

Joint special meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh) Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities; and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011)

“The nexus between international terrorism and organized crime”

*Friday, 26 April 2019,
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Chairs’ summary

Introduction

1. In its presidential statement of 8 May 2018 (S/PRST/2018/9), the Security Council notes that “the nature and scope of the linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime vary by context” and encourages “Member States, as well as international, regional, subregional organizations and forums to continue conducting research to better understand the nature and scope of the links that may exist between terrorists and transnational organized criminals”. The Council reiterates this position in its resolution 2462 (2019).

2. The interactions and synergies between terrorists and criminal groups may take a number of forms, including coexistence in the same territory, the development of ad hoc alliances based on common interest, and the convergence or merging of activities. Terrorist groups may either engage directly in criminal activities or benefit indirectly from them by, inter alia, imposing taxes on criminal groups operating in terrorist-controlled areas. They may also rely on criminal groups for the provision of services, including the procurement of firearms, the counterfeiting of identity documents, and the use of trafficking and smuggling routes to relocate from conflict zones. Even in regions where the nexus between terrorism and organized crime may not be as relevant, there appear to be potential links between certain other forms of criminality and terrorism perpetrated within a State or neighbourhood.

3. The joint special meeting was organized by the Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da'esh) Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities; and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011). The panellists included representatives of Member States, international and regional organizations, and academic institutions.

Opening statements

4. In his introductory remarks, the Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee recalled the previous initiatives of the Security Council and the Committee on the linkages between terrorism

and organized crime. By focusing on regional specificities, responses and lessons learned, the joint special meeting was intended to complement the discussions held at the Committee's open briefing of 8 October 2018 on the linkages between terrorism and three specific criminal activities (human trafficking, drug trafficking and arms smuggling). The responses to the terrorism threat must be comprehensive, coordinated, preventive and adaptable in order facilitate identification of the circumstances in which terrorists might benefit directly or indirectly from criminal activities or from their criminal connections. The tools and instruments developed in the context of combating organized crime might also contribute to the identification of terrorist networks.

5. The Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) stated that events such as the joint special meeting were an integral part of the ongoing cooperation between the relevant Security Council Committees, as called for by the Council in its resolution 2368 (2017). Furthermore, in its resolution 2368 (2017), the Council referred to the involvement of ISIL and Al-Qaida in transnational organized crime and expressed concern that terrorists benefited from transnational organized crime in some regions. There were various views on the nexus between terrorism and organized crime, owing in part to the differing experiences of States and regions. More structured coordination and increased information-sharing would enable the three Council Committees, other United Nations bodies, and relevant international and regional partners to address the related challenges more effectively.

6. The CTED Deputy Executive Director stated that, because terrorists and criminal groups continued to adapt their operations to avoid detection, there was a need to ensure the rapid sharing of up-to-date information. Over the past year, CTED had participated in a number of international conferences and workshops on the linkages between terrorism and organized crime and had actively engaged on those linkages with the member entities of its Global Research Network. Furthermore, CTED continued to engage in dialogue with Member States, including within the framework of assessment visits, concerning their understanding of the linkages. That dialogue would be fed into the terrorism-financing thematic summary gaps assessment that the Council, in its resolution 2462 (2019), requests CTED to carry out on an annual basis. There was a need to overcome inter-institutional barriers to information-sharing and address the current limited use of financial intelligence. The United Nations and international and regional organizations remained committed to supporting Member States in countering the threat posed by terrorism and organized crime.

7. The Coordinator of the Analytical and Sanctions Monitoring Team noted that, during the "caliphate" phase, ISIL made significant use of the proceeds of illegal activities to carry out its terrorist business. Moreover, the Taliban (which was not defined as a terrorist group) used the profits of narcotics trading, becoming the world's leading heroin producer. The Monitoring Team regularly raised the issue of possible linkages between terrorism and organized crime in its discussions with Member States. In Central Asia, North America and Europe, the responses might be summarized as follows: they had not identified many (if any) linkages and, on the whole, assessed such linkages to be unlikely because organized crime was profitable and would not risk its business model by engaging in activities that (or with individuals who) might attract scrutiny from counter-terrorism agencies or other law-enforcement agencies. In its most recent report, the Monitoring Team had noted the existence of extensive connections in the Sahel and West Africa.

Some terrorists were also organized criminals or close relatives of organized criminals and were involved in kidnapping for ransom; trafficking of narcotics; smuggling of weapons, gasoline or vehicles; extortion; or illegal mining. They shared with criminals the objective of weakening fragile States and undermining law and border security.

The nexus between international terrorism and organized crime: definitions and scope of the issue

8. The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) provided an overview of the academic debate on the definition and scope of the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, as well as the attention paid to the phenomenon by the Security Council, the G20, and other policymakers such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), in cooperation with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the Council of Europe and the European Union, as well as by academics.

9. In defining the linkages between terrorism and organized crime, a context-dependent approach was required because the two phenomena took various forms in different geographical contexts. Furthermore, both terrorism and organized crime were difficult to analyse and measure. There was a need to address the two together because a joint approach provided the best opportunities to disrupt both terrorist and criminal operations.

10. From a terrorism-financing perspective, different terrorist organizations had turned to different criminal activities as a source of funding. Whereas small cells and lone actors engaged mainly in petty crimes, structured, “corporate” terrorist organizations and terrorists controlling territories engaged in more complex criminal activities and often cooperated with organized criminal groups.

11. Different disruption strategies were therefore needed. Whereas law enforcement strategies and sanctions had proven effective in preventing terrorists from raising and moving funds, financial intelligence had proven extremely useful within the framework of countering petty crime. Public/private partnerships such as the Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) in the United Kingdom had shown good results in that respect. Effective strategies to disrupt the linkages between terrorism and organized crime required a proper understanding and assessment of the risks and the adoption of a risk-based approach. Furthermore, it was essential to consider and understand how terrorists acquired skills and how criminals were radicalized, particularly in the prison setting. Strategic interventions targeting both groups would clearly show criminals the cost of making business with terrorists.

Session I: Latin America

12. The Argentine Council for International Relations stressed that organized criminal groups in Latin America systematically used violence for their purposes. In Latin America, organized crime was used as a source of financing and terrorist tactics were used to achieve the groups’ objectives. The linkages between organized criminal groups and terrorist groups took the form of

cooperation, association, or even partnership. It was therefore difficult to distinguish between criminal and terrorist groups.

13. An effective response should include three elements: (i) a coherent legislative framework against terrorism, organized crime and corruption; (ii) the institutional capacity to carry out complex investigations and ensure inter-agency information exchange and cooperation and partnership with the private sector and academia; and (iii) a clear political will.

14. Colombia provided an overview of its Attorney-General's Office, which had recently been restructured. The Office included a section on organized crime and terrorism and a section on illicit financing, which was a cross-cutting issue for all organized crime and terrorism-related matters. Colombia faced emerging threats from drug trafficking, other forms of organized crime, illicit mining, trade-based money- laundering, and terrorism.

15. Illicit mining had become a more profitable source of funding than drug trafficking and was therefore exploited by both terrorist and criminal groups, which used the same methods. Armed and criminal groups were either directly involved in the extraction, trading and exportation of gold or engaged in the extortion of groups involved in such activity.

16. The Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States (OAS/CICTE) stressed that many vulnerabilities exploited by criminal organizations were equally susceptible to exploitation by terrorist groups. Those vulnerabilities included porous borders, links with established drug trafficking organizations, weak legal frameworks, and the use of alternative money-remittance systems. There was also a risk that the use of routes for illicit trafficking would enable the cross-border movements of terrorists and that the proceeds from criminal activities could be used to finance terrorist acts or organizations.

17. CICTE supported Member States in strengthening their counter-terrorism policies, strategies and capabilities through 12 terrorism prevention programmes aimed, among other things, at enhancing the legal and regulatory framework, improving information-sharing, ensuring the use of intelligence as admissible evidence in criminal investigations and prosecutions, and combating use of the Internet for terrorist purposes.

Session II: West Africa

18. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Regional Office for West and Central Africa addressed the types of relations and connections between terrorist and criminal groups encountered in West Africa. There was a growing trend for terrorist actors to recruit criminals, often on the basis of a shared hostility towards national authorities and poor economic and social conditions.

19. In recent years, terrorist groups had turned to criminal activities such as drug trafficking. They had become more tolerant of criminals involved in drug trafficking and other illicit trafficking because they needed income for their survival and operations. Criminal activities were not the only source of revenue for terrorist groups in the region, but kidnapping for ransom, petty crime, and looting had been used by terrorist cells to fund themselves. The interactions between

criminals and terrorists were also facilitated by the fact that they operated in the same territory, belonged to the same ethnic group, or even belonged to the same family. Those ties helped create a favourable environment for cooperating without necessarily indicating an adherence to terrorist ideology. Moreover, criminal groups had often provided logistical support to terrorists and facilitated their local establishment.

20. The Central Office for the Suppression of Illicit Drug Trafficking of Niger (*Office Central de Répression du trafic illicite des stupéfiants* (OCRTIS)) noted that the Sahel region had been at the centre of multiple illicit trafficking operations (drugs, counterfeiting of pharmaceuticals, weapons, migrants and human trafficking) for several years. The “narco-terrorists” were individuals associated both with criminal groups involved in international drug trafficking and with terrorist groups operating in the region. They were also directly or indirectly involved in financing the activities of such groups.

21. Many routes used for drug trafficking and other transnational trafficking were believed to be used by terrorists also. The growing number of terrorist organizations in the Sahel had also expanded drug and other illegal trafficking as a source of funding. Non-State armed groups were providing military support to drug traffickers and some (e.g., Boko Haram) were using Tramadol as the “combatant’s drug”. The recent arrest of drugs traffickers engaged in delivering weapons to a terrorist group in northern Mali proved that criminal organizations and terrorist organizations were cooperating and even establishing partnerships.

22. In addressing those threats, Niger had strengthened its counter-terrorism legal framework and has also set-up a Central Office for Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime and a Specialized Judicial Unit on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime. It had also improved information exchange among all relevant authorities.

23. The Lake Chad Basin Commission noted that Boko Haram used the shrinking of Lake Chad to its advantage. Most of the area’s previous inhabitants had been displaced. The worsening economic situation had also created a fertile ground for recruitment by organized criminal and terrorist groups. Terrorist groups operating in the region had used criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom, robberies, and cattle rustling as sources of funding.

24. The Lake Chad Basin Commission had made efforts to address the threat posed by organized crime and terrorism, notably through its Regional Stabilization Strategy for Boko Haram, the operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force, and collaboration with other ongoing initiatives in the region, such as the G5 Sahel. A comprehensive approach was needed to overcome the scourge of terrorism and organized crime. The formulation of unified legal frameworks by the countries of the Lake Chad Basin should be accompanied by initiatives, such as the Regional Stabilization Strategy, aimed at promoting the area’s development.

Session III: Asia

25. The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) noted that the return of foreign fighters from ISIL-controlled territories has posed challenges for the region, especially when combined with the strengths of criminal groups. There was significant

scope in the region to improve law and order and to address the porous borders and the political instability that enabled certain groups. Criminal activities of terror groups in the region offered the most obvious examples of the crime-terror nexus. The Abu Sayyaf Group's involvement with extortion and kidnapping was one example in that regard. ICPVTR recommended enhanced coordination between police and counter-terrorism agencies, better understanding of the role of cyberspace, and improved use of legal mechanisms for prosecuting terrorists in different jurisdictions. ICPVTR stressed that the intelligence-sharing initiative launched by six Southeast Asian States ("Our Eyes") aimed to help them respond more quickly and effectively to transnational security threats, could possibly be replicated in South Asia. The importance of identifying and stopping traditional terrorism financing, in particular transactions using hawala networks, was also emphasized.

26. The State Financial Intelligence Service (SFIS) of the Kyrgyz Republic highlighted the criminal activities of the group "Jaishul Makhdi" which had attempted to establish a so-called caliphate in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2010 and 2011. Members of the group had committed a number of crimes, including murder and robbery, using criminal actions to advance their agenda. Financial investigations into the group had identified further relationships with people with criminal financial ties to Russia. Charges had eventually been brought against 16 individuals. The Kyrgyz Republic had adopted laws criminalizing terrorism financing. Its financial intelligence unit (FIU) monitored the financial activities of organized criminal groups and reported suspicious cases to law enforcement.

27. The National Intelligence Coordinating Agency of the Philippines stated that local terrorist groups remained disorganized and fractured following their recent setbacks (e.g., the failed attempt to seize Marawi City in May 2017). However, the alliance of those groups with transnational criminal syndicates allowed them to challenge military operations that targeted their activities. The group that had led the Marawi siege was closely aligned to "narco-politicians". Kidnapping, extortion, drug trafficking and arms smuggling were all used by the Abu Sayyaf Group to generate cash and enable it to sustain its operations. The Philippines was in the process of amending its Human Security Act to make it more responsive to the challenges posed by violent extremism. Outreach to the private sector and collaboration with the international community were important elements of countering extremism.

28. The Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism stated that it had conducted together with the Asia Pacific Group on money laundering (APG), a study of typologies on the links between terrorism financing and organized crime. The preliminary findings indicated that small terrorism cells were more likely to use nominal sums from self-financing or from non-profit organizations seeking to move FTFs to conflict zones. Drug trafficking and migrant and arms smuggling were among the crimes used to raise funds for terrorists. A minority of responses had identified religious taxes as a means of fundraising. Responding jurisdictions had also noted that, while some criminal proceeds were transferred to terrorist groups, others were invested in legitimate businesses. They had also identified a number of challenges regarding the reporting of suspicious transactions to FIUs, in particular FIUs' limited analytical capabilities and the failure of reporting entities to file suspicious transaction reports proactively.

Session IV: Europe

29. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) shared a case study involving a United Kingdom national who was acting as a petty criminal and drug dealer, while also operating as an FTF in the Syrian Arab Republic. A similar pattern was seen in Germany, where an analysis of 800 FTFs had found that one-third of the total had criminal convictions and that the majority were known to police. Fifty per cent of accused individuals in Belgian FTF cases had criminal convictions, and more than 60 percent of FTFs from the Netherlands were the subject of police reports for involvement in petty crimes. The ICSR had found that the process of radicalization provided a way to make use of criminal skills, allowing a form of redemption and ultimately legitimizing criminal activity. Law enforcement should re-think its definition of radicalization and not exclude “un-Islamic behaviour” such as taking or dealing drugs. (One example in that regard was the 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack, in which the driver of the truck involved had been under police surveillance, but had not been considered a violent extremism threat because he had been observed dealing drugs.) Individuals in prison settings were highly vulnerable to training in violent extremism and likely to promote violent extremism upon their release.

30. Italy described the role and organization of its National Anti-Mafia and Anti-Terrorism Directorate (DNAA). Counter-terrorism had been added to the mandate of the Directorate in 2015. The Directorate had no direct operational or investigative powers but oversaw and coordinated the activities of 26 prosecutors’ offices and acted as a central point for coordination among law enforcement, the FIU, intelligence services, and the private sector. The Directorate also maintained a national database containing information relevant to its mandate, which was used by district offices. That structure had led to the identification of relationships between the Italian mafia and oil traffickers operating in ISIL-controlled territories, among others.

31. The Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism stated that, in Europe, unlike in other regions of the world, there currently appeared to be no systematic cooperation between organized criminal groups and terrorist groups. There was, however, ad hoc cooperation on an opportunistic basis, which was reflected in the procurement of arms and false documentation. There was also overlap in the recruitment of new members for criminal gangs and terrorist groups. In both cases, prison settings provided fertile ground. It was important to avoid compartmentalization, including by raising prosecutorial authorities’ awareness of the relationship between crime and terrorism.

Developing integrated and operational responses to the nexus

32. UNODC noted that, whereas organized criminal groups were increasingly using terrorist tactics, terrorists, for their part, were benefitting from organized crime, including through illicit trafficking in arms, people, drugs, cultural property, and illegally mined natural resources. UNODC worked to assist Member States to address the links between organized crime and terrorism and to ensure that the two phenomena were not treated in isolation from each another. UNODC supported the role of national law enforcement in intelligence-based investigations of

terrorism to identify, investigate and intercept the illegal movement of goods. There was a need to strengthen information and intelligence-sharing, both nationally and internationally.

33. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), noting its view that the expression “*nexus*” between terrorism and organized crime was an understatement, stated that terrorism was a form of organized crime. Terrorism across Africa was suspected to be heavily funded by other transnational criminal activities, such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, the sale of stolen cultural artefacts on the black market, the sale of illicit petroleum, counterfeiting medicines, and wildlife crimes such as oil bunkering. Many terrorist groups were essentially operating as mafia groups. One such example was Al-Shabaab, which used violence as a tactic for social control. In many failing or failed States, terrorist groups had stepped in to offer State services, in the manner of a traditional mafia group. The recent CTED report on the link between human trafficking and terrorism had noted the lack of related data. With its 17 databases and global communication system, INTERPOL was in a unique position to provide such data and thereby help “connect the dots” between organized crime and terrorism.

34. The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) discussed a policy toolkit that it had developed together with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), to help States better understand the nexus between transnational organized crime and terrorism and effective measures to combat the nexus. The toolkit included a number of nexus “watch points” (i.e., geography, social indicators, security, governance and corruption). The next steps would be to pilot the toolkit in select States and develop table-top exercises for training, based on scenarios targeted at specific States and regions.

Closing remarks

35. The Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) and the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) made closing statements highlighting the substantive nature of the discussions and the importance of the opportunity the discussion had provided to consider the nature and scope of the nexus between organized criminal groups and terrorists in different regional contexts. The meeting had shed light on the many different tools and good practices that should be developed and effectively implemented by Member States, regional and international organizations to address this area. In this regard, the discussions had also left much food for thought on future strategies.