29. Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

During the period under review, the Council held one meeting under the item entitled “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts” which took the form of a briefing. More information on the meeting, including on participants, speakers and outcomes, is given in table 1 below. Council members also held five open videoconferences in connection with this item and the Council adopted two resolutions, including one under Chapter VII of the Charter. More information on videoconferences is given in table 2 below. In addition, the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution in connection with this item because of the negative vote of a permanent member.

Whether in the context of meetings or videoconferences, Council members continued to focus on several issues under this item, including the threat posed by returning and relocating fighters, the countering of terrorism financing, the introduction of a gender perspective in counter-terrorism efforts as well as the linkages between terrorism and organized crime and the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da’esh). During 2020, Council members also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of terrorism. Council members heard most briefings by the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. In addition, Council members were briefed twice by the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, once by a civil society representative and once by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

The Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism briefed Council members three times, on 7 February and on 6 and 24 August 2020. Two of those briefings concerned the tenth and eleventh reports of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in

808 For more information on the format of meetings, see part II sect. II.
809 Resolutions 2557 (2020) and 2560 (2020). For more information on the procedures and working methods developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.
support of Member States in countering the threat.\footnote{See: S/2020/95 and S/2020/774.} During his first briefing, on 7 February 2020, the Under-Secretary-General reported that ISIL (Da’esh) had lost its last stronghold in the Syrian Arab Republic in March 2019 and had seen a change in leadership after the death of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in October 2019, although the Secretary-General’s report showed that the group remained at the centre of the transnational terrorism threat. He noted that ISIL (Da’esh) had continued to seek resurgence and global relevance online and offline and its regional affiliates had continued to pursue a strategy of entrenchment in conflict zones by exploiting local grievances. The Under-Secretary-General further stated that due to their high number, foreign terrorist fighters who had travelled to Iraq and Syria were expected to continue to pose a threat, with estimates of those alive ranging from 20,000 to almost 27,000. He noted that the situation of ISIL (Da’esh) fighters and associated family members in detention and displacement facilities in Iraq and Syria had worsened since his last presentation to the Council, adding that their fate remained a major challenge to the international community. In closing, he urged the Council and Member States to maintain and reaffirm their unity in the face of the persisting threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda and their affiliates, as well as terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.\footnote{See S/PV.8716.}

In her briefing at the same meeting, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate highlighted that thousands of women and children associated with ISIL (Da’esh) remained in makeshift camps in appalling conditions. She noted that leaving them to fight for survival, facing threats of further radicalization, would not only be contrary to principles of humanity but also detrimental to counter-terrorism efforts. She added that women associated with ISIL (Da’esh) often had simultaneous roles as victims and perpetrators and required gender-responsive, tailored prosecution and rehabilitation strategies that were consistent with international human rights standards. She underlined that children were primarily victims and had to be dealt with as such. The Executive Director called upon Member States to develop and implement comprehensive repatriation strategies in line with international law. Furthermore, she stated that bringing ISIL (Da’esh) perpetrators to justice continued to be of critical
importance and stressed that its institutionalization of sexual violence and slavery required special attention. The international community had an opportunity to prosecute the perpetrators, rehabilitate the victims and facilitate reconstruction and community development in places destroyed by ISIL violence.\(^{812}\) Ms. Freij, a civil society representative from north-east Syria, recounted her experience as a survivor of ISIL (Da’esh) rule and her work as an activist for women’s rights in civil society institutions. She requested the Council to assist civilians in preventing another humanitarian disaster in Idlib, northern Syria and the rest of the country and to make every effort to launch a process of transitional justice in Syria and end impunity so that all those responsible for perpetrating serious human rights violations would be held accountable. Further to the briefers, speakers at the meeting emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism efforts and for the perpetrators of terrorist acts to be held accountable. Council members also reaffirmed the need for international cooperation in countering terrorism, with several speakers stressing the importance of a coordinating role by the United Nations system.\(^{813}\)

On 6 August 2020, at the initiative of Indonesia which held the Presidency for the month,\(^{814}\) Council members held a high-level open videoconference in connection with this item and on the theme entitled “Addressing the issue of linkages between terrorism and organized crime”.\(^{815}\) The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia presided over the videoconference, during which Council members heard briefings by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and by the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. The Executive Director of UNODC presented a report jointly prepared by the UNODC and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, which provided an overview of measures taken by Member States and United Nations entities to address linkages between terrorism and organized crime. She noted that many States had reported that terrorists benefited from organized crime, while some States had observed that criminal organizations were increasingly disinterested in cooperating with terrorist groups, 

\(^{812}\) Ibid.

\(^{813}\) Ibid., South Africa, China and Viet Nam.

\(^{814}\) A concept note was circulated by a letter dated 30 July 2020 (S/2020/764).

\(^{815}\) See S/2020/791.
potentially to avoid additional scrutiny from national authorities. She stated that many governments had taken steps to counter these threats, through adopting legislative, policy and operational responses identified in resolution 2482 (2019). She further noted that the COVID-19 pandemic posed several new challenges to national authorities, noting that organized criminal groups and terrorists could seek to exploit new vulnerabilities, and that transit patterns were shifting in view of travel restrictions and lockdown measures.  

In his briefing during the same videoconference, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism stated that the report of the Secretary-General set out how the ability of terrorists to draw on organized crime, whether domestic or transnational, online or offline, could exacerbate the threat posed by terrorism to international peace and security. He reported on the first Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week at the United Nations on the strategic and practical challenges of countering terrorism in a global pandemic environment, which had drawn over 1,000 participants from Member States, civil society and private sector organizations, international and regional organizations and United Nations entities. He warned that the pandemic had the potential to act as a catalyst in the spread of terrorism and violent extremism by exacerbating inequalities, undermining social cohesion and fuelling local conflicts. Council members discussed the evolving linkages between organized crime and terrorism, and the threat that they could pose to international peace and security. Several Council members also discussed how to address both phenomena, with some noting the changed context and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 24 August 2020, Council members held an open videoconference at which the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism provided a briefing. He noted that States needed to stay attuned to how the ISIL (Da’esh) threat had evolved during and after the pandemic and that in conflict zones, the terrorist threat had increased as evidenced by

[816] Ibid.
[819] Ibid., Indonesia, Tunisia, Viet Nam, Belgium, China, Estonia, France, Niger and South Africa. In addition to Council members, other Member States submitted statements in connection with the videoconference. For more information on the discussion and statements submitted, see part VII, sect. I.
the regrouping of ISIL (Da’esh) and its increasing activity in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and among some of its regional affiliates. In non-conflict zones, the threat appeared to have decreased in the short term because of COVID-19 related measures, such as lockdowns and restrictions on movement. Nevertheless, he pointed out that there was a continued trend of attacks by individuals inspired online and acting alone or in small groups. He reiterated that the pandemic’s socioeconomic fallout could exacerbate conditions conducive to terrorism and increase the medium to long-term threat, both within and outside conflict zones. He noted that more than 10,000 ISIL (Da’esh) fighters were estimated to remain active in Iraq and Syria, and that there was a significant increase in ISIL (Da’esh) attacks in both countries in 2020 as compared with 2019. Noting that the global threat from ISIL (Da’esh) was likely to increase if the international community failed to meet the challenge of repatriation, he reiterated the Secretary-General’s call on Member States to meet their obligations under international law and repatriate their nationals.821

In her briefing during the same videoconference, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate stressed that the dire situation faced by thousands of women and children associated with ISIL (Da’esh) in the detention camps of north-eastern Syria remained a major challenge for the international community. She noted that the pandemic risked exacerbating an already untenable humanitarian, human rights and security situation. She stated that pandemic-related restrictions, including social isolation measures, curtailed religious and cultural activities and the lack of employment opportunities could exacerbate existing grievances. She noted that ISIL (Da’esh) and its affiliates took the opportunity of the increase of people’s presence on the Internet to spread their propaganda. She further said that Member States had to ensure that policies adopted to curtail the spread of terrorist propaganda were human rights-compliant and gender-sensitive.822 Many Council members agreed that the issue of foreign terrorist fighters remained a challenge.823 Noting that the issues of relocation and returning foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members presented significant

822 Ibid.
823 Ibid. Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia, Russian Federation, Tunisia, United States and Viet Nam.
challenges for Member States, the representative of Indonesia stressed the importance of an effective comprehensive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategy, and called upon Council members to set their differences aside. In that regard, the United States expressed disappointment that Indonesia’s efforts to draft a meaningful resolution on prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists had been stymied by the refusal of Council members to include repatriation.

The issues outlined above were also addressed by the Council in the draft resolutions proposed and adopted during the period under review. On 31 August 2020, Indonesia submitted a draft resolution, which was not adopted due to the negative vote of a permanent member, namely, the United States. Among other aspects, the draft resolution would have called upon Member States to assess and investigate suspected individuals whom they had reasonable grounds to believe were terrorists, including suspected foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members. It would have also called upon all Member States, to develop and implement comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration measures for persons who were engaged in terrorism-related activity, including foreign terrorist fighters and to develop and implement risk assessment tools to identify individuals who demonstrated signs of radicalization to terrorism. In addition, the draft resolution would have encouraged all Member States to cooperate in efforts to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, including by bringing them to justice, preventing the radicalization to terrorism and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and accompanying family members, particularly accompanying children, including by facilitating the return of the children to their countries of origin, as appropriate and on a case by case basis. In the explanation of vote submitted to the Council, the permanent mission of the United States indicated that while the draft resolution was meant to address the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorists, including foreign terrorist fighters and their accompanying family members, it failed to “even include reference to

824 The result of the vote was as follows: in favour: Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom and Viet Nam; against: United States; abstaining: None. See also S/2020/865. For more information on the procedural developments, including voting procedures, during the COVID-19 pandemic, see part II.
825 See S/2020/852, paras. 3, 8, 12 and 18.
the crucial first step — repatriation to countries of origin or nationality”. The permanent mission further submitted that failing to address head-on the importance of repatriation would inevitably perpetuate the problem of terrorism. 826

On 18 December 2020, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2557 (2020) under Chapter VII of the Charter, extending the mandate of the Monitoring Team established pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 1526 (2004) for a period of 12 months until December 2021. 827 In the resolution, the Council welcomed efforts by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban in facilitating intra-Afghan negotiations and encouraged the parties to make rapid progress on a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, and a political settlement that would end the conflict in Afghanistan and ensure that Afghanistan would never again be a safe haven for international terrorism. 828

On 29 December 2020, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2560 (2020) in which it stressed the important role of the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee in identifying possible cases of non-compliance with the measures pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017). 829 The Council also encouraged Member States to more actively submit to the Committee listing requests of individuals, groups, undertakings and entities that met listing criteria in paragraph 2 of resolution 2368 (2017) and to submit to the Committee “additional identifying and other information set out in paragraph 85 of resolution 2368 (2017)” in order to keep the ISIL (Da’esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List reliable and up-to-date. 830 Moreover, the Council requested the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team to study the basic and extraordinary exemptions procedures set out in paragraphs 81 (a) and (b) of resolution 2368 (2017), and to provide recommendations to the Committee to determine whether or not updating those exemptions was required. 831

Table 1
Meetings: Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

826 See S/2020/870.
828 Ibid., eighth preambular paragraph. On the situation in Afghanistan, see sect. 15.
829 Resolution 2560 (2020), fifth preambular paragraph.
830 Ibid., para. 1.
831 Ibid., para. 2. For further information on the mandate of the Monitoring Team, see part IX, sect. I.B.1.
Meeting record and date | Sub-item | Other documents | Rule 37 invitations | Rule 39 and other invitations | Speakers | Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
S/PV.8716 7 February 2020 | Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat (S/2020/95) | | | Under-Secretary-General, Office of Counter-Terrorism, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, civil society representative | All Council members, all invitees a | 

a Ms. Freij participated in the meeting via videoconference from Istanbul.

Table 2
Videoconferences: Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Videoconference date</th>
<th>Videoconference record</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining) and record of written procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 August 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/791</td>
<td>Letter dated 11 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 August 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/836</td>
<td>Letter dated 26 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 August 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/870</td>
<td>Letter dated 31 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
<td>Draft resolution S/2020/852 not adopted 14-1-0 a S/2020/865 (Record of written procedure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 December 2020</td>
<td>S/2020/1311</td>
<td>Letter dated 29 December 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council</td>
<td>Resolution 2560 (2020) 15-0-0 S/2020/1305 (Record of written procedure)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a For: Belgium, China, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, United Kingdom and Viet Nam. Against: United States. Abstaining: None.