

Security Council Open Debate
Threats to International Peace and Security Caused by Terrorist Acts
International Cooperation on Combating Terrorism and Violent Extremism
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Statement by Mr. Quinlan Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations
Speaking as Chair of the Al-Qaida Committee

When I last briefed the Council as Chair of the Al-Qaida Committee in May (see S/PV.7184), I spoke about the threat arising from an increasing range of heterogeneous Al-Qaida-linked or splinter groups. Since May we have all witnessed the dramatic shift in that threat, with the brutal extremism and rapid territorial gains of two groups on the Al-Qaida sanctions list, namely, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Al-Nusra Front (ANF). The Council responded on 15 August by adopting resolution 2170 (2014), which emphasizes the role of the Al-Qaida sanctions regime in tackling the threat posed by ISIL and ANF and called on States to strengthen measures to counter funding and recruitment for those groups. In that resolution, the Council directed the Al-Qaida Sanctions Monitoring Team to submit to the Committee in mid-November a report on the threat, including to the region, posed by ISIL and ANF, their sources of arms, funding, recruitment and demographics, and to recommend additional action to address the threat.

In its report (see S/2014/815), the Monitoring Team notes that the threat from those groups is not new: ISIL evolved from Al-Qaida in Iraq to emerge today as a splinter group of Al-Qaida, while the ANF remains a formal Al-Qaida affiliate. Both groups originated from terrorist networks founded by veterans of previous Al-Qaida-related groups in Afghanistan and elsewhere during the 1990s. Differences relating to leadership emerged in 2013, with the Al-Qaida core and ANF formally disassociating itself from ISIL and its leader, Al-Baghdadi, in February 2014; but both groups continued to subscribe to the underlying goals of Al-Qaida, promoting extremism and seeking to change the existing political order in the Middle East through terrorist violence to establish a State based on a widely repudiated misinterpretation of religion and to expel foreign influence.

But while the threat is not new, the Monitoring Team assessed that the scale of the threat was qualitatively and quantitatively different, because of the nexus between funding and the groups' control over population and territory, and the thousands of foreign terrorist fighters that have joined them. Both groups pose an immediate threat to the population in territories they have seized and where they operate, as well as in neighbouring territories. Both groups have a track record of summary killings, rape and sexual violence, trafficking in women and children, targeting humanitarian workers and kidnapping and murdering hostages for income or political messaging. Their presence fundamentally complicates efforts to forge political order in Iraq and Syria, and aggravates and intensifies existing armed violence. Their extreme ideology exacerbates sectarian tensions, generating further tension in the region, while their campaign against minorities has altered the demography of Iraq and Syria.

Globally, the Monitoring Team found the threat derived from three strands: first, the large and diverse networks of foreign terrorist fighters, numbering over 15,000 from more than 80 countries and who already threaten a range of States; secondly, the power of ISIL and the Nusra Front's toxic ideology and propaganda, which has set a new standard for Al-Qaida in

disseminating its message; and, thirdly, their operational innovation, which could create a mobile, transnational cadre of expert terrorists who can combine terrorist, guerrilla and conventional tactics. Those three strands carry associated risks. As we have seen with previous Al-Qaida veterans, there is a high risk that these battle-hardened, radicalized recruits will transfer their skills and threaten peace and security in other countries in years to come. ISIL's propaganda is produced in greater volumes and with greater frequency than before, and has been modernized and digitalized, making it globally available with the potential to sustain a new wave of Al-Qaida movement activity.

The Monitoring Team found that both ISIL and ANF had seized military assets from conventional armies, captured, diverted and traded arms with other opposition groups and benefitted from an extensive informal regional economy in arms smuggling. ISIL is particularly well armed, having seized extensive supplies of heavy weapons from the Government of Iraq, including man-portable air defence systems and high mobility multipurpose military vehicles, while the Nusra Front is more dependent on continuing fresh supplies of weapons and ammunition. Both are sophisticated in their use of improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war.

Similarly, on finances, the Monitoring Team found that ISIL had been able to seize considerable assets in both Iraq and Syria and continued to benefit from a substantial, continuing revenue flow from a range of sources, including the sale of oil, extortion, kidnapping for ransom and — to a lesser extent today — donations. The bulk of ISIL's funds appear to come from its control of oil fields in Iraq and Syria, which it sells and smuggles predominantly through tanker trucks and long-established smuggling networks, which the Monitoring Team assessed could raise revenue ranging from \$846,000 to \$1,645,000 per day. Both ISIL and the Nusra Front exploit civilian populations, extracting payments from those who pass through, conduct business in or live in areas under their control, and raising revenue through the sale of stolen goods. There is evidence that ISIL encourages the looting and smuggling of antiquities from Iraq and Syria and generates revenue by taxing looters. However, ANF lacks the same range and depth of resources and appears to rely more on external donations and kidnapping for ransom. The funds generated from those illegal activities are used by groups to support their recruitment efforts and strengthen their operational capability to organize and carry out terrorist attacks.

In terms of ISIL and Nusra Front recruits, the Team identified three main sources: foreign terrorist fighters, local Iraqis and Syrians, and new local affiliates, ranging from militia and ex-Baathists who had made tactical alliances with ISIL. Recruits are drawn in through Internet-based platforms, personal contact and persuasion, or in some cases through prison-based networks. Despite the sharp growth in foreign terrorist fighters in the last three years, the Monitoring Team found no specific typology for a foreign terrorist fighter, but more data was emerging. What can be said is that this new wave tends to be younger, more diverse and digital-savvy, which in turn generates fresh social and operational networks that are more transnational. Fighters came from over 80 countries, with large groupings from the Maghreb and the Middle East, along with Europe and Central Asia. There was also evidence of a significant presence of dual nationals with European passports.

As directed in resolution 2170 (2014), adopted in August, the Monitoring Team has made a number of detailed recommendations, which the Al-Qaida Committee is now considering.

The Monitoring Team recommends that the Committee promote fuller implementation and greater use of the existing Al-Qaida sanctions regime by encouraging States to identify more designations to the Committee relevant to ISIL and ANF and encouraging the availability of technical assistance and capacity-building to address gaps in implementation, in collaboration with the Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate.

The Monitoring Team also recommends a number of measures requiring Council action, designed not only to stem the flow of funds to ISIL and ANF from the sale of oil from territory they control, but also to tackle potential revenue streams, such as from looted antiquities, and to prevent possible avenues for resupply in ISIL- and ANF-controlled territory by banning flights to or from such territory. The Team also recommends a specific focus on heightened vigilance in the banking sector against ISIL and ANF. Should such measures be adopted, the Team also recommends that the Committee assess the impact of such measures after six months to ensure that they affect only their target.

Lastly, the Monitoring Team recommends that Member States use INTERPOL's network and tools, such as the transnational fighters database, to share information on known and suspected foreign terrorist fighters, and highlights the need for more concerted multilateral and national action to address the toxic ideas and imagery promoted by ISIL, ANF and other groups within the Al-Qaida movement.

Effectively implemented, well-targeted Al-Qaida sanctions can make a real contribution to disrupting ISIL and ANF and inhibiting their international network of recruits and facilitators. But sanctions alone are clearly not sufficient; a comprehensive approach is needed that properly integrates United Nations strategies with multilateral and national action and incorporates strategic communication to counter the terrorist narrative.