated devices from scratch and modifying commercial UAS for terrorist purposes. Terrorists use online and social media channels to facilitate the acquisition of UAS and their components and as platforms for the sharing of knowledge and expertise on how to assemble and deploy these systems and to execute attacks.

10. UAS also offer new benefits and opportunities for law enforcement (e.g. as part of rapid-response operations or to secure an area during major public events) and border control, which should be executed in strict adherence to the rule of law and human rights,⁴ and for beneficial commercial, civilian, scientific, innovative and humanitarian use. For States with porous borders and limited resources, UAS can serve as a cost-effective operational tool for border-management and early warning activities. They can also be utilized to map crime scenes during investigations or areas of interest to law enforcement, monitor inaccessible borders and search for missing persons during disaster response operations.

11. In its resolution 2370 (2017), the Security Council strongly condemned the continued flow of weapons, including small arms and light weapons, military equipment, UAS and their components and improvised explosive device components to and between ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida, their affiliates, and associated groups, illegal armed groups and criminals, and encouraged Member States to prevent and disrupt their procurement networks for such weapons, systems and components. The technical guidelines developed under the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism

² These include the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (S/2015/939); the addendum to the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (2018) (S/2018/1177); the technical guide to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) and other resolutions (S/2019/998); the framework document for Counter-Terrorism Committee visits to Member States (S/2020/731); and the global survey of the implementation of resolution 1373 (2001) by Member States, issued in 2009, 2011, 2016 and 2021 (S/2009/620, S/2011/463, S/2016/49 and S/2021/972).

³ The purpose and focus of these non-binding guiding principles is to address the threat of the terrorist use of unmanned aircraft systems. The present non-binding guiding principles do not affect or provide an interpretation of international law, including international humanitarian law.

⁴ See Office of Counter-Terrorism and others, "Preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons: technical guidelines to facilitate the implementation of Security Council resolution 2370 (2017) and related international standards and good practices on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons", specifically submodule II, on preventing terrorists from acquiring unmanned aircraft systems and components. Available at www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/technical-guidelines-facilitate-implementation-security-council-resolution-2370-2017-and.

Coordination Compact and compiled by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) provide technical guidance to Member States and other interested stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of resolution [2370 \(2017\)](#), subsequent relevant resolutions and international standards and good practices on preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons and their systems and components, including UAS and their components.⁵

12. In its resolution [2617 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council noted with concern the increasing global misuse of UAS by terrorists to conduct attacks against, and incursions into, restricted commercial and government infrastructure and public places, acknowledged the need to balance fostering innovation and preventing the misuse of UAS as its applications expanded, and noted international efforts that contributed to raising awareness of and preparedness for terrorist use of UAS as the technology became more accessible and broadly used across public and private sectors, including the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, Office of Counter-Terrorism and International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) publication entitled “The protection of critical infrastructures against terrorist attacks: compendium of good practices”, and the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s “Berlin memorandum on good practices for countering terrorist use of unmanned aerial systems”.

13. The threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes also makes it imperative for States to enhance measures to counter terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure and “soft” targets. In its resolution [2341 \(2017\)](#), the Security Council encouraged States to make concerted and coordinated efforts to raise awareness and expand knowledge of the challenges posed by terrorist attacks in order to be better prepared for such attacks. In its resolution [2396 \(2017\)](#), the Council stressed the need for States to develop, review or amend national risk and threat assessments to take into account “soft” targets in order to develop appropriate contingency and emergency-response plans for terrorist attacks. In the same resolution, the Council called upon Member States to establish or strengthen national, regional and international partnerships with stakeholders, both public and private, as appropriate, and to share information and experience in order to prevent, protect, mitigate, investigate, respond to and recover from damage from terrorist attacks against “soft” targets.

14. Guiding principles 50 and 51 of the addendum to the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (2018) ([S/2018/1177](#), annex) are especially relevant to States’ efforts to prevent and counter UAS attacks against critical infrastructure, vulnerable or soft targets and tourism sites.

15. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has developed the UAS Toolkit to assist States in developing effective operational guidance and safe domestic operations for UAS. Security Council resolution [2309 \(2016\)](#), on terrorist threats to civil aviation, should also be taken into account in this regard. States face persistent challenges with respect to sharing key information on recent incidents, attack methods and landside vulnerabilities at airport facilities.

⁵ Ibid.

16. Capacity-building initiatives have been developed to assist Member States in response to UAS-related threats, including by the Office of Counter-Terrorism⁶ and INTERPOL.⁷

17. While there is increasing use of UAS for law enforcement, commercial, civilian, scientific and humanitarian purposes, there are global and regional concerns with regard to the use of UAS for terrorist purposes. There is growing interest among and ongoing exploratory studies by international and regional organizations and entities, such as the Initiative to Counter Unmanned Aerial System Threats of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, to better understand and identify the benefits, trends, threats and challenges of such use.

18. In view of the rapid technological advances in this field, Member States should consider developing measures to counter potential terrorist threats related to advancements in artificial intelligence, autonomous technology and robotics and unmanned systems that operate in other domains (e.g. ground, surface and subsurface) and mitigate associated risks while allowing legitimate use of UAS.⁸ There is a need to increase the exchange of information and practices in this area by law enforcement, civil society, academia and industry; strengthen understanding of the issues and challenges posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes at the operational level; analyse the opportunities offered by UAS and UAS-related threats and risks in the context of counter-terrorism; and explore ways to achieve a more consistent global approach.

Non-binding guiding principle 1

In their efforts to establish and maintain national legal and regulatory frameworks to counter the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes,⁹ Member States should consider:

(a) Integrating consideration of the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes into relevant national counter-terrorism strategies, national strategies and/or action plans on the protection of critical infrastructure and

⁶ For example, the Global Counter-Terrorism Programme on Autonomous and Remotely Operated Systems (AROS Programme), which includes UAS and focuses on raising awareness and fostering the exchange of experiences and expertise on these systems and enhancing State capacities to investigate and counter threats related to these systems, as well as to leverage them to prevent and counter terrorism-related threats. The Programme is implemented in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, ICAO and the Department of Operational Support, in coordination with the Department of Peace Operations and INTERPOL.

⁷ A global initiative of INTERPOL considers UAS from the following three perspectives: as threats, as tools and as evidence for use in investigation. The initiative is designed to help counter the various threats posed by UAS to INTERPOL member countries, while also encouraging their appropriate use to support law enforcement activities and operations around the world. INTERPOL has developed the “Framework for responding to a drone incident for first responders and digital forensics practitioners”, which includes police procedures for handling cases in which UAS are part of the criminal investigation. The guidelines provide support with respect to, inter alia, digital evidence collection and analysis and remote controllers and other devices.

⁸ See UNIDIR, “Uncrewed aerial systems: a primer”, October 2022. Available at <https://unidir.org/publication/uncrewed-aerial-systems-primer>.

⁹ ICAO defines UAS as “An aircraft and its associated elements which are operated with no pilot on board”. See the ICAO UAS Toolkit for more details, at www.icao.int/safety/UA/UASToolkit/Pages/Frequently-Used-Terms.aspx.

“soft” targets,¹⁰ consider assessing threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes as a part of national and sectoral risk assessments and apply risk management processes to ensure that such strategies are regularly reviewed and updated through an inter-agency and multi-stakeholder consultative process;¹¹

(b) Ensuring that terrorist acts committed by using UAS are established as serious criminal offences in domestic laws and regulations and establishing an array of legal provisions to enable the conduct of investigations and, as appropriate, prosecutions of those offences, in compliance with international law, in particular international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law;

(c) Aligning UAS and related terminology, including terminology related to their components, with existing definitions and categories developed at the international level, and using terms in a clear and uniform manner;

(d) Developing national laws, regulations and administrative procedures defining the roles and responsibilities of all relevant agencies and stakeholders involved in the implementation of measures to respond to threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes and providing for the establishment of an effective and independent oversight system at the domestic level over the implementation of such measures;

(e) Reviewing and/or developing legislation or regulations that identify the competent and responsible national authorities that are authorized to detect and, if necessary, intercept or disable UAS and components in the counter-terrorism context through use of counter-UAS measures, systems and techniques;

(f) Developing national laws, regulations and administrative procedures to enable inter-agency and multi-stakeholder approaches at the domestic level to facilitate cooperation and coordination and intelligence- and information-sharing on threats posed by the use of UAS and their components for terrorist purposes;

(g) Developing national laws, regulations and administrative procedures that provide, as appropriate, for the registration of UAS and their operators, certification protocols and operational requirements of UAS, and the effective implementation of such measures;

(h) Developing national laws, regulations and administrative procedures that define the categorization of and provide control over UAS parts and their components for dual-use goods and systems;

(i) Developing and implementing mechanisms, which take into account the evolving nature of the threat, to review legislation, regulations, policies and measures to respond to the threat while enabling the lawful use of UAS and their components under domestic and international law.

¹⁰ As defined by the General Assembly in its resolution [75/291](#) of 30 June 2021, vulnerable targets include critical infrastructure and public places (“soft” targets), and in accordance with Security Council resolutions [2341 \(2017\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#), the addendum to the guiding principles on foreign terrorist fighters (2018), and “The protection of critical infrastructures against terrorist attacks: compendium of good practices”.

¹¹ See the five thematic modules on protecting vulnerable targets against terrorist attacks developed by the Office of Counter-Terrorism in 2022, specifically module 5, “Protecting vulnerable targets from terrorist attacks involving unmanned aircraft systems”.

Non-binding guiding principle 2

In their efforts to increase understanding and awareness of the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, and to establish inter-agency and multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination, Member States should consider:

(a) Designating a national authority to lead national coordination, development and implementation and serve as a contact point for foreign partners on measures related to UAS;

(b) Defining the roles and responsibilities of each relevant national entity (e.g. civil aviation authority, law enforcement, customs, the military) and other stakeholders, and empowering them by developing standard operating procedures and providing necessary legal, human and financial resources;

(c) Establishing clear protocols and procedures for national entities to securely share, in a timely manner, including at the local level, information related to threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, in a manner that enables engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including, as appropriate, industry representatives of the private sector, civil society, academia, think tanks and owners and operators of critical infrastructure and “soft” targets;

(d) Sharing data related to the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, including terrorists’ *modi operandi*, at the international level and, when applicable, through INTERPOL, via its I-24/7 secure global police communications system, with relevant international law enforcement partners;

(e) Equipping national entities to conduct regular risk assessments that incorporate UAS-related threat information, including emerging technologies or new methods of use, in a systematic manner, taking into consideration regional and international developments, and ensuring that the results of such risk assessments are disseminated to all relevant national entities responsible for mitigating and responding to those risks;

(f) Establishing protocols and procedures for implementing risk mitigation strategies, including contingency plans, response mechanisms, awareness-raising activities, multi-stakeholder joint operations, drills and real-life exercises, engaging all actors responsible for responding to an incident involving UAS and those responsible for the recovery and preservation of forensic evidence, based on the results of risk assessments, and requiring regular reviews and updates to the risk assessment guidelines and risk mitigation strategies to facilitate their effectiveness in addressing evolving UAS-related threats;

(g) Incorporating UAS-related risk assessment and mitigation measures into appropriate efforts to counter other terrorist attack modalities for which UAS may increase or enable risk, especially efforts concerning countering terrorists’ manufacture, production and use of chemical, biological and radiological weapons;

(h) Developing and implementing training and awareness-raising activities for relevant authorities to enhance their understanding of threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes and their components, the specifics of terrorist groups’ systems and the *modus operandi* through which they acquire them, and the links that may exist, in some cases, between terrorists and some forms of transnational organized crime, to conduct risk assessments and to ensure full respect for applicable international law, including human rights law, in responses taken;

(i) Developing security awareness-raising among relevant private sector and industry stakeholders, including to highlight potential risks of the use of UAS for terrorist purposes and encourage the exercising of due diligence when importing,

exporting and procuring UAS and their components, in compliance with all applicable legal obligations with regard to privacy and data protection;

(j) Implementing awareness-raising activities for the public on potential threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, for example combined with improvised explosive devices or other lethal or harmful payloads, on threats against vulnerable targets and on how to report suspicious activities to the relevant authorities.

Non-binding guiding principle 3

In their efforts to develop measures to detect, identify, deter and respond to the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, including through counter-UAS measures and systems and to recover from UAS incidents, Member States, acting in cooperation, as and when appropriate, with local authorities, civil society, academia and the private sector, should consider:

(a) Implementing preventive, preparedness and mitigation measures at the national level to respond to and prevent terrorists from acquiring UAS and related components, including by conducting regular reviews of national laws, regulations, administrative procedures and transfer control systems;¹²

(b) Adopting a risk-based approach to develop tailored solutions to assess, address and respond to specific threat scenarios posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes;

(c) Developing and deploying UAS traffic management¹³ systems to assist authorities with identifying which UAS may be operating for terrorist purposes;

(d) Establishing a licensing and registration scheme that clearly and proportionately defines restrictions that mitigate the risk of UAS use for terrorist purposes, enables appropriate authorities to identify terrorist perpetrators and allows for more effective collection of digital forensics, while developing and implementing such licensing procedures and conditions through a multi-stakeholder approach that is in line with human rights and with protection of privacy and data;

(e) Engaging in ongoing collaboration with relevant industry stakeholders, civil society and academia to develop technical requirements for detecting, identifying, locating and tracking, and countering UAS that remain resilient to tampering and commensurate with the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes;

(f) Cooperating with international standardizing bodies and manufacturers to support the development of technical requirements to be consistently applied and incorporated at the design level, in order to facilitate both the detection and identification of UAS and to monitor the effective and proper implementation of these requirements;

¹² See Office of Counter-Terrorism and others, “Preventing terrorists from acquiring weapons”.

¹³ See ICAO, “Unmanned aircraft systems traffic management (UTM) – a common framework with core principles for global harmonization”. Available at www.icao.int/safety/UA/Documents/UTM-Framework.en.alltext.pdf.

(g) Participating in existing bilateral, regional and global efforts to prevent and reduce the risk of diversion of UAS to terrorists;¹⁴

(h) Exchanging information, as appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels, and with all relevant stakeholders (including law enforcement, the military, critical infrastructure owners/operators, academia, civil society and other appropriate public and private sector entities), on the development of counter-UAS systems that can prevent, detect, track, identify and mitigate UAS used for terrorist purposes;¹⁵

(i) Developing and implementing standardized testing and evaluation procedures for assessing the safety and effectiveness of counter-UAS technologies, equipment and methods, and deploying counter-UAS technologies that are reliable, accurate and scalable to meet the needs of various environments and use, which may include a certification process;

(j) Properly equipping relevant authorities to conduct investigations and, as appropriate, prosecute the supply of UAS and their components to terrorists, terrorist organizations and/or for terrorist purposes;

(k) Providing relevant authorities with appropriate digital forensic tools and capacity to process digital evidence, and ensuring the availability of capacity-building to assist them with the development and implementation of a protocol and guidance on the technical exploitation of UAS, including the recovery of data and identifiers from UAS and associated equipment, and on the preservation of such data as evidence for investigation and prosecution purposes in a manner consistent with international human rights law;

(l) Establishing an incident-reporting system and response protocols and procedures that include procedures, methods and technologies for reporting the potential use of UAS for terrorist purposes and that provide support for decision-making and implementation of operational measures as well as timely response to incidents;

(m) Establishing and implementing clear response protocols and procedures for sightings of potential use of UAS for terrorist purposes, which are agreed and practised in advance by all relevant actors and stakeholders, as part of the national and local crisis management plans;

(n) Developing protocols for different threat levels, with clear thresholds for escalation and suggested responses at each level;

(o) Providing rapid response to sightings of potential use of UAS for terrorist purposes to minimize the risk of harm to people and infrastructure, such as through the deployment of law enforcement to the scene or the temporary suspension of operations at the targeted facility;

(p) Conducting testing and assessments to evaluate the impact of technological and tactical trends and future risks in the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, including the safety of counter-UAS technology and its potential negative impacts.

¹⁴ The Register of Conventional Arms (see <https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/register/>) is a global instrument for reporting the international transfers of seven categories of major conventional arms plus small arms and light weapons, which includes unmanned aerial combat vehicles in category IV (b) and category V.

¹⁵ See Project Courageous of INTERPOL, which is developing a standardized methodology for testing and selecting countermeasure systems that can be used to detect and track UAS that enter protected airspace or a no-fly zone.

Non-binding guiding principle 4

In their further efforts to address the threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes, Member States should consider:

(a) Assisting other States, upon request, by providing effective and targeted capacity development, training and other necessary resources, as well as technical assistance, to enable the development of appropriate capacity to counter threats posed by the use of UAS for terrorist purposes;

(b) Sharing experiences and information on national practices on the development, governance and implementation of legal and regulatory frameworks, inter-agency and stakeholder cooperation and operational measures, and strengthening effective international cooperation in this area.
