

BLUE SKY V

An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts



November 2020

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since 2012, the Global Center on Cooperative Security has released the latest report in its “Blue Sky” series on the margins of the UN General Assembly's biennial review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. The series advances a central argument: the United Nations and its partners should take steps to optimize the comparative advantages of the organization in the spheres of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE). The reports focus on the United Nations' attributes as a strategic leader across its three pillars of human rights, peace and security, and development, including as a norm-setter, convener, provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field. Building on past versions, this report and its recommendations widen the aperture to look more broadly at the global landscape of counterterrorism and PVE trends, changing geopolitical dynamics, and UN-wide reform efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating its advance worldwide. UN headquarters remains closed to the public, and the negotiations around the Strategy, originally scheduled for June 2020, have been deferred to the General Assembly's 75th session. In addition to adhering to social distancing measures, the deferral allows for member states to account for the changes expected in the global socioeconomic and political landscapes resulting from the health and economic impacts of the pandemic and the measures to contain them. This report accounts for some of these impacts, including the economic fallout and exacerbated humanitarian crises. An addendum to this report will be released closer to the date of the review to update its findings and recommendations.

This report is informed by research and interviews held with representatives of UN agencies, member states, academia, civil society groups, and human rights organizations. Consultations were held under nonattribution rules during a two-day retreat on 27–28 February 2020 at the Greentree Foundation in Manhasset, New York, as well as during the Global Center roundtable series on different thematic topics with relevant stakeholders organized on a monthly basis. Summary findings were presented in advance of the UN Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week in July 2020 to inform those debates and discussions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CFT	countering the financing of terrorism
CTC	Counter-Terrorism Committee (UN Security Council)
CTED	Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN Security Council)
CTITF	UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
GCTF	Global Counterterrorism Forum
HRDDP	Human Rights Due Diligence Policy
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
PVE	preventing violent extremism
UN	United Nations
UNCCT	UN Counter-Terrorism Centre
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNDPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNOCT	UN Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime



Building the United Nations—#5—Finishing Steel of General Assembly
7 November 1955
Smithsonian American Art Museum/Art by Harold Weston

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The seventh review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* offers a critical moment to reflect on the United Nations' role acting against the changing landscape of security, including the COVID-19 pandemic, growing authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, and declining support for multilateralism. Now more than ever, it is critical that the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law underpinning the Strategy are reinforced and that the United Nations places a renewed focus on policy leadership and coordination to support the Strategy's implementation in a manner that responds to the peace and security needs of the next decade.

This report, the fifth in the Global Center on Cooperative Security's "Blue Sky" series, explores how the United Nations' comparative advantage can be leveraged to improve the policy development, interagency coordination, delivery, and impact of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts in support of the Strategy. It first observes the complex security landscape and the way UN counterterrorism entities have adapted their responses to ever-changing threats. Second, it situates counterterrorism and PVE efforts within the UN Secretary-General's broader reform initiatives to advance a prevention-forward approach. Third, it assesses efforts to implement the Strategy at the global, institutional, and programmatic levels in a balanced manner that promotes transparency and accountability.

CALIBRATING THE UN COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE

The period since the last Strategy review can be largely characterized as one that saw an ever-expanding role of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), established in 2017 and headed by an Under-Secretary-General. This expansion is reflected in the substantive increase in staffing, extrabudgetary resources, liaison offices, and partnership with UN

entities and regional bodies. Member states have placed wide-ranging demands and priorities on the UNOCT that require the office to respond with strategic leadership and coordination.

The UNOCT's reliance on extrabudgetary funding profoundly impacts all aspects of its work. First, the majority of its funding, managed through a trust fund, supports the implementation of ad hoc, time-bound capacity-building programs, with two-thirds of more than 130 staff members tasked with executing these. This is, in part, the result of situating the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre, a capacity-building entity, within the UNOCT, as well as creating the new Special Projects and Innovation Branch. The effect has been to focus more energy and resources on the delivery of capacity building than on effectively coordinating the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (Global Compact) membership. Second, it makes the UNOCT highly dependent on a handful of donors who provide funds that come with explicit earmarking or implicit expectations and oversight. Some commentators have referred to the "pay to play" nature of a select number of donors influencing policy priorities, rather than allocating funds based on a clearly defined plan that strives for balanced Strategy implementation. Third, the rapid rate at which the UNOCT is spending down the trust fund raises serious questions around the sustainability of its operation.

Unearmarked, multidonor resource mobilization is a critical part of taking UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts to the next level and ensuring improved coordination and visibility. The UNOCT multiyear appeal for 2019–2020 represented a first concerted effort for joint resource mobilization but seemed to lack clear strategic direction and prioritization. It would have benefited from further coordination, especially at the UN country team level. The UNOCT's role in overseeing the multiyear appeal's development and the inclusion of proposals that it would implement underline the office's duality as referee and player within the UN counterterrorism and PVE system.

SITUATING UN COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS WITHIN A PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

In the increasingly saturated landscape of capacity development assistance, one strength that differentiates the United Nations is its field presence around the world. To leverage that advantage, coordination between headquarters and field offices and missions must be strengthened in close collaboration with Resident Coordinators, UN country teams, and civil society. The Secretary-General's prevention agenda has offered renewed opportunities for the United Nations to deliver as one. Enhancing coordination between headquarters and the field by supporting upstream violence prevention efforts, setting longer-term and locally driven priorities with local governments and civil society, and monitoring context-specific indicators will help achieve counterterrorism and PVE outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts. This will also allow for better integration of counterterrorism and PVE efforts across the UN pillars of human rights, peace and security, and development rather than as a standalone effort.

DELIVERING ON CIVIL SOCIETY COMMITMENTS

UN agencies' mandates across the counterterrorism and PVE architecture cannot be fulfilled without the meaningful and sustained participation of civil society, which is a critical partner in mitigating violence and building resilient societies. Counterterrorism and PVE efforts can be harmful to civil society, particularly human rights defenders, and can undermine efforts to build lasting security, including by securitizing civil society work; imposing restrictions on the freedoms of expression and opinion, association, assembly, and religion; and demanding onerous reporting requirements as part of sanctions regimes and regulations on countering terrorism financing.

Civil society engagement needs to involve meaningful collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental actors that informs the strategic design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of

policies and programs. The UNOCT's long-anticipated civil society engagement strategy focuses on drawing expertise from civil society in three key areas—gender, youth, and human rights—across the UNOCT's and the Global Compact's work, but little attention is paid to how the UNOCT will best support civil society to realize Strategy implementation. The Strategy's success depends on consistent engagement with civil society, which was lacking in the Strategy's development. It remains to be seen how civil society will be brought on in that process and how do-no-harm principles will be upheld. Specific concerns have been raised to ensure broad participation by and protection of civil society who engage the United Nations and select national governments. Efforts should be benchmarked against the UN system-wide guidance being prepared as an output of the Secretary-General's call to action to positively engage, promote, and protect civic space.

STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

At the time of its adoption, the Strategy marked a political turning point by recognizing that a sustained response to terrorism requires prevention and cannot rely on hard security responses alone, while placing respect for human rights and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of counterterrorism efforts. In recent years, however, the Strategy's biennial review process has become increasingly politicized. The resulting resolutions are cumulative rather than reflective of current priorities, and outcomes do not effectively guide UN-wide efforts in a manner that systemically accounts for human rights, civil society engagement, and human security.

Without adequate safeguards, the UN system's counterterrorism and PVE policy, coordination, technical assistance, and advocacy risk causing more harm than good. For more than a decade, there has been a steady shrinking of civic space, which is often accompanied by a deterioration of other rights, and abuses under the guise of countering terrorism have been widespread. Member states, independent experts, and civil society have long observed that Pillar IV remains underimplemented by pointing toward the limited advocacy, programming, and investment under this pillar. Mainstreaming human rights issues across the

United Nations' work requires more than incremental, project-based, or piecemeal approaches. It calls for structural reforms, strong leadership, direct financial support, and accountability to support a fundamental shift in the culture. Global Compact entities should employ appropriate accountability and oversight mechanisms that identify, monitor, and address potential harms. Project aims and indicators should focus on measuring impact, reduction of terrorism, and improvements in human security, not merely project milestones.

Priorities and targets guiding the Global Compact working groups' efforts should accordingly be founded on the principles of the Strategy and its biennial resolution and leverage the many existing data and assessment frameworks within the UN system, notably through the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, as well as country-specific and thematic analysis. These efforts must furthermore strive to be gender sensitive and consider the varying experiences, effects, impacts, and needs of people with different gender identities. Gender mainstreaming and parity are critical to achieving gender equality commitments in line with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the Secretary-General's gender parity strategy.

ASSESSING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

Assessing progress made in Strategy implementation by member states is difficult, given the need to rely on self-reporting from governments, UN agencies, and civil society. Lacking a formal assessment mandate and framework, the Secretary-General depends on member states sharing information voluntarily, with limited infrastructure for drawing on existing country-specific and thematic analysis and outputs of the UN system. Due consideration should be given to the establishment of an independent review body or the creation of a peer review mechanism to assess member state implementation of the Strategy, which other parts of the UN system employ. The establishment of such a framework would allow for results to feed into the Secretary-General's biennial report ahead of the Strategy review to better inform the negotiation process and priority setting.

Since the last review, a number of efforts have been made to improve the caliber of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation at the UN's programmatic and institutional levels, including by the creation of the Global Compact Working Group on Resource Mobilization and Monitoring and Evaluation. Additional dedicated resources and staff, however, are needed. Without appropriate investments in monitoring and evaluation, priority-setting and funding remain opaque, the impact of individual projects continues to be unclear, duplication and overlap are difficult to avoid, and their overall contributions to the actualization of the Strategy remain uncertain.



Construction of UN headquarters
23 August 1951
UN Photo

INTRODUCTION

Adopted by consensus in 2006 by the UN General Assembly, the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* provides a comprehensive framework for preventing and countering terrorism.¹ Every two years, UN member states review the Strategy to assess intervening developments and set forward-looking priorities. The upcoming review provides a rare moment for a more extensive reflection on UN leadership as the negotiations and the seventh review period are deferred to the 75th session.² The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the global economic and political landscape and will continue to transform it in anticipated and unforeseeable ways.

This independent report and its recommendations focus on ways the United Nations' comparative advantage can be leveraged to improve the policy development, interagency coordination, delivery, and impact of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts in implementing the Strategy. It assesses these efforts against a global backdrop of expanding securitization, shrinking civic space, and declining support for multilateralism. Now more than ever, it is critical that the promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law underpinning the Strategy are reinforced and that the UN system's efforts to support its implementation place a renewed focus on policy leadership and coordination in a manner that effectively responds to the peace and security needs in years to come.

CHANGING SECURITY LANDSCAPE

UN counterterrorism efforts have generally enjoyed broad member state support. This may partly reflect a recognition of the United Nations' comparative advantages as a strategic leader, including as a norm-setter, as a convener, as a provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and as a global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field. Yet, it has also required a delicate balancing act among the Strategy's four pillars, ambiguity regarding the definitions of terrorism and violent extremism, and a shared stake in the global response to a number of evolving terrorism-related threats.

When the UN General Assembly adopted the Strategy, the terrorism threat to international peace and security primarily referred to the activities of al-Qaida, the Taliban, and associated networks, which significantly united member states in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and during the 2005 UN world summit. Much has happened since, and although the number of lives claimed by terrorist attacks annually has diminished at a global level, the threat continues to grow more diverse, diffuse, and decentralized.³ The world has witnessed the extraordinary rise and relative decline of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a group that no longer controls territory but continues with its affiliates to pose a threat and remains well funded.⁴ Furthermore, the challenges posed by foreign fighters and their families, many of whom are detained in camps, have been a significant priority for many governments. Right-wing terrorism has increased at least 320 percent over the past five

- 1 UN General Assembly, *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006 (adopted 8 September 2006) (hereinafter UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy). Since its adoption, each of the biennial review resolutions has been adopted by consensus.
- 2 See President of the UN General Assembly, letter to all permanent representatives and permanent observers to the United Nations, 4 May 2020 (recommending postponement of the seventh review of the Strategy to the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly) (copy on file with authors).
- 3 According to the 2019 Global Terrorism Index, 2018 marks the second-worst year for the number of countries suffering at least one fatality, with 103 countries recording one or more terrorism incidents and 71 countries suffering at least one fatality. Despite this, total fatalities from terrorism were reportedly down 52 percent from their peak in 2014. Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), "Global Terrorism Index 2019: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," *IEP Report*, no. 69 (November 2019), p. 2, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf>.
- 4 The main strategy of ISIL is exploitation of regional instabilities and vulnerabilities, and it is now "seeking to create the conditions for a resurgence" in places such as South Asia via the Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State and North and West Africa via the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, where ISIL continues to gain momentum. See UN Security Council, "Letter Dated 15 January 2019 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," S/2019/50, 15 January 2019 (containing 23rd report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2368 concerning ISIL, al-Qaida, and associated individuals and entities).

years, active predominately in western Europe, North America, and Oceania.⁵ Right-wing groups have taken advantage of the space created by the alt-right and increasing popularity of nationalist politics in a growing number of member states. Although doctrinally inconsistent and often fractious, violent right-wing movements have long maintained cross-border and



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Special event titled “Violent Right-Wing Extremism: Prevention and Response” organized by the Group of Friends of Preventing Violent Extremism on 30 May 2019.

intercontinental relationships with their ideological bedfellows, including the participation of upward of a thousand individuals in military and ideological training by neo-Nazi paramilitaries in Ukraine. Al-Shabaab, ISIL, and Boko Haram continue to be among the principal terrorist groups on the African continent, where terrorist threats are attributed to more than 25 different groups that mix and shift constantly⁶ and where attacks vary widely in sophistication, from knives to drones and artificial intelligence. The emerging picture is a terrorism threat landscape

that has become more diverse and diffuse when compared to the centralized, hierarchical organizations associated with groups such as al-Qaida a decade ago, which were more vulnerable to the momentary fallout caused by the deaths of senior leaders.⁷

Against this backdrop, terrorism has left an indelible mark on national and international security policies. National responses to terrorism and its financing have been informed by new international legal obligations, including via binding UN Security Council resolutions. The mandates of numerous UN agencies and programs have been reframed to include counterterrorism, countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), and PVE objectives. The inherently political subjectivity of terms such as terrorism and violent extremism have rendered the counterterrorism and PVE agenda ripe for abuses as antiterrorism laws and policies are applied to quell political dissent, human rights defenders, and the press and otherwise target particular groups perceived to pose a threat to governments. The normalization of exceptional security powers within ordinary legal systems has been a priority of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

In the first half of 2020, the pandemic cast a long shadow with far-reaching ramifications for the global peace and security landscape. The unfolding situation has already impacted the conduct of counterterrorism operations and multilateral initiatives, with political consequences that are not understood fully.⁸ Terrorist organizations have taken advantage of the global health crisis to renew attacks and destabilize governments.⁹ The pandemic has also disrupted humanitarian

5 Thirty-eight attacks were recorded in 2018, compared to nine in 2013. Deaths have also been increasing in recent years, with 77 deaths attributed to far-right terrorists by September 2019, up from 11 three years prior. IEP, “Global Terrorism Index 2019,” pp. 3, 4, 46.

6 Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “Africa’s Active Militant Islamist Groups,” April 2018, <https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Africas-Active-Militant-Islamist-Groups-April-2018.pdf>.

7 UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), *Research Digest*, no. 9 (February 2020), [https://mailchi.mp/2cde5f4d3f18/cted-research-digest-issue-3178473?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/2cde5f4d3f18/cted-research-digest-issue-3178473?e=[UNIQID]).

8 In addition to the postponement of the Strategy review, several other forums have been canceled or postponed, including a summit between leaders of the European Union and the G5 Sahel countries that has been canceled. International Crisis Group (ICG), “COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch,” *Crisis Group Special Briefing*, no. 4 (24 March 2020), <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/B004-covid-19-seven-trends.pdf>.

9 See, e.g., “Terrorist Groups Exploiting COVID-19 in Sahel, UN Peacekeeping Chief Tells Security Council,” UN News, 5 June 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1065742>.

aid flows and peace operations.¹⁰ Politicized responses can disturb peace processes¹¹ and further constrain civic space.¹²

The viral outbreak illustrates how contemporary challenges related to public health, socioeconomic development, and conflict cannot be divorced from one another. They require the international community to better anticipate crises and address the underlying conditions in order to prevent them from materializing in the first place. In recent years, however, the international community's ability to meet these challenges has been hampered by discord, shifting priorities, and a global downturn in liberal democratic values such as the rule of law and human rights.¹³ In this climate, repressive, national security-based responses to terrorism have further decreased the already limited space for civil society engagement.¹⁴ As the United Nations marks its 75th anniversary in 2020, the seventh

Strategy review sits at a critical juncture that challenges member states to preserve the fragile consensus while reaffirming the Strategy's constitutive pillars in the face of an ever-changing threat landscape.

This report first observes the growth of Strategy and UN counterterrorism efforts in response to the evolving security landscape, resulting in a sprawling institutional architecture and array of programming that require considerable focus to coordinate and lead. Second, the report places counterterrorism and PVE efforts within broader UN reforms to advance a prevention-forward approach that creates opportunities for greater integration across the United Nations' pillars of human rights, peace and security, and development. Third, it assesses efforts to implement the Strategy at the global, institutional, and programmatic levels in a manner that systematically accounts for human rights and promotes transparency and accountability.

10 For example, Oxfam has ended its operations in 18 countries. Oxfam International, "Oxfam Accelerates New Strategic Changes to Its Global Operations," 20 May 2020, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/oxfam-accelerates-new-strategic-changes-its-global-operations>. For a complete list of impacts on humanitarian aid, see "Coronavirus and Aid: What We're Watching," New Humanitarian, 11 June 2020, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2020/06/11/coronavirus-humanitarian-aid-response>. See also International Rescue Committee, "COVID-19 in Humanitarian Crises: A Double Emergency," April 2020, <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4693/covid-19-doubleemergency-april2020.pdf>.

11 ICG, "COVID-19 and Conflict."

12 International Center For Not-For-Profit Law, "Coronavirus and Civic Space: Preserving Human Rights During a Pandemic," 10 March 2020, <https://mk0rofifiqa2w3u89nud.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/03.2020-Coronavirus-and-Civic-Space.pdf>.

13 See Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat," n.d., https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf.

14 See, e.g., Anne Charbord and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space," University of Minnesota Human Rights Center, 2019, https://www.law.umn.edu/sites/law.umn.edu/files/civil_society_report_-_final_april_2019.pdf.



General Assembly adopts resolution on UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review in 2018
26 June 2018
UN Photo/Loey Felipe

THE STRATEGY AND ITS REVIEW PROCESS

At the time of its adoption in 2006—five years into the so-called global war on terror—the Strategy marked a political turning point by recognizing that a sustained response to terrorism requires preventive measures and cannot rely on hard security responses alone. The Strategy comprises four pillars: (1) measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, (2) measures to prevent and combat terrorism, (3) measures to build state capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard, and (4) measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.

Pillar I commits member states to taking measures to address conditions that stoke prolonged unresolved conflicts, among them the dehumanization of victims of terrorism; the lack of the rule of law; violations of human rights and ethnic, national, and religious discrimination; political exclusion; socioeconomic marginalization; and lack of good governance.¹⁵ Member states saw the utility of harnessing the long UN track record of engagement in these areas toward addressing the root causes of terrorism, which in 2016 culminated in a global appeal spearheaded by the UN Secretary-General in his plan of action to prevent violent extremism.¹⁶ The plan and the PVE agenda have been subject to varying degrees of interpretation, prioritization, and

critique by member states.¹⁷ There is general agreement on the importance of addressing preventative aspects of counterterrorism, but the scope and function of the prevention agenda, as well as the means and basis for the implementation of PVE-related measures, vary.

In addition to emphasizing preventive responses, the second critical innovation of the Strategy was to reframe the relationship between human rights and counterterrorism as articulated in Pillar IV. Prior to the Strategy's adoption, human rights were positioned as a consideration that must be balanced against security imperatives. In an important departure from this zero-sum approach, the Strategy affirms that respect for human rights and the rule of law is the necessary foundation that is mutually reinforcing and complementary to counterterrorism efforts.

Although the United Nations plays “an important role in facilitating and providing support to their efforts, on the basis of a balanced implementation of all four pillars of the Strategy,”¹⁸ member states bear the primary responsibility for Strategy implementation.¹⁹ The General Assembly's biennial review of the Strategy provides an opportunity to reflect on the changing nature of the threat, assess UN and member states' implementation, and set priorities (box 1).²⁰ In so doing, member states can also direct the normative role of the United

15 UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/72/284, 2 July 2018, para. 38 (hereinafter sixth review resolution); UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/70/291, 19 July 2016, para. 35 (hereinafter fifth review resolution); UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/68/276, 24 June 2014, para. 22 (hereinafter fourth review resolution).

16 The plan of action was only half-heartedly “noted” rather than “welcomed” by the UN General Assembly following its presentation by the Secretary-General in February 2016, and in the 2018 Strategy review, reference to it proved to be a divisive issue. At the time, supporters argued that the plan offered a road map to balance a militarized, law enforcement-centric response to terrorism. The plan reflected an approach that circumvented the need to define violent extremism, raising the risk of discriminatory policies and programming being implemented with human rights and rule of law implications. Critics further argued that the plan did not offer any conceptual clarity about what kinds of programs constituted PVE efforts, blurring the fields of work among the three UN pillars. Alistair Millar and Naureen Chowdhury Fink, “Blue Sky III: Taking UN Counterterrorism Efforts in the Next Decade From Plans to Action,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2016, p. 4, http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Blue-Sky-III_low-res.pdf.

17 UN Human Rights Council, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, A/HRC/43/46, 21 February 2020 (hereinafter 2020 Human Rights Council report).

18 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/73/866, 8 May 2019, para. 2.

19 The development of national, subregional, and regional plans to support those efforts are further encouraged. Sixth review resolution, para. 5; fifth review resolution, para. 9; fourth review resolution, para. 9; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/66/282, 12 July 2012, para. 7 (hereinafter third review resolution).

20 Beginning with the fourth review, the General Assembly stressed the importance of updating the Strategy to reflect emerging threats and trends, ensuring its relevance and giving a living purpose to the document. Sixth review resolution, para. 3; fifth review resolution, para. 3; fourth review resolution, para. 3. See UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System*, para. 3.

Box 1. The Mechanics of the Strategy Review Process

Although there is no prescribed, standardized process for reviewing the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, it generally follows a typical path.

The biennial review process commences when the President of the General Assembly appoints two permanent representatives as co-facilitators. Their selection does not follow a set, formal procedure; they are selected by prerogative of the President. The initially appointed facilitators of the seventh review were the permanent representatives of Egypt and Spain to the United Nations.^a They are entrusted with the complex task of navigating the growing divisiveness of debates within the United Nations on terrorism.

At the start of the process, the UN Secretary-General submits a report to the General Assembly on the evolving global terrorism landscape and progress made in the implementation of the Strategy through UN activities.^b In 2020 this report was released in February.^c The Secretary-General will update this report in advance of the postponed negotiations. Shortly after a report's release, a briefing for member states presents the highlights of the report and allows for a discussion among participants. This briefing did not occur in 2020 because large gatherings were prohibited due to the global health crisis.

Usually, the co-facilitators then develop a zero draft of the review resolution on the basis of the previous one, initial discussions with member states, and the Secretary-General's report, and it is shared for member state input.^d Subsequently,

several rounds of informal meetings will be held with member states' counterterrorism focal points at missions to the United Nations to work toward an agreed text and untangle differences. Often, specific member states volunteer to work with colleagues to find agreement on certain themes, and several versions of the draft review resolution will be shared. Several formal meetings would be held with permanent representatives during critical points in the negotiations. The negotiation process takes place behind closed doors and offers no formal opportunities for nonstate stakeholders, including civil society, to feed into the process.

The President pays special attention to transparency considerations and to ensuring that a broad number of member states are actively engaged, although the degree of their engagement is largely dependent on the co-facilitators' organization, willingness, and commitment to transparency and whether and how the member state has stakes in the outcome. The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism serves as the secretariat to the process, supporting edits to the resolution, ensuring it appropriately aligns with past resolutions and other UN documents, and addressing questions from member states relating to past resolutions and mandates. A date then is set for the final adoption of the text, which is presented by the co-facilitators of the process and validated by member states. The date set for the resolution's adoption for the sixth review was used to time the first UN Counter-Terrorism Week in 2018, and similar plans were made for 2020.

a Letter to Tijjani Muhammad Bande, 21 November 2019, <https://www.rightsandsecurity.org/assets/downloads/Joint-Letter-PGA-Egypt-GCTS.pdf>.

b UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/72/284, 2 July 2018, para. 57; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/70/291, 19 July 2016, para. 4; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/68/276, 24 June 2014, para. 4; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/66/282, 12 July 2012, para. 3; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/64/297, 13 October 2010, para. 3; UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/62/272, 15 September 2008, para. 3.

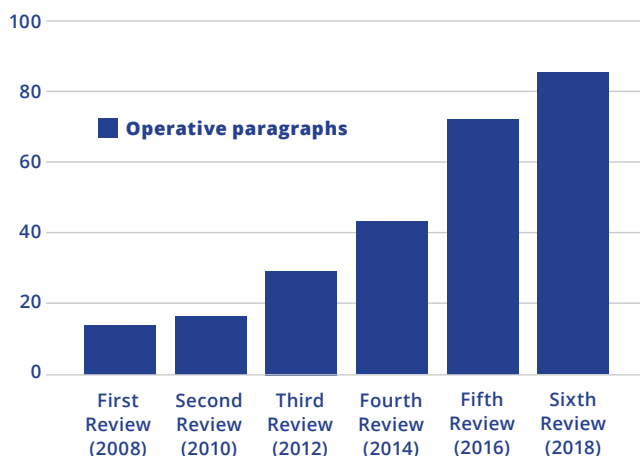
c UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/74/677, 7 February 2020.

d In 2020 the pandemic halted these efforts, and a zero draft was not shared.

Nations, assess its complex counterterrorism architecture, and focus its counterterrorism efforts.

The long-standing consensus around the Strategy is broadly viewed as a testament to the United Nations' core principles and values. In recent years, however, member states have questioned whether the Strategy review process and the resulting resolution, now on their seventh iteration, achieve their intended purpose. Since 2008, the outcomes of the review process have largely been additive: the resolution texts have steadily grown from 14 operative paragraphs to 85 (fig. 1). The resolutions address an ever-expanding list of overlapping topics across the four pillars, ranging from international cooperation in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of terrorism acts and sexual and gender-based violence to weapons and explosive devices.²¹ Some member states have criticized the method for articulating trends and priority issues, which has been viewed as lacking strategic focus or organization.²²

Figure 1. The Growth of the Strategy Review Resolutions Over the Years



Source: Global Center on Cooperative Security.

As a negotiated process aimed at consensus, a downside is that the priorities of member states most impacted by the threat of terrorism may become too generalized to be applicable or appropriate in other contexts, that there is a tit-for-tat approach to adding paragraphs, and that the final text is dense and disorganized. For example, some interlocutors have argued that the 2018 review disproportionately focused on foreign fighters, which can misdirect attention and resources in areas where no such issue exists.²³ The lack of civil society input in the process and the politicized nature of the reviews remain central underlying challenges.

The reviews also sidestep efforts to define “terrorism” and “violent extremism,” reflecting the politicization of the terms. Despite member states’ determination to “make every effort to reach an agreement on and conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism,” reaffirmed in the Strategy 14 years ago, core terms remain undefined at the international level. The Strategy ostensibly addresses terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations,” yet the international community’s primary focus on groups such as al-Qaida and ISIL has led some states to propose the inclusion of specific language on right-wing terrorism in the review, while others more concernedly have sought to remove references to “violent” to focus on “extremism” writ large.

In addition, the reviews have gradually sought to solidify Pillars I and IV even though they are often introduced as separate considerations. Positive examples include the language concerning victims of terrorism, which has grown from mere affirmations of solidarity to commitments to provide appropriate support to victims and their families.²⁴ A broader array of state actions, including a lack of good governance and socioeconomic and political marginalization, are

21 Sixth review resolution, paras. 50–52; fifth review resolution, paras. 59–61.

22 Although it is often suggested that the resolution could be reorganized by Strategy pillar, some sources note the futility of this exercise given the cross-cutting nature of certain provisions. Other sources argue that the UN counterterrorism architecture merits a dedicated, standalone discussion and resolution. Still others suggest that there are insufficient mechanisms to monitor and evaluate Strategy implementation by the United Nations and member states, resulting in a lack of solid data on which to base their review negotiations and priority-setting. In an effort to improve this, member states requested in the 2018 review resolution that the Secretary-General prepare a report on ways to assess the impact and progress made in the implementation of the Strategy by the UN system. Many of the Secretary-General’s recommendations require further follow-up.

23 Akinola Olojo et al., “How ‘Foreign’ Are Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Africa?” ISS Today, 29 November 2018, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/how-foreign-are-foreign-terrorist-fighters-in-africa>. See UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/74/677, 7 February 2020 (hereinafter UN Secretary-General’s 2020 Strategy implementation report).

24 Sixth review resolution, para. 14.

recognized as conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. For the first time, the review resolution in 2018 recognized the role of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in relation to the Strategy.²⁵ The resolutions also make reference to a few human rights instruments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Reports by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism were first noted in the 2016 review, indicating an important albeit long overdue recognition of the crossover function of UN human rights entities and mandates in the counterterrorism space.²⁶

The selection of priority issues often does not reflect human rights priorities identified by the Special Rapporteur or civil society actors engaged on this topic. These priorities include curbs on the use of exceptional national security powers, the need for clarity on the interplay of legal regimes in the counterterrorism sphere, and the fairness and effectiveness of criminal justice responses to terrorism.²⁷ The only provision related to refugees in the reviews raises concerns over the abuse of their status by terrorists,²⁸ although their displacement is largely driven by conflicts such as terrorist activities, and governments have promulgated tough anti-immigration policies by drawing on poorly substantiated links between illegal migration and a rising threat of terrorism. A more balanced approach would focus equally on strengthening the accountability of state actors in enacting counterterrorism measures that reinforce human rights and refugee protections, including nonrefoulement obligations.

The treatment of gender, the role of women, and the role of civil society in the Strategy has evolved over time but requires further progress.²⁹ The contributions of women in implementing the Strategy were explicitly noted first during the fourth review, in 2014, which encouraged stakeholders to merely “consider” the participation of women in efforts to prevent and counter terrorism. This language has since evolved to “ensure” their participation and leadership.³⁰ Despite advances, references to the inclusion of women have remained unchanged since 2016. The language also has not accounted for the different experiences of gender identities and ages.

The Strategy enshrines the importance of civil society engagement as part of a “whole of society” approach to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism, highlighting the determination of member states to encourage their engagement “as appropriate” on efforts to implement the Strategy.³¹ The international community has more specifically recognized the role of civil society in this space to be appropriate in the development of national PVE plans of action, the rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign fighters, and efforts to counter terrorist narratives.³²

The above raises important questions regarding the purpose of the biennial reviews and whether they are sufficient in themselves to direct member states’ individual and collective counterterrorism efforts, inform policy, ensure coordination, appropriately steer the content of large mobilization strategies and technical assistance programs, and address the specific needs of actors closest to the issues.

25 Ibid., p. 4 (“[r]ecognizing that achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which comprises universal goals and targets that involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike, can contribute to the implementation of the Strategy, and recognizing also the importance of regional development frameworks in this regard, such as the African Union Agenda 2063”).

26 Ibid., para. 27; fifth review resolution, para. 24.

27 “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-General,” A/72/495, 27 September 2017.

28 Sixth review resolution, para. 30; fifth review resolution, para. 33.

29 The Global Center on Cooperative Security joined a number of nongovernmental organizations in deploring the lack of attention to human rights in the 2018 Strategy review. See International Federation of Human Rights, “Global Group of NGOs Deplore Lack of Attention to Human Rights in Latest Review of UN’s Global Counterterrorism Strategy by UN Member States,” 11 July 2018, <https://www.fidh.org/en/global-group-of-ngos-deplore-lack-of-attention-to-human-rights-in>.

30 Sixth review resolution, para. 32; fifth review resolution, para. 27; fourth review resolution, para. 21.

31 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, para. 3e.

32 UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/70/674, 24 December 2015, para. 55; UN Security Council, S/RES/2178, 24 September 2014, para. 16; UN Security Council, S/RES/2396, 21 December 2017, para. 32; UN Security Council, “Letter Dated 15 December 2015 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,” S/2015/939, 23 December 2015, annex II (*Guiding Principles on Foreign Terrorist Fighters*, introduction, guiding principles 2, 7, 8, 13, and 22); UN Security Council, S/RES/2354, 24 May 2017, para. 2f.

THE UN COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE TODAY

The next year will mark the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks and the adoption of the seminal UN Security Council resolution, Resolution 1373. In the intervening years, UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts at the Security Council, General Assembly, and Secretariat have steadily grown alongside an expanding legal framework now comprising 19 universal legal instruments against terrorism; at least 55 General Assembly resolutions adopted since 2006, which have addressed different aspects of terrorism; and more than 20 Security Council resolutions. The dramatic investments in the UN counterterrorism architecture and the proliferation of member states' obligations have led some commentators to warn against counterterrorism becoming the informal "fourth pillar" of the United Nations.³³

Providing guidance on the complex issue of terrorism and coordinating the panoply of UN actors supporting member states requires considerable leadership. This role has been largely imparted on the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), established in 2017 and headed by a new Under-Secretary-General, Vladimir Voronkov, alongside the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), headed by Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninx.³⁴

Since the UNOCT's creation, its role has expanded, principally driven through the support of a small cohort of member states. Its growth is demonstrated in the steady increase of staffing, extrabudgetary resources, and partnerships with other UN entities, alongside a growing number of issue areas identified by member states. These increased investments have placed wide-ranging demands on the UNOCT, from coordination to the delivery of technical assistance and policy leadership, that it cannot sustainably meet on its own. Continued reforms should be sought to recalibrate the UNOCT to fulfill its mandate most effectively,

notably by centering its focus on policy leadership and coordination. Policy leadership is critical in orienting counterterrorism and PVE efforts and integrating them across the UN triptych of peace and security, human rights, and development. Furthermore, such leadership would best leverage the comparative UN advantage of operating under the blue flag, which provides it with unique norm-setting and convening power.



UN Photo/Mark Gartens

Secretary-General António Guterres (*right*) and Vladimir Voronkov (*left*), Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, at the launch of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact on 6 December 2018.

TRACKING THE EXPANSION OF UN SECRETARIAT BODIES: THE UNOCT AND THE GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM COORDINATION COMPACT

Shortly after taking office in January 2017, Secretary-General António Guterres announced his intention to introduce wide-ranging reforms to the UN system. The overarching goals of the reform have been to prioritize early warning and early action on preventing violent conflict and to sustain peace, create a "21st century United Nations" better equipped to address interlinked

33 See, e.g., Ali Altiok and Jordan Street, "A Fourth Pillar for the United Nations? The Rise of Counter-terrorism," Saferworld, June 2020, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/ct-textpp-final-file.pdf>.

34 The most recent report in the "Blue Sky" series noted that the new architecture should be viewed "as the beginning rather than the end of a process of improving coordination and enhancing efforts to implement the Strategy across all four pillars, in order to make its actions and agencies in these areas more effective and fit for purpose." Alistair Millar, "Blue Sky IV: Clouds Dispersing?" Global Center, May 2018, p. 3, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GC_2018-May_Blue-Sky.pdf.

contemporary challenges,³⁵ and support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.³⁶ His first major reform initiative was to establish the UNOCT with an Under-Secretary-General at its head. The Under-Secretary-General also serves as the Chair of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (Global Compact) and Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT), now nested within the UNOCT.³⁷ The goals of the reorganization were to improve coordination and coherence, realize a simpler and more efficient bureaucracy consistent with the management reform agenda, elevate the issue of counterterrorism, and promote the “balanced implementation” of the Strategy.³⁸

The UNOCT and Its UNCCT

Upon its establishment in 2017, the UNOCT was given a mandate with five core competencies and functions.

1. Provide leadership on the General Assembly counterterrorism mandates entrusted to the Secretary-General from across the UN system.
2. Enhance coordination and coherence across the Global Compact entities to ensure the balanced implementation of the four pillars of the Strategy.
3. Strengthen the delivery of UN counterterrorism capacity-building assistance to member states.
4. Improve visibility, advocacy, and resource mobilization for UN counterterrorism efforts.
5. Ensure that due priority is given to counterterrorism across the UN system and that the important work on preventing violent extremism is firmly rooted in the Strategy.³⁹

The creation of the UNOCT removed the counterterrorism portfolio from the heavy workload of the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) (now the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs [UNDPPA]), transferring the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) and UNCCT and associated regular and extrabudgetary resources to the purview of the Under-Secretary-General.⁴⁰ The move has siloed the UNOCT from the larger peace and security architecture. Whereas the UNDPPA works behind the scenes to forge political agreements in various conflict settings, the UNOCT’s more narrow focus is to support the implementation and raise the visibility of the Strategy. The contours of the UNOCT’s workplan are set by the Strategy and its biennial reviews, with CTED recommendations orienting counterterrorism and PVE technical assistance programming.

Shortly after its establishment, the UNOCT undertook a reform process that resulted in a restructuring of its operations into four divisions: (1) the UNCCT, (2) the Special Projects and Innovation Branch, (3) the Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section, and (4) the Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch (fig. 2).

The organizational restructure largely sought to reduce bureaucratic layers and clarify responsibilities and introduced a deputy to the Under-Secretary-General. While generally welcomed, the internal changes do not fully address the “legacy institutional and staffing structure that has created a complicated and suboptimal web of units and reporting lines.”⁴¹ This is especially evident given the relative position of the UNCCT within the UNOCT with regard to its size, resources, and separate governance structure.

35 “Secretary-General’s Remarks to Economic and Social Council on Repositioning the UN Development System to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda [As Delivered],” 5 July 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-07-05/secretary-generals-remarks-economic-and-social-council-repositioning>.

36 The reform agenda was lauded by more than 120 member states expressing their commitment for advancing stronger collaborations across the UN system, reducing mandate duplication and redundancy among main UN organs, and supporting greater alignment across its humanitarian response, development, and sustaining peace initiatives, among other aspects. “Political Declaration for UN Reform High Level Event,” n.d., <https://www.passblue.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/FINAL-UN-Reform-Declaration.pdf>.

37 UN General Assembly, A/RES/71/291, 19 June 2017.

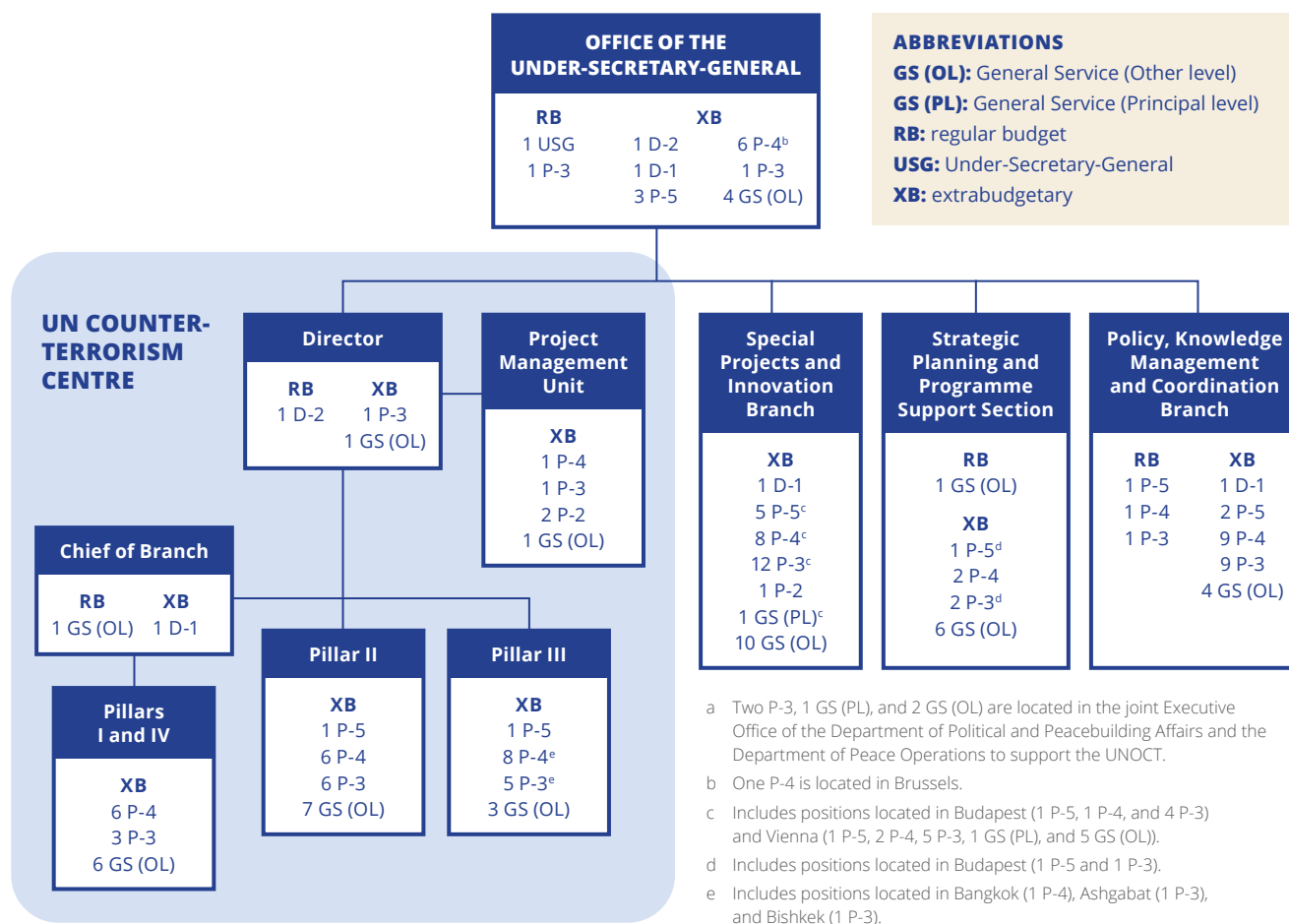
38 UN General Assembly, *Capability of the United Nations System to Assist Member States in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/71/858, 3 April 2017, para. 5.

39 UN General Assembly, *Strengthening the Capability of the United Nations System to Assist Member States in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/71/291, 19 June 2017.

40 The CTITF was established in 2005 to strengthen the coordination and coherence of UN counterterrorism efforts. An office within DPA supported the CTITF. The Global Compact replaced the CTITF in 2018.

41 Millar, “Blue Sky IV,” p. 15.

Figure 2. UNOCT Organizational Structure



Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism

The office, which is headed by a Chief of Office, supports the Under-Secretary-General in carrying out his responsibilities and is comprised of three sections responsible for front office operations and communications, donor relations and resource mobilization, and appeal management and coordination with the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)

The UNCCT provides capacity-building assistance to support member states' counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts in line with the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as the UNCCT Vision Statement, the UNCCT Five-Year Plan, and the guidance of the UNCCT Advisory Board.

Special Projects and Innovation Branch

The branch is primarily responsible for leading the conceptualization, development, and implementation of special technical assistance programs that require increased coordination and

partnership with other UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities, the UNCCT, the private sector, academia, and other public sector organizations.

Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch

The branch focuses on, inter alia, providing strategic policy advice and analysis, drafting and coordinating the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General on counterterrorism, promoting coordination and coherence in the counterterrorism and PVE work of the UN system, and supporting relevant intergovernmental processes as mandated, including the biennial Strategy review.

The Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section

The section houses the secretariat of the Project Review Board and is responsible for strategic longer-term planning of UNOCT activities. It carries out a number of administrative functions, including the development of budget proposals, risk assessments, and coordinating the office's activities with the UN Department of Safety and Security, and in accordance with the UN Security Management System.

Source: UN General Assembly, "Proposed Programme Budget for 2021; Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs," A/75/6 (Sect. 3), 23 April 2020; UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Office Structure," <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/office-structure> (accessed 23 October 2020).

The UNCCT was established in 2011 with an original contribution by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which remains the sole chairman of its advisory board.⁴² By situating the UNCCT within the UNOCT, the UNOCT found itself delivering a large portfolio of technical assistance, as may be broadly interpreted as part of its mandate to “strengthen” the delivery of UN capacity development to member states. The UNOCT also delivers technical assistance through the newly created Special Projects and Innovation Branch. The delineations between the branch and the UNCCT are not self-evident. Although the UNCCT delivers technical assistance writ large, the stated purpose of the Special Projects and Innovation Branch is to develop and deliver “technical assistance programmes that require increased coordination and partnership with other Global Compact entities and the UNCCT” and provide a “surge capacity” to better assist member states. For instance, the branch is currently leading a technical assistance program on countering terrorist travel, in partnership with CTED, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Civil Aviation Organization, the UN Office of Information and Communication Technology, and Interpol, which enjoys broad membership appeal.

The UNOCT’s funding overwhelmingly depends on the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism, established in 2009. The UNOCT has received pledges totaling \$250 million as of July 2020 from this fund and others.⁴³ Top pledgers to the trust fund include Saudi Arabia (\$110 million for the UNCCT), Qatar (\$75.3 million), the Netherlands (\$6.3 million plus an in-kind contribution valued at \$11.5 million), the European Commission (\$5.6 million), and the United States (\$6.4 million)

(fig. 3).⁴⁴ This makes the UNOCT highly dependent on extrabudgetary funds from a select number of donors. Of these funds, approximately 60 percent are allocated to the UNCCT and the remainder to the UNOCT, with a majority of the total dedicated to programming.⁴⁵ Since the Advisory Board of the UNCCT oversees its budget, programs, projects, and proposals, it has an influential oversight role, and it remains unclear if this role extends beyond UNCCT activities to UNOCT functions that are supported by UNCCT-earmarked funds.⁴⁶

The project-focused nature of UNOCT funding has also led to an exponential increase in staff whose contracts are directly tied to project implementation and duration. UNOCT staffing bulged from 63 in June 2018 to a planned total of 157 by the end of 2020 to operationalize the office, with two-thirds dedicated to the capacity development divisions of the UNCCT and the special projects branch.⁴⁷ This increase is one of the effects of the UNOCT’s oversaturation of extrabudgetary funding tied to ad hoc, time-bound capacity development programs, which profoundly impacts all aspects of its work and the sustainability of its operations.

In 2019, only 4.6 percent of the UNOCT’s budget came from the UN Regular Budget, supporting eight full-time staff members in leadership and policy coordination roles and related costs.⁴⁸ As a point of comparison, none of the other entities falling under the Political Affairs section of the United Nations have higher extrabudgetary than regular budget expenditures.⁴⁹ The current percentage of UNOCT’s funding structure mirrors more closely UN counterterrorism technical assistance

42 The advisory board comprises 21 members and the EU.

43 Pledges or contributions were received in cash and in kind. This figure includes an allocation from the UN Sub-Fund for Peace and Security of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General made by China. UNOCT, “July in Review 2020,” n.d., https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org/counterterrorism/files/unoct_monthly_review_july2020.pdf.

44 UNOCT, “Funding and Donors,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/funding-and-donors> (accessed 13 September 2020).

45 Ibid.

46 UN Office of Internal Oversight Services, no. 2018/121, 6 December 2018, recommendation 3, <https://oios.un.org/file/7319/download?token=5wahnhcj> (hereinafter UNCCT audit).

47 Ibid.; UN General Assembly, “Proposed Programme Budget for 2021; Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs,” A/75/6 (Sect. 3), 23 April 2020, table 3.71.

48 The regular budget positions support the posts of one Under-Secretary-General and one D-2, one P-5, one P-4, two P-3, and two General Service (Other level) positions. Figures do not include contributions of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. UN General Assembly, “Proposed Programme Budget for 2021,” p. 131, table 3.69.

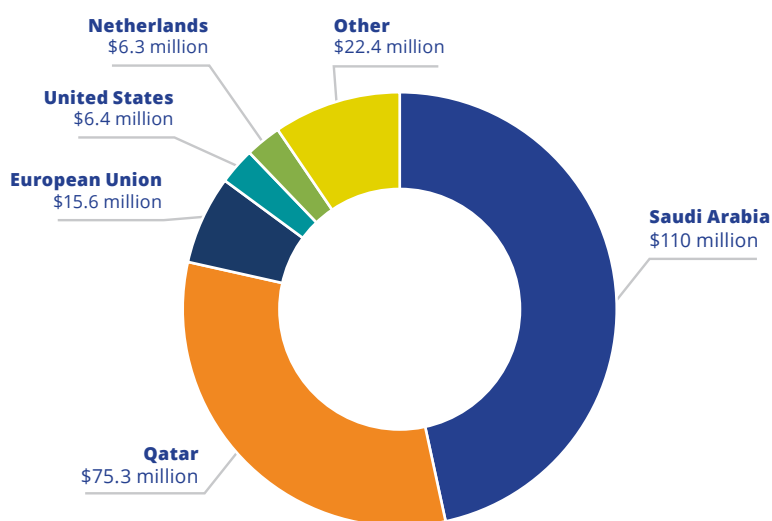
49 UN General Assembly, “Proposed Programme Budget for 2021.”

providers such as UNODC.⁵⁰ This distribution ratio is expected to widen further in the coming year (table 1).

Moreover, although \$238 million in the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism sounds sizeable, at the rate at which the UNOCT is spending down those funds, half will be spent by mid-2021, and the current funds depleted by the end of 2023. Aggressive spending often happens under pressure by individual donors and the UNCCT Advisory Board. This makes the UNOCT heavily dependent on the graces of its primary donors, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who are in a position to provide substantial reinvestments. Serious questions have been raised regarding the long-term strategy of the UNOCT and the sustainability of its operations. Some commentators have referred to a “pay to play” nature in which a select number of donors support UN counterterrorism projects and, through them, influence policy priorities. The lack of a clearly defined plan for the allocation of funds meant to support the implementation of the Strategy is a source of frustration for UN agencies and member states, which was played out during resource mobilization efforts for the 2019–2020 UNOCT multiyear appeal (box 2).

To support the delivery of its technical assistance programs, the UNOCT has established Programme/Project Support Offices in Ashgabat, Bangkok, Budapest, Doha, Nouakchott, and Rabat,⁵¹ in addition to Liaison and Coordination Offices in Dhaka and Brussels. Ostensibly, these offices reduce costs and bring programming, notably the Countering Terrorist

Figure 3. Sources of Cash Pledges to the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism



Note: Data from Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism only.

Source: UNOCT, “Funding and Donors,” <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/funding-and-donors> (accessed 25 September 2020).

Table 1. UNOCT Extrabudgetary Spending Growth (million \$)

	2019 EXPENDITURES	2020 APPROPRIATED BUDGET	2021 ESTIMATED BUDGET
Regular Budget	1.6	1.6	1.6
Extrabudgetary	33.1	41.9	51.0
Total Budget	34.7	43.5	52.7
Total Budget Growth (%)	n/a	25.4	21.2
Ratio Extrabudgetary to Regular Budget	21	26	31

Source: UN General Assembly, “Proposed Programme Budget for 2021; Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs,” A/75/6 (Sect. 3), 23 April 2020.

50 UNODC expenditures in 2018 were \$333 million, of which \$22.4 million (6.7 percent) is classified as regular budget. UNODC, “2018 Revenues and Expenditures,” n.d., <https://www.unodc.org/documents/donors/Revenues-expenditures-2018.pdf>.

51 The Budapest location has staff from the Countering Terrorist Travel Program of the Special Projects and Innovation Branch, as well as staff from the UNCCT’s Pillar III unit. UNOCT, “Office Structure,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/office-structure> (accessed 7 September 2020).

Box 2. The 2019–2020 UNOCT Consolidated Multi-Year Appeal

The first “all of UN” multiyear appeal for 2019–2020 was launched to grow the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism and to improve the coordination, coherence, and visibility of UN counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) resource mobilization efforts. It solicited \$194 million to support a number of global, regional, and national projects across the four pillars of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and included a separate UN Capacity Building Implementation Plan for Countering the Flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters.^a A clear strategic direction or prioritization of resource mobilization efforts is difficult to distill from the appeal, which lists a disparate set of projects focused on topics ranging from youth empowerment to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense.

The duality of the role of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) underpins the appeal, which left other entities of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact feeling that the UNOCT both sets the rules of the game and is an active player, especially through the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre: of the 60 projects identified, the UNOCT is the proposed implementer of 13, surpassed

only by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the UN Development Programme.^b Interlocutors expressed uncertainty about the extent to which the proposed “shared funding arrangements” were an effective funding modality for the implementing partners, many of whom were not consulted on the final, trimmed versions of their original proposals. Representatives of some Global Compact entities also voiced concern about diminished investments and interests in their counterterrorism and PVE efforts by member states.

In the absence of public reporting on the success of the appeal, stakeholders are left to speculate on the basis of limited information. Many suggest that the appeal did not come close to its desired outcome of growing the trust fund by \$194 million, exemplified by its lack of success in realizing the requested \$18 million funding for its Foreign Terrorist Fighters Plan, commonly referenced as a priority issue for UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts in recent years. It is critical that any future appeal is a more consultative and transparent process developed in close cooperation with Global Compact entities and properly monitored and evaluated.

- a Of 67 projects submitted to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), there were 60 projects in addition to a foreign terrorist fighter plan from 10 UN entities. More than half of these projects fall into Pillar 1, a quarter fall in Pillar 2, and the remainder are divided between Pillars 3 and 4. The majority of them focused on Africa or had a global reach. Only 19 projects are directly linked to recommendations by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate. UN General Assembly, “Proposed Programme Budget for 2021; Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs,” A/75/6 (Sect. 3), 23 April 2020, pp. 92–97.
- b UNOCT, *2019–2020 UNOCT Consolidated Multi-Year Appeal*, n.d., p. 3, exh. 2, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/unoct_multi-year-appeal_website.pdf (“Projects per UN Entity”).

Travel Program, closer to the recipient countries. UN staff in the field have expressed a lack of clarity concerning conflicting reporting lines and decision-making authority, as coordination functions are vested in the UNOCT. More fundamentally, UNOCT overprioritization of technical assistance reveals inefficiencies in leveraging the full potential of other Global Compact members, many of which have established field presences, connections, existing programming, and a deeper understanding of local priorities and needs.

The Global Compact and Its Members

Chaired by the Under-Secretary-General, the Global Compact is the principal means by which the UNOCT fulfills its coordination and coherence mandate to support the implementation of the Strategy. It was created in 2018 to transform the work of the CTITF into a more transparent, functional, and inclusive coordinating mechanism. As of March 2020, 43 entities comprising the Security Council, Secretariat, and independent bodies have signed the compact

as members or observers, making it the largest coordination framework across the three pillars of the United Nations.⁵²

The Global Compact's wide membership is indicative of the sprawling effect that counterterrorism and PVE issues have had across the UN system. Among its members are Secretariat entities that have a specific mandate to address terrorism, including UNODC and its Terrorism Prevention Branch, which was established in 2002 to provide legal counterterrorism technical assistance to member states. Given UNODC's long-standing experience and substantial donor support, there are understandable concerns about the overlap with UNOCT capacity development efforts. Although the two organizations partner on several initiatives, resource competition is unavoidable.

Members also include entities that have incorporated counterterrorism and PVE aspects in their development and conflict prevention work, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Like many development actors, UNDP was initially hesitant to engage on counterterrorism issues for fear that the agenda would undermine its traditional development programming.⁵³ UNDP set out to adopt its own PVE strategy in 2016 and launched a global PVE program with significant extrabudgetary resources.⁵⁴ This process produced a number of research, guidance, monitoring, and evaluation products, as well as a range of in-country projects and interventions, notably in support of the development, monitoring, and evaluation of national PVE action plans.⁵⁵ Yet, concerns regarding the securitization of development activities and objectives persist, notably at the grassroots level

where labeling community programming as related to PVE measures can be counterproductive and even harmful. Of late, commentators have noted a decreased engagement of UNDP in the counterterrorism and PVE space.

The compact has members that are more squarely focused on the human rights pillar of the United Nations, such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. UNICEF's and the UNOCT's co-chairmanship of a steering committee to support the rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation of third-country nationals from Iraq and Syria is a good example of leveraging the expertise and credibility of Global Compact members and bringing together a protection and accountability framework without placing the entire initiative under the umbrella of counterterrorism work.

The Global Compact seeks to promote action-oriented, "all of UN" collaboration among its membership. It is organized by thematic working groups and supported by a secretariat within the UNOCT Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch. The compact has undergone reforms to improve coordination, efficiency, and transparency. The working groups were consolidated from 12 to eight, each aligned under the four pillars of the Strategy.⁵⁶ Among these is a newly created working group on resource mobilization, monitoring, and evaluation chaired by the UNOCT, CTED, and UNODC. During the General Assembly, the various Global Compact working group co-chairs also meet with the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) co-chairs and

52 See appendix A.

53 The Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 16 on promoting just, peaceful, and inclusive societies, and the UN plan of action to prevent violent extremism provide a basis for UNDP engagement on PVE. See Asako Okai and Ulrika Mod  er, "New Approaches to Preventing Violent Extremism," UNDP, 25 April 2019, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2019/new-approaches-to-preventing-violent-extremism.html>.

54 See *ibid.*

55 These products include the often-cited research study on the drivers of violent extremism in Africa; guidance for member states on how to "formulate and implement PVE National Action Plans and support gendered dimensions of return, reintegration and rehabilitation" of foreign fighters and their families; and a lengthy process to improve the impact of PVE programming, including its monitoring and evaluation. See UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, 2017, <http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf>; UNDP, "Preventing Violent Extremism," n.d., <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development/peace/conflict-prevention/preventing-violent-extremism.html> (accessed 7 September 2020); UNDP, *Improving the Impact of Preventing Violent Extremism Programming: A Toolkit for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation*, 2018, https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Global%20Policy%20Centres/OGC/PVE_ImprovingImpactProgrammingToolkit_2018.pdf. For a critique of the 2017 UNDP report, see James Khalil, "A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 42, no. 4 (2019): 429–443.

56 Mergers include the working group on the promotion and protection of human rights with the working group on support for victims of terrorism, and the criminal justice working group with the CFT working group.

working group co-chairs to compare notes and assess priorities and partnerships.⁵⁷ Global Compact working groups meet regularly and provide an important opportunity for exchanges, although interlocutors lament the lack of broader strategic direction to orient their efforts. Meetings are largely comprised of project updates, with incidental opportunities to hear from and coordinate actions in the field. Priorities and targets guiding the working groups' efforts should equally leverage existing data and assessments within the UN system, notably through CTED, as well as country-specific and thematic analyses. More specifically, targets and indicators should focus on measuring change for societies.

To improve transparency and accountability, the UNOCT began producing public monthly newsletters⁵⁸ and organizing quarterly briefings for member states, which provide a detailed overview of internal organizational and operational changes, programmatic activities, funding sources, and Global Compact developments. The briefings create opportunities for member states to track the pulse of UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts and offer a regular forum for questions. Increased attention to strategic planning and collective, coordinated action of the Global Compact entities would support the improved implementation of the Strategy. Moreover, the UNOCT could expand access to the briefings to civil society, webcasting these and making all documents and presentations promptly available on its website. In March 2020, an online platform was launched to facilitate collaboration among Global Compact entities and provide greater insights to its work for member states. It is too early to judge the usefulness of the portal, and access is limited to designated member state focal points. The UNOCT and the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology should explore enabling access to select portions of the portal to a wider array of stakeholders,

including civil society, to inform and improve transparency and accountability for the work of the Global Compact and to enhance information sharing.

SECURITY COUNCIL BODIES ACTING ON TERRORISM: SANCTIONS, RESOLUTIONS, AND ASSESSING COMPLIANCE

Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII are binding on member states and play an important role in UN counterterrorism efforts. For many years, counterterrorism resolutions predominately focused on imposing and managing sanctions regimes against individuals and entities associated with the Taliban in Afghanistan and the global threat of al-Qaida and later ISIL. These efforts are overseen by two sanctions committees within the Security Council tasked with designating individuals and entities to which sanctions measures, including an asset freeze and arms embargo, must be applied. The committees are supported by a monitoring team.

Targeted sanctions can be a useful means to address terrorism financing, but persistent concerns about the fairness of the listing and delisting processes have undermined their effectiveness and credibility. From 1999 to 2002, there was no mechanism to remove an individual from the sanctions list; until 2006, diplomatic channels were the only option for individuals to seek to be delisted.⁵⁹ Member states called on the Security Council to ensure fair and clear procedures in the imposition of sanctions during the 2005 UN world summit, which led to the establishment in 2009 of the UN Office of the Ombudsperson to review requests from individual entities seeking to be delisted by the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. Domestic courts must also ensure the application of

57 The GCTF has emerged as one of the principal actors to fill some of the perceived gaps in the United Nations' counterterrorism and PVE response. In addition to producing good practice documents, the GCTF has inspired several institutions and public-private partnerships that address different aspects in Strategy implementation. These include Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism; the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law; and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund. See Eric Rosand, "Preparing the Global Counterterrorism Forum for the Next Decade," *U.S. Institute of Peace Special Report*, no. 476 (August 2020), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/20200817-sr_476-preparing_the_global_counterterrorism_forum_for_the_next_decade-s.pdf.

58 See UNOCT, "Newsletter," n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/newsletter> (accessed 7 September 2020).

59 James Cockayne, Rebecca Brubaker, and Nadeshda Jayakody, "Fairly Clear Risks: Protecting UN Sanctions' Legitimacy and Effectiveness Through Fair and Clear Procedures," UN University, 2018, p. 7, https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:6450/UNU_FairlyClearRisks_FINAL_Web.pdf.

certain minimum due process standards in giving effect to UN sanctions listings, although challenges remain because the process is politicized.

Starting with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1373 and the creation of the CTC, a number of measures have been introduced by the council that have expanded member state counterterrorism-related obligations on a variety of topics.⁶⁰ Since the 2018 review of the Strategy, the council has called on member states to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism through increased use of financial intelligence and introduced a resolution linking international terrorism and organized crime.⁶¹ The issues addressed in the resolutions represent the many interests of the 83 member states that have cycled into the council since 2001 and that have included counterterrorism topics among the top priorities for their council presidencies. The expansive and at times permanent nature of these resolutions have raised concerns about the extent to which the council's activism on counterterrorism matters is driven by needs and gaps, while the regulatory burdens it imposes has had a chilling effect on civil society activities and humanitarian operations.

Within the Security Council, the CTC works to bolster the ability of member states to prevent and respond to terrorism within their borders and across regions.⁶² It is supported by a special political mission, CTED,

which monitors, facilitates, and promotes the implementation of relevant resolutions by conducting member state assessments, facilitating (not delivering) technical assistance, and providing analyses of emerging issues, trends, and developments.⁶³ CTED's mandate as a special political mission is up for renewal by the end of 2021.

CTED assessments are intended to help inform the Global Compact's capacity development programs and wider UN policy work. Assessments are carried out with the agreement of member states and are often a multiagency effort,⁶⁴ with the resulting report submitted to the CTC. The Detailed Implementation Survey, CTED's assessment questionnaire, is not publicly available. Member states can choose to make the subsequent report more widely available, but few have done so. More commonly, only the recommendations are shared, which omit the contextual details and the analysis. CTED releases global implementation surveys that summarize trends across assessment missions, as well as regular issue-specific analyses. Such reports provide useful trends analyses at the aggregate level, but more transparency on the Detailed Implementation Survey and the country assessments would allow the UN system to maximize their value and effectively orient technical assistance toward areas of greatest need, as well as help inform the Strategy review process and engagement with civil society.

60 Since approximately 2012, Security Council resolutions have been issued more frequently and have been more thematically diverse. Twenty-three of 58 counterterrorism-related Security Council resolutions have been adopted since 2012. Of those 23, 22 percent were related to sanctions measures, compared to 51 percent prior to 2012.

61 UN Security Council, S/RES/2427, 9 July 2018; UN Security Council, S/RES/2482, 19 July 2019.

62 For the establishment of the CTC, see UN Security Council, S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001.

63 For the establishment of CTED, see UN Security Council, S/RES/1535, 26 March 2004. For the CTED mandate renewal, see UN Security Council, S/RES/2395, 21 December 2017, para. 4.

64 CTED country visits often include entities such as UN Women, UNODC, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Its mandate invites CTED to consult with civil society and the private sector, although its participation in formal visits is at the discretion of the host state.



Nepalese peacekeepers serving with the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) patrol on foot in North Kivu province
1 February 2018
UN Photo/Michael Ali

SITUATING THE STRATEGY WITHIN THE UN PREVENTION AGENDA

In an increasingly saturated landscape of multilateral entities and bilateral assistance, the United Nations differentiates itself in its expansive and sustained presence around the world. To leverage that advantage, it must strengthen coordination between headquarters and field offices, missions, and UN agencies, in close collaboration with UN country teams. The Secretary-General's reforms have offered renewed opportunities to improve coherence and coordination, principally through the empowered role of the Resident Coordinators.

The Secretary-General's reforms are organized around the central idea that the United Nations is a "field-based organization";⁶⁵ they seek to decentralize decision-making in an institution in which two-thirds of staff members work in the field. The Resident Coordinators sit at the center of this new framework.⁶⁶ Newly independent, their offices are strategically placed to lead UN country team efforts in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and to support crisis prevention.⁶⁷ Early gains have been observed in case studies conducted by the UN University on the Resident Coordinator-led conflict prevention model, where many of the countries studied emerged "less conflict-prone due to the preventive work carried out by Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams," which includes supporting peace processes and dialogue, addressing underlying conflict drivers, and strengthening prevention capacities.⁶⁸ Promoting

programming around cross-cutting prevention themes has also been shown to be a useful tool to foster common approaches to prevention. For example, in Kyrgyzstan and Tunisia, Resident Coordinators "have successfully leveraged emerging programming around [PVE issues] to align country team members behind common prevention goals."⁶⁹

The reforms of the Resident Coordinator mandates respond to the need to link Strategy implementation to priorities embedded in larger UN peace and security, development, and human rights efforts. Currently, the separate priorities and funding sources that are attached to counterterrorism and PVE projects, 55 percent of which are national in scope,⁷⁰ have siloed counterterrorism activities from broader conflict prevention efforts.⁷¹ Such cross-cutting issues in the field support and build on the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and provide an important framework to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.⁷² The Strategy articulates some of these conditions and the need to maintain effective, fair, humane, transparent, and accountable criminal justice systems as a fundamental basis of any strategy to counter terrorism.⁷³ Consistent with the Secretary-General's vision for a more robust, results-oriented, efficient, and cohesive development system, the priorities set at the country level should accordingly feed into the Strategy's activities.

65 "UN Secretary General's Town-Hall Meeting: Notes From the UN Staff Union," Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations, 14 August 2017, <https://www.ccisua.org/2017/08/14/un-secretary-generals-town-hall-meeting-notes-from-the-un-staff-union/>.

66 UN General Assembly, A/RES/72/279, 31 May 2018, para. 2. As of June 2020, there were 129 Resident Coordinators across all countries in which the United Nations is active, with some Resident Coordinators covering more than one nation. UN Development Coordination Office, "List of Resident Coordinators," 1 June 2020, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/List-of-Resident-Coordiators-as-of-1-June-2020.pdf>.

67 Resident Coordinators assumed their new functions on 1 January 2019, leading 131 UN country teams who serve 164 countries and territories and directly reporting to the Deputy Secretary-General. "Secretary-General's Remarks to Economic and Social Council on Repositioning the UN Development System to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda," 5 June 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-07-05/secretary-generals-remarks-economic-and-social-council-repositioning>.

68 Sebastian von Einsiedel, "What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention: Lessons From the Field," UN University Centre for Policy Research, June 2018, p. 5, <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2856/RC-Project-Synthesis.pdf>.

69 Ibid., p. 10.

70 See UN Secretary-General's 2020 Strategy implementation report, para 59.

71 The most recent Blue Sky report noted that breaking the silos would help realize "an all-of-UN approach, while benefiting from the specific expertise and data" being collected and contextualized at the country level, for instance, on issues related to children affected by violence and conflict. Millar, "Blue Sky IV," p. 14.

72 This approach was further promoted by the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations and Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee. See Abdellatif Aboulatta, "2030 Agenda—A Unique Opportunity to Address Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism," UN Chronicle, n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/2030-agenda-unique-opportunity-address-conditions-conducive-spread-terrorism> (accessed 9 September 2020).

73 Sixth review resolution, para. 34.

The need to guarantee a coordinated approach was also stressed by interlocutors who complained of setbacks when counterterrorism priorities and programs are “parachuted in” without adequate local and national consultations. For instance, the listing of terrorist organizations and individuals may interfere with peace processes and dialogue with nonstate armed groups,⁷⁴ utilizing an inadequate lens from which to view long-standing conflicts. Most urgently, this is reflected in the devolving crisis across the Sahel, where the conditions conducive to conflict in countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali are multifaceted, even if intertwined with terrorist activities; where serious governance and development needs persist; and where there are emergent or ongoing humanitarian crises.

The Resident Coordinators must be supported in this role. They face a number of challenges in their position, particularly in conflict-prone countries, but also due to various political, mandate, and resource constraints.⁷⁵ Navigating these while maintaining favor with the host government and upholding the UN Charter requires tremendous leadership skills. Interlocutors further emphasized the need to sensitize the counterterrorism community in New York of the Resident Coordinators’ reformed mandates to help support more consistency in developing priorities and strategies, as negotiated with the host member state.

The Secretary-General’s most recent biennial report on Strategy implementation, released in February 2020, suggests a move toward centering the role of the Resident Coordinators but shies away from fully empowering them by stating that they “where necessary and relevant ... should be informed and may also be involved” in facilitating UN counterterrorism and PVE support.⁷⁶ In order to achieve an all-of-UN

approach, the Secretary-General should clarify how counterterrorism and PVE efforts, especially those linked to Strategy Pillars I and IV, fit into the Resident Coordinator’s broader conflict and violence prevention role.

In a May 2019 report containing “concrete recommendations and options on ways to assess the impact of and progress in the implementation of the Strategy,” as requested in the sixth review resolution, the Secretary-General stated that the Resident Coordinator Offices have “limited capacity ... to ensure inter-agency coordination and decision-making at the national and regional levels regarding counter-terrorism assistance and engagement” and suggested that the UN field presence could be strengthened by the creation of counterterrorism focal points.⁷⁷ This proposal does not adequately take into account the significant resources and political sensitivities that accompany the offices’ role. Guidance and resources from the UNOCT could be helpful, given the sheer scale of funding, but they may have the effect of disproportionately framing prevention through a securitized PVE lens, which subtracts energy and resources from addressing development, human rights, and rule of law deficits. Finally, placing the counterterrorism focal point’s work under the direction of the Global Compact would further contribute to UN counterterrorism entities operating in a silo and muddy reporting lines of different mandate holders in the field. The UNOCT Project Review Board and UNCCT Advisory Board should account for the distorting effects of the introduction of large counterterrorism and PVE projects by actively consulting with the UN country teams, including with the Office of the Resident Coordinator and the UNDP/PPA Peace and Development Advisors.

74 For instance, see Akinola Olojo, “How Viable Is Dialogue With al-Shabaab and Boko Haram?” *Institute for Security Studies Policy Brief*, no. 130 (July 2019), <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/policy-brief-130.pdf>; Véronique Dudouet, “Anti-Terrorism Legislation: Impediments to Conflict Transformation,” *Berghof Policy Brief*, no. 2 (November 2011), https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Policy_Briefs/PolicyBrief02.pdf.

75 The reformed mandates faced significant resistance from member states, who raised concerns on the potential interferences to national sovereignty and the securitization of the development agenda. During a 11 September 2018 briefing on the implementation plan, for instance, Egypt, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, commented that better integration efforts should be limited to “countries facing humanitarian emergencies and in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.” Rodrigo Saad, “The Human Rights Implications of the New UN Resident Coordinator System,” *Universal Rights Group*, 13 March 2019, <https://www.universal-rights.org/blog/the-human-rights-implications-of-the-new-un-resident-coordinator-system/>. Resident Coordinators also lack an explicit mandate to engage in political activities. Von Einsiedel, “What Works in UN Resident Coordinator-Led Conflict Prevention,” p. 3.

76 UN Secretary-General’s 2020 Strategy implementation report, annex V, pt. C.

77 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System*, para. 64.

The complementarity between the recommendations emerging from CTED assessments and the Resident Coordinator's role in identifying risks and building social resilience also must be carefully considered. Already, CTED consults Resident Coordinators during assessment visits and has suggested that they are an important avenue for identifying civil society input. CTED's upcoming mandate renewal should clearly account for the revised role of the Resident Coordinators to ensure coherence and complementarity of UN efforts in headquarters and at the country level.

The Secretary-General could similarly leverage the reformed mandates of the Resident Coordinators to identify specific risks related to the Strategy's implementation and put forward a consolidated approach from the institutional perspective in guiding the United Nations' assessment of member state priorities and needs, consistent with the Strategy and relevant Security Council resolutions. By incorporating the

Resident Coordinators' input in program delivery on the basis of their assessments and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework,⁷⁸ UN counterterrorism bodies would create greater continuity in the portfolio of actions within a single country and across the organization's peace, development, and human rights efforts.

Of course, CTED is a Security Council body, while the mandates of the UNOCT and the Resident Coordinator system are derived from the General Assembly. Enhancing coordination by streamlining efforts around common, longer-term priorities and national-level indicators will help achieve outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts. To sustain these efforts, another important voice from the field must be included, that of civil society, the ultimate beneficiaries of counterterrorism and PVE policies and programs.

78 The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is the primary instrument for planning and implementing UN development activities. The frameworks are agreements negotiated between the United Nations and the host government. UN Sustainable Development Group, "United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework," n.d., <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/cooperation-framework> (accessed 9 September 2020).



Dream Achievers Youth Organization organizes to strengthen youth leadership and empowerment in Mombasa, Kenya, in a program supported by the Global Center on Cooperative Security
21 June 2019
Photo: Enos Opiyo

DELIVERING ON CIVIL SOCIETY COMMITMENTS

UN agency mandates across the counterterrorism and PVE architecture cannot be fulfilled without meaningful and sustained civil society engagement. A vibrant and active civil society plays a critical role in empowering communities, enhancing resilience, supporting accountability and transparency, advancing the rule of law, and achieving the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.⁷⁹ Whereas a national government bears the primary responsibility for its nation's security, local authorities, practitioners, and civil society organizations are often well placed to prevent and respond to localized threats posed by violent extremism in their communities.⁸⁰

International good practice on counterterrorism and PVE matters has long recognized civil society as a critical partner to governments and the United Nations. Yet, the proliferation of counterterrorism and PVE measures and programs has also securitized the roles of civil society and been directly correlated to shrinking civic space.⁸¹ Many efforts to involve civil society and community organizations in PVE activities relegate them to the role of intelligence and information gathering for security agencies. Such efforts overwhelmingly target marginalized populations, raising profiling risks and further undermining trust and the legitimacy of

PVE initiatives.⁸² Measures restricting the freedoms of expression, opinion, association, assembly, and religion have also been invoked to target civil society activities, despite a lack of evidence that these restrictions actually reduce the number of terrorist attacks.⁸³

The repression of peaceful activism continues to be a widespread crisis in most parts of the world. Civil society is under serious attack in 111 countries, and just 4 percent of the world's population lives in countries with open space for civil society.⁸⁴ The operational space for civil society is further being constrained by onerous restrictions at all levels imposed as part of sanctions regimes and regulations to counter the financing of terrorism. Humanitarian actors face manifold challenges in this regard as they operate in complex situations where armed conflict, terrorism, and humanitarian crises overlap. Overly broad and ambiguous definitions of terrorism and its financing can result in the criminalization of humanitarian activity, while lingering perceptions of nonprofit organizations as being high risk for terrorism financing abuse have contributed to restricted financial access.⁸⁵ Security Council Resolution 2462 called on member states to combat the financing of terrorists and their activities while drawing attention to the negative

79 UN General Assembly, A/58/817, 11 June 2004 (containing *We the Peoples: Civil Society, the United Nations and Global Governance; Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations*). The report defined civil society as

an associations of citizens (outside their families, friends and businesses) entered into voluntarily to advance their interests, ideas and ideologies. The term does not include profit-making activity (the private sector) or governing (the public sector). Of particular relevance to the United Nations are mass organizations (such as organizations of peasants, women or retired people), trade unions, professional associations, social movements, indigenous people's organizations, religious and spiritual organizations, academe and public benefit non-governmental organizations.

Ibid. at 13.

80 Letter to Vladimir Voronkov on civil society engagement with the UNOCT, 24 January 2018, <https://organizingagainstve.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Civil-Society-Engagement-with-the-UN-Office-of-Counter-Terrorism.pdf>.

81 See UN Human Rights Council, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*. For a comprehensive treatment of this topic, see Charbord and Aoláin, "Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space."

82 Matthew Schwartz, "Shifting the PVE Paradigm: A Think Piece on Human Insecurity, Political Violence, and New Directions for Preventing Violent Extremism," Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2018, p. 8, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCCS-Shifting-the-PVE-Paradigm-07-09-18-v2.pdf>.

83 Jeong-Woo Koo and Amanda Murdie, "Liberty or Security: Do Civil Society Restrictions Limit Terrorism?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, 4 June 2018, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/liberty-or-security-do-civil-society-restrictions>.

84 "People Power Under Attack: A Global Analysis of Threats to Fundamental Freedoms," CIVICUS, November 2018, p. 4, <https://www.civicus.org/documents/PeoplePowerUnderAttack.Report.27November.pdf>.

85 These perceptions have been driven in part by Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8, which addresses measures to prevent the misuse of nonprofit organizations and classifies the organizations as being at risk of being abused for terrorism at various levels. See generally Alice Debarre, "Safeguarding Medical Care and Humanitarian Action in the UN Counterterrorism Framework," International Peace Institute, September 2018, https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/1809_Safeguarding-Medical-Care.pdf.

impacts on “impartial humanitarian actors.”⁸⁶ The resolution, although imperfect, has brought humanitarian actors such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Committee for the Red Cross into the fold.⁸⁷

IMPROVING CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

UN efforts to engage civil society continue against the backdrop of the global deterioration of human rights and civil society space. The Secretary-General’s 2020 call to action for human rights sets out “broad and sustained” engagement of states, civil society, and other stakeholders in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In designing a system-wide strategy on civic space, the call to action presses for a mechanism to be emplaced and guidance provided to UN leaders to “(i) positively engage with interlocutors to promote and protect civic space; (ii) respond to undue restrictions on civic space; and (iii) protect the space for different stakeholders to express their views.”⁸⁸ The call to action also looks to the Resident Coordinators, UN country teams, and heads of UN peace operations to develop partnerships with civil society “to contribute to an enabling environment for civic space, including for women’s organizations and women’s rights defenders.”⁸⁹

Civil society makes a critical contribution to violence prevention and conflict resolution. It comprises a

wide range of actors, such as victims’ rights groups, bar associations, and religious and traditional authorities that play roles in the field from the rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants to supporting accountability and good governance practices. Tangible benefits may be derived from its engagement in policymaking on terrorism-related issues. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recognized that where civil society engagement is restricted, “responses to security threats, development challenges, environmental disasters and disease ... risk being ill-informed and weaker.”⁹⁰ Integrative efforts between civil society and multilateral actors have also yielded considerable benefits. For instance, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regularly meets with the private sector and civil society via its Private Sector Consultative Forum.⁹¹ UN leaders and entities must create a conducive environment for civil society to meaningfully engage in policy and program deliberations.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN UN COUNTERTERRORISM AND PVE EFFORTS

The Strategy review resolutions, on the other hand, do not explicitly recognize civil society’s contributions to prevent violence and conflict and afford limited space for its engagement. The fourth review resolution and reviews thereafter incorporate language encouraging engagement among civil society, member states, and the UN system, specifically the CTITF, to enhance

86 UN Security Council, S/RES/2462, 28 March 2019, para. 24 (“Urges States, when designing and applying measures to counter the financing of terrorism, to take into account the potential effect of those measures on exclusively humanitarian activities, including medical activities, that are carried out by impartial humanitarian actors in a manner consistent with international humanitarian law”).

87 Critics note that Security Council Resolution 2462 is limited and continues the practice of criminalizing a large array of terrorism-related acts with insufficient safeguards. See “UN: Security Council Resolution Undermines Aid, Human Rights Work,” Human Rights Watch, 2 April 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/02/un-security-council-resolution-undermines-aid-human-rights-work>.

88 António Guterres, “The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights,” 2020, p. 9, https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.

89 Ibid.

90 UN Human Rights Council, *Procedures and Practices in Respect of Civil Society Engagement With International and Regional Organizations: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, A/HRC/38/18, 18 April 2018, para. 56.

91 When faced with considerable critique for characterizing the nonprofit sector as “particularly vulnerable” to terrorism financing abuse, which led to increasing scrutiny by domestic regulators, restricted financial access, and costly compliance measures for civil society, FATF held a series of consultations with civil society actors and accepted public comment to revise FATF Recommendation 8 and its interpretive note, which was completed in June 2015. The updated best practices paper sought to highlight the importance of implementing Recommendation 8 and its interpretive note in a manner that does not disrupt or discourage legitimate charitable activities. FATF, “Public Consultation on the Revision of the Interpretive Note to Recommendation 8 (Non-profit Organisations),” n.d., <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/fatfrecommendations/documents/public-consultation-npo-inr8.html> (accessed 17 October 2020).

Strategy implementation.⁹² At the same time, the resolutions imply blanket risk of terrorism financing to nongovernmental, nonprofit, and charitable organizations.⁹³ Additional attention should be paid to how this risk is assessed, how negative effects on civil society should be mitigated, and, importantly, how civil society will be engaged to contribute to answering these questions. The review resolutions must respect “do no harm” principles and support an enabling environment for a robust and independent civil society. At a time when civil society spaces are being eroded under the pretense of countering terrorism, mere affirmations of the need to respect the rights to freedom of expression, association, and religion are insufficient.⁹⁴ The United Nations should support human rights defenders and push back against restrictions on their work. It also needs to adopt protective measures in its engagement with civil society to ensure individuals are not targeted because of their collaboration.⁹⁵

Individual Global Compact entities vary in the degree to which they prioritize and realize civil society engagement as a core pillar of their work and their commitment to protecting civic space. UNDP has nurtured a vast network of civil society entities across its programming, including in PVE activities. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) regularly communicates with a network of more than 1,000 civil society organizations and issues statements condemning violations against civil society. CTED’s Global Research Network, now five years old, hosts regular meetings and draws on evidence-based research from nongovernmental sources to integrate into its activities and analytical products. UN Women activated its own networks by leading a global

consultation process with civil society on the Strategy review and organized a dedicated side event during the 2019 African regional high-level conference on counterterrorism in Kenya.⁹⁶

In 2018, Voronkov expressed his commitment to create a UNOCT civil society engagement strategy. This came after restrictions on civil society participation in the UN High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States were met with calls to expand access and engagement from member states and civil society alike. The framing of the conference was also criticized for adopting a securitized approach by giving priority to heads of counterterrorism agencies as compared to a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach, which would place emphasis on a more balanced treatment of government, civil society, and private sector representation (box 3).

The UNOCT’s long-anticipated civil society engagement strategy was made public in a condensed format in May 2020 and articulates specific objectives, desired outcomes, and guiding principles for engagement.⁹⁷ It places special focus on drawing expertise from civil society in three key areas—gender, youth, and human rights—across the UNOCT and the Global Compact’s work, while little attention is paid to how the UNOCT will best support civil society to realize implementation of the Strategy. Select civil society organizations were consulted early in the development of the engagement strategy, but consultations with civil society representatives in New York suggest that avenues for input were limited and often self-initiated. It remains unclear how civil society perspectives are reflected in the final engagement strategy and what its role will be

92 Sixth review resolution, para. 24; fifth review resolution, para. 10; fourth review resolution, para. 10 (recognizing the need for member states to “prevent the abuse of non-governmental, non-profit and charitable organizations by and for terrorists” and calling on “non-governmental, non-profit and charitable organizations to prevent and oppose, as appropriate, attempts by terrorists to abuse the status of those organizations”).

93 Sixth review resolution, para. 26; fifth review resolution, para. 14; fourth review resolution, para. 10.

94 Sixth review resolution, para. 8; fifth review resolution, para. 7; fourth review resolution, para. 10.

95 For example, see “UN Expert ‘Shocked’ by Egyptian Reprisals Against Human Rights Defenders She Met,” UN News, 4 December 2018, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027581>.

96 The African Regional High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism was held 10–11 July 2019 in Nairobi. Women-led civil society representatives from Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, and Tunisia participated in a closed meeting with the UN Secretary-General.

97 The engagement strategy lists three desired outcomes: (1) the creation of opportunities for civil society to provide feedback on UNOCT and Global Compact working group policy and programmatic activities; (2) involvement in outreach efforts to disseminate UNOCT work, develop new partnerships, and improve the impact of counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism policies and programs; and (3) the creation of structured mechanisms to ensure the mainstreaming of civil society engagement across UNOCT and the Global Compact working groups. UNOCT, *Civil Society Engagement Strategy*, 17 January 2020, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/civil_society_engagement_strategy_website_mai_2020.pdf.

Box 3. UNOCT High-Level and Regional Conferences

In June 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres convened the first-ever UN high-level conference to discuss counterterrorism issues. A key outcome of the conference has been the organization of a set of regional high-level conferences to promote the implementation of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* and relevant resolutions.

- ▶ **16–17 May 2019 in Dushanbe:** International and Regional Cooperation on Countering Terrorism and Its Financing Through Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime
- ▶ **20–21 June 2019 in Ulaanbaatar:** Whole-of-Society Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism
- ▶ **10–11 July 2019 in Nairobi:** Counter Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism
- ▶ **3–4 September 2019 in Minsk:** Countering Terrorism Through Innovative Approaches and the Use of New and Emerging Technologies
- ▶ **7–8 November 2019 in Budapest:** Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism: Regional Policy Responses and Risk Mitigation
- ▶ **18–19 December 2019 in Abu Dhabi:** Empowering Youth and Promoting Tolerance: Practical Approaches to Countering Terrorist Radicalization and Terrorism
- ▶ **11–12 February 2020 in Vienna:** Foreign Terrorist Fighters: Addressing Current Challenges

Many member states commended the regional conferences for moving the UN counterterrorism discussion outside New York City and hosting

regionally contextual conversations, but they were also widely critiqued. The conferences were very costly and time intensive for UN, member state, and civil society participants. The regional conferences were framed to feed into the high-level conference at the center of UN Counter-Terrorism Week, but did not make any explicit ties to the Strategy review. This left several commentators questioning the aims and added value of the conferences. Furthermore, the lack of connection to the Strategy suggested to some that the conferences could constitute a quasi-parallel track to inform UN counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism priorities and policies, based not on consensus but on statements made during the high-level conference and the priorities and interest of host states and donors. To a number of observers, this had the effect of potentially muddying a clear policy direction of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) from which to exercise leadership, notably because the host had much influence over the topic of the conference. Exacerbating this confusion, little documentation of the conferences has been developed. Instead, statements, press releases, and summaries of the meetings are available, which left observers wondering what lasting value is created by the costly conferences other than to advance national political positions. Moreover, several interlocutors raised concerns that the conferences served to “blue wash” state practices or promote them in a favorable light by giving them the symbolic UN seal of approval. Although some efforts were made to welcome select civil society participants to the regional high-level conferences,^a it is common practice for host governments to screen and pre-approve their participation, making the selection of the host government a critical consideration that must feature in the UNOCT’s risk analysis, “do no harm” commitments, and mitigation strategy.

a For example, to support the UNOCT in its efforts to increase representation of civil society, including funding its participation, the Global Center on Cooperative Security organized two one-day workshops involving civil society from the League of Arab States and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe regions, focused on empowering youth and promoting tolerance and challenges related to foreign terrorist fighters. The workshops provided civil society-centric discussions on the themes with the aim to inform the broader conference with recommendations to improve engagement among civil society, UN member states, and the United Nations. See Annabelle Bonnefont and Jason Ipe, “Enhancing Civil Society Engagement,” Global Center on Cooperative Security, n.d., https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Key-Findings_Recommendations_Civil-Society-Engagement.pdf.

in informing and shaping its implementation. Barriers to access and transparency are even greater for the vast universe of civil society and community organizations sitting outside of New York's Turtle Bay neighborhood. The pandemic has ushered in renewed opportunities to engage virtually and minimize travel, physical, and other barriers to entry, a positive development that should be carried over as governments and UN headquarters gradually reopen their doors.

The UNOCT's engagement strategy calls for the establishment of a civil society hub and dedicated civil society engagement capacity in each of the organization's branches and the UNCCT. It is unclear where the hub will be situated, although within the UNOCT Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch with the appropriate authority and resources ostensibly makes sense as it would allow civil society to inform policymaking processes and access Global Compact members and initiatives. This would also leverage Global Compact members' existing civil society networks at all levels, rather than replicating those efforts in a new global network. Additionally, the hub will need to coordinate with other UNOCT branches, the UNCCT, and all Global Compact members to ensure civil society is able to provide input into the design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of programs, much like member states should do with their own strategies, policies, and measures.⁹⁸ Indeed, merely talking about civil society and youth- and women-led organizations or inviting them to the table is not enough. Civil society engagement must involve meaningful exchanges that influence the strategic design and objectives of policy, which in turn must translate into actions by government and nongovernmental actors.

Additionally, the UNOCT engagement strategy refers to a monitoring and evaluation framework that will be developed in consultation with the UNOCT Monitoring and Evaluation Officer and evaluated after a two-year period. The engagement strategy evaluation should seek to identify and assess UNOCT and Global Compact entities' efforts to enhance their engagement with civil society in accordance with their mandate and should be benchmarked against the UN system-wide guidance being prepared as an output of the Secretary-General's call to action.

The engagement strategy also mentions the aim to include civil society feedback in the Strategy review. A more robust process for soliciting civil society input to inform the Secretary-General's biennial report on Strategy implementation should be put in place by providing at least sufficient time and communications to solicit, accept, and review civil society submissions.⁹⁹ The information prepared by Global Compact entities for the Secretary-General's reports should also demonstrate how the UN body engaged with civil society and should relay the views of their own civil society networks on how counterterrorism and PVE efforts support or restrict them. Briefings to member states on the Secretary-General's report should be open to civil society participation and webcast to promote greater transparency. Member states can further engage with civil society by inviting draft language, creating space for strategic conversations around shared objectives, and providing opportunities for the participation of grassroots organizations in high-level discussions. Such measures would help to diversify the field of civil society represented in the discussions and enable networking with counterparts in the peace-building, human rights, and humanitarian communities.

98 The *Civil Society Engagement Strategy* currently requires "UNOCT Branches and Global Compact Working Groups to include civil society consultation in project initiation documentation, as relevant (per UNOCT Standard Operating Procedure #4) and workplans." Ibid., para. 3.1.1.1.

99 Although input was sought for the Secretary-General's February 2020 report on Strategy implementation, the request came with little notice, over the winter holidays, with just two weeks to respond to an English online survey, focusing on questions relating to what civil society was doing to implement the Strategy rather than to civil society engagement with the UN system and member states more generally. The deadline was ultimately extended by one week, but the 55 organizations that provided feedback did not receive any further communications indicating what was being done with their input and how they can continue to stay involved and informed.



UN permanent headquarters
1 September 1951
UN Photo

STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The “Blue Sky” series of reports has consistently called for greater attention by the United Nations to the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. Pillar IV of the Strategy is devoted to “[m]easures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism.” Although some improvements have been made to the United Nations’ ability to support member states in their implementation of this pillar, abuses continue from the application of broadly defined terrorism laws targeting political opponents and marginalized groups perceived to pose a threat to governments. Violations in this space are warrantless surveillance, prolonged arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment, the use of extrajudicial or arbitrary executions, and other abuses that may themselves amount to crimes against humanity.

Member states’ determination to “make every effort to reach an agreement on and conclude a comprehensive convention on international terrorism,” reaffirmed in the Strategy, has gone unanswered in the 14 years since the latter’s adoption. Although its potential effect on state practice should not be overstated, a comprehensive definition of terrorism would help inform the international jurisprudence and crystallization of customary law, technical assistance, and country assessments that rely on the interpretation of a growing number of Chapter VII resolutions that criminalize terrorism-related acts and include measures to prevent their occurrence. The ever-widening net of counterterrorism laws has also contributed to fragmentation in the legal landscape as new institutions have emerged in this space. “Soft law” produced by entities such as FATF and the GCTF have been referenced in binding legal frameworks without adequate UN membership input or human rights safeguards.¹⁰⁰

Without adequate safeguards, the UN system’s counterterrorism and PVE policy, coordination, technical assistance, and advocacy risks causing more harm than good. For more than a decade, there has been a steady shrinking of civic space, which is often accompanied by a deterioration of other rights, and abuses under the guise of countering terrorism have been widespread.¹⁰¹ Member states, independent experts, and civil society have long observed that Pillar IV remains underimplemented by pointing to the limited attention, programming, and investment under this pillar. Ensuring that human rights principles inform Strategy implementation, including by adopting rights-based and nondiscriminatory approaches in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programs and by creating avenues for civil society participation, requires more than incremental, project-based, or piecemeal approaches. It calls for structural reforms, strong leadership, and accountability to support a more fundamental shift in the culture.

BREAKING DOWN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SILO IN THE UNITED NATIONS

The asymmetry of priorities of Strategy implementation reflects the wider systemic imbalance among the United Nations’ three pillars, where the human rights pillar receives only 3.7 percent of the total UN budget.¹⁰² Critical voices, including those of former advisers to the Secretary-General, have decried the UN chief’s weak record of defending human rights and have lamented the relatively muted role of human rights in his reform efforts.¹⁰³ In response to organization-wide concerns on human rights and the disproportionate

100 See UN General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-General*, A/74/335, 29 August 2019 (containing the Special Rapporteur’s report) (hereinafter 2019 Special Rapporteur’s report).

101 The year 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, according to Freedom House. Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have borne the brunt of governmental abuses in democratic and authoritarian states. Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy,” n.d., https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FIW_2020_REPORT_BOOKLET_Final.pdf. See Guterres, “Highest Aspiration,” p. 8.

102 For example, the approved regular budget appropriation for OHCHR in 2020 was \$116 million. OHCHR, “OHCHR’s Funding and Budget,” n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/FundingBudget.aspx> (accessed 10 September 2020).

103 See Colum Lynch, “U.N. Chief Faces Internal Criticism Over Human Rights,” *Foreign Policy*, 4 February 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/04/un-chief-antonio-guterres-internal-criticism-human-rights/>; Universal Rights Group, “Human Rights Dialogue: The Place of Human Rights in a Reformed United Nations,” 2018, p. 8, https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Glion_2018_LR.pdf.

allocations across its three pillars of work, Guterres launched his call to action for human rights in 2020.¹⁰⁴

The issue of human rights has become increasingly polarized in the UN system, and certain member states have successfully pushed to further undermine this work. These moves include the elimination of key positions in the Secretary-General's office overseeing the "Human Rights Up Front" initiative, which sought to place human rights at the heart of UN work;¹⁰⁵ threats to dilute the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; and the use of procedural rules to block the High Commissioner for Human Rights from briefing the Security Council on the situation in Syria. The hostile environment for multilateralism and human rights led the previous high commissioner not to seek renewal of his position in 2017 in the face of the UN leadership's continued reluctance to speak out more strongly on human rights.¹⁰⁶

These power struggles are playing themselves out in the microcosm of the seventh Strategy review, with the initial appointment of the permanent representatives of Egypt and Spain to the United Nations as co-facilitators. Beginning in 2015, Egypt introduced an initiative on the "effects of terrorism on the enjoyment of human rights," which was merged in 2018 with the Mexico-led resolution on "protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism."¹⁰⁷ Although the latter resolution had enjoyed broad member state support at the Human Rights Council, the merger resulted in the dilution of much of the language on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms relating to counterterrorism and the rights of victims of those abuses. Human rights organizations have roundly criticized this merger, which was characterized as a compromise

to secure the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism.¹⁰⁸ The 2018 resolution erodes the integrity of the Strategy and effectively derailed years of consensus-based, normative progress achieved in the post-9/11 era.

MAINSTREAMING HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS IN THE UN COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE

More can be done to support member states' implementation of the Strategy by setting agreed priorities at the country level, informed by CTED country assessments and civil society, and by coordinating collective technical assistance efforts accordingly. Policy leadership on these issues also requires doubling down on the commitment to ensure that respect for human rights and the rule of law forms the basis of all these efforts by shifts in priorities and resources, the development and delivery of more robust programs and guidance materials, and the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs under Pillar IV. During an August 2020 briefing to the Global Compact, the High Commissioner for Human Rights affirmed,

If human rights are truly to be the fundamental basis for all counter-terrorism efforts, all programmes and support to Member States should be drawn up and implemented with clear awareness of the human rights risks endemic to counter-terrorism work; they should be driven by a human rights diagnosis of the specific problems of each area; and their design, implementation, and projected

104 Guterres, "Highest Aspiration."

105 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the internal "Human Rights Up Front" campaign in 2013, introducing three levels of action to place the promotion and protection of human rights at the center of UN work, including at the country, regional, and senior management levels. United Nations, "Protect Human Rights," n.d., <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/> (accessed 2 October 2020).

106 See, e.g., Lynch, "U.N. Chief Faces Internal Criticism Over Human Rights."

107 UN General Assembly, A/RES/73/174, 17 January 2019.

108 See "UNGA: Protect Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism," 24 October 2019, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UN-Advocacy-OpenLetter-TerrorismHumanRights-2019.pdf> (letter jointly signed by 20 human rights organizations denouncing the draft resolution). See also Andrew Smith and Marc Pollards, "Keeping Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism in Focus at the UN," Just Security, 30 October 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/66777/keeping-human-rights-and-counter-terrorism-in-focus-at-the-un/>.

outcomes should integrate human rights goals and considerations.¹⁰⁹

Norm-setting and norm preservation continues to play an important role in UN counterterrorism work, which principally involves clarifying safeguards and providing guidance to member states. Words must be followed by action, and concerns have been voiced about the absence of clear UN leadership on counterterrorism abuses. For example, the Under-Secretary-General came under fire for a 2019 visit to the Xinjiang region in China, where the mass detention of Uyghur and other Muslim communities for alleged counterterrorism purposes went unmentioned during a briefing on the implementation of the Strategy; at the time, Voronkov was the highest-ranked UN official to visit this Chinese region.¹¹⁰ The principles enshrined in the UN Charter require of UN officials clear affirmations and policy leadership to address violations of human rights eroded in the name of countering terrorism.

In response to this global human rights deficit and its relationship to countering terrorism, CFT, and PVE, the United Nations has produced useful guidance materials to inform member state practice. Since the last review, UN bodies have produced several additional guidelines to help orient member state efforts, including a handbook on children affected by the foreign fighter phenomenon¹¹¹ and an addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles.¹¹² In 2018 the Global Compact Working Group on Human Rights produced guidance for states on human rights-compliant responses to the threat posed by foreign fighters, an effort championed by OHCHR. The document was widely seen as a good example of practical and clear guidance on the layered human rights dimensions of the issue. In the intervening period prior to the next Strategy review, a number of emergent issues may benefit from normative guidance, in particular on topics related to the collection and use of surveillance information in terrorism investigations and the

impacts of CFT measures on principled humanitarian action following the passage of Security Council Resolution 2462. These resources join a steady stream of guidance materials and policy recommendations that are prepared for member states by the UNOCT and other Global Compact members, although their linkages to ongoing programs and uptake and impact remain largely unclear. The extent to which additional guidance can contribute to human rights-compliant practices bears questioning, absent more meaningful commitments to existing human rights obligations or principled engagement with nonadherent states.

These complex efforts require dedicated staffing within the UNOCT and other Global Compact members. For example, a new full-time position at OHCHR was recently filled, for a total of only 1.5 staff members dedicated to counterterrorism and human rights issues. The UNCCT committed to increasing its staff who cover human rights and victims to four, although none is expressly tasked with focusing on the impacts of counterterrorism on human rights. CTED has three human rights officers, including one in a senior position, and recruited an international humanitarian law expert. These important developments help ensure more sustained attention to human rights issues across Global Compact entities, but measured against the task at hand, additional structural mechanisms must be considered to account for the leadership gap.

The Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, a part-time position, remains the principal UN entity explicitly and exclusively dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in relation to counterterrorism and PVE efforts. The issues tackled by the Special Rapporteur's reports include the PVE agenda's impact on human rights, the development of soft law and new institutions in this domain, and the use and abuse of counterterrorism measures on human rights defenders and civil

109 Michelle Bachelet, "Strengthening the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and the Rule of Law at the Heart of the Counter-Terrorism Compact" (statement, Fifth Meeting of the Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee, 28 August 2020), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26195&LangID=E>.

110 See "Joint Letter to the UN Secretary General on Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang," Human Rights Watch, 17 September 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/17/joint-letter-un-secretary-general-human-rights-violations-xinjiang>.

111 UNCCT, *Children Affected by the Foreign-Fighter Phenomenon: Ensuring a Child Rights-Based Approach*, n.d., https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/0918_ftf_handbook_web_reduced.pdf.

112 UN Security Council, S/2018/1177, 28 December 2018, annex (containing *Addendum to the Guiding Principles on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (2018)*).

society activists.¹¹³ Each issue underscores the required breadth of human rights analysis and the precarious foothold of human rights expertise and impact within the counterterrorism architecture. It reveals that to make a step change in the ability of the United Nations to promote and protect human rights while countering terrorism, there is a need to establish accountability mechanisms that can weather the sustained adversity to the foundations of the Strategy and are positioned with a broad purview and wide authority.

Separate initiatives have been undertaken to systematize human rights protections in the prioritization, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of UN counterterrorism and PVE projects. For example, the 2018 UNCCT annual report highlights new projects that focus on human rights and gender considerations, with plans underway to vet all activities in terms of their human rights implications.¹¹⁴ Conducting human rights assessments will require dedicated and experienced personnel, beyond project managers, to deliver on this promise in a meaningful way and will be necessary not only at the project proposal review phases but across the entire project life cycle. This initiative can further be built on, for instance by ensuring that the UNCCT monitoring and evaluation framework adopts explicit human rights indicators across its programming and that information is properly collected and logged to allow for the abovementioned accountability mechanism to function. CTED, meanwhile, has listed the promotion of and respect for human rights in the context of counterterrorism as one of five sets of priorities for 2020.¹¹⁵

Other processes can be undertaken to address human rights more systemically. All UN entities must adhere to the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), which aims to ensure that support for non-UN security forces is provided in a manner that is compliant with and promotes respect for international human rights and humanitarian law. OHCHR offers many tools, metrics, and methodologies, and its role can be more

systematically integrated into the Global Compact's overall efforts rather than limited to selective projects. OHCHR should leverage its position as the co-chair of the Global Compact's Human Rights and Victims Working Group to focus on developing a strategy for the improved assessment and integration of human



UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Fionnuala Ni Aolain, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, presents her report at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council on 4 March 2020.

rights issues across the Global Compact. This effort should be led by a dedicated staff person in close cooperation with the secretariat of the Global Compact. If the UN system is going to reinvigorate its commitments to human rights and countering terrorism, a substantial investment is required to support the work of actors such as OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, whose capacities are critically overstretched.

Ultimately, efforts to mainstream human rights considerations into the UN counterterrorism architecture must be supported by an accountability framework. The United Nations can and should do more to help member states implement their obligations consistent with international law, and enhanced transparency can support accountability. There is no standardized mechanism to robustly advance UN entities' compliance

113 2020 Human Rights Council report; 2019 Special Rapporteur's report; UN General Assembly, *Impact of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Civic Space and the Rights of Civil Society Actors and Human Rights Defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, A/HRC/40/52, 1 March 2019; UN General Assembly, "Human Rights Defenders: Note by the Secretary-General," A/59/401, 1 October 2018 (containing report of the Secretary-General's special representative on human rights defenders, para. 48).

114 UNCCT, *UNCCT Annual Report 2018*, n.d., p. 111, https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/uncct_annual_report_2018.pdf.

115 See UN Security Council, S/2020/243, 27 March 2020, annex (containing *Work Programme of the Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1373 (2001) Concerning Counter-terrorism for 2020*).

with and oversight of international law obligations in their counterterrorism and PVE efforts. This could be addressed by establishing a human rights oversight office within the Global Compact.¹¹⁶ This office might be led by OHCHR in New York or by independent entities and be empowered with the resources and mandate to provide guidance on the human rights implications of member state counterterrorism laws and policies and to ensure adequate safeguards are in place in policy formulation and technical assistance delivery by Global Compact members. Such an entity would ensure that all counterterrorism and PVE programming from inception to staffing, delivery, monitoring, and review are undertaken in compliance with international human rights standards. It also would apply key programming principles such as do no harm, equity, and inclusion. It could not cover in detail all the human rights components alone, and procedures must be in place to hold all UN staff accountable to the HRDDP standards, with adequate access to expertise and resources and clear delineations for when grave violations are committed. Here again, engagement with civil society, notably entities with expertise on human rights, would bolster the overall caliber of UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.

TOWARD GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND SENSITIVITY

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women runs through the work of the United Nations and is grounded in its charter. A gender-sensitive approach must take into account the differing experiences, effects, impacts, and needs of people with different gender identities in its counterterrorism and PVE policies, entities, and programs. Global Compact entities should account for gender equity

and representation in its operations, project partners, and beneficiaries; develop projects that actively center and amplify women's and gender nonbinary voices; account for gendered power dynamics in political-economy analyses; and advocate for mainstreaming gender equity, the empowerment of women, and transgender and nonbinary people.

Secretary-General Guterres established a UN system-wide commitment for spending on women, peace, and security to reach or exceed 15 percent by 2020¹¹⁷ and a Gender Parity Strategy that sets targets for equal representation of women and men within the institution by 2026.¹¹⁸ It is unclear how systematically human rights and gender considerations are integrated into the programs and activities of Global Compact entities, and collecting and publishing this information would help support the institutional commitment.¹¹⁹ Across the United Nations, significant strides have been made to reach parity between women and men, with more women than ever appointed as heads of missions and deputy heads in peace operations in its institutional history operations. Nevertheless, considerable gaps remain, particularly in incentivizing senior-level recruitments. Rather than holding agency leadership to account, however, they are asked to hold their teams to account.¹²⁰ Global Compact Secretariat units are tasked with developing their own implementation plans and targets to achieve gender parity at all levels. In early September 2020, 44 percent of UNOCT staff were female, and there were no women leaders in the top three levels (Under-Secretary-General, D-1, and D-2) (fig. 4). Greater parity between women and men in the UN system not only operationalizes the core values of the United Nations but also affects the efficiency, impact, and credibility of its policy, programming, and culture.

116 See "Input of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism to the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism on Implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," OHCHR, 16 December 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/InputSRCTUNOCTGCTSIImplementation2020.pdf>.

117 UN Executive Office of the Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Remarks to the Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security," 25 October 2018, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-10-25/secretary-generals-remarks-security-council-open-debate-women-peace>.

118 "Gender Parity Strategy: Gender Parity and the Reform Process," United Nations, n.d., <https://reform.un.org/content/gender-parity-strategy> (accessed 10 September 2020); *System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, United Nations, 6 October 2017, https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org.gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf.

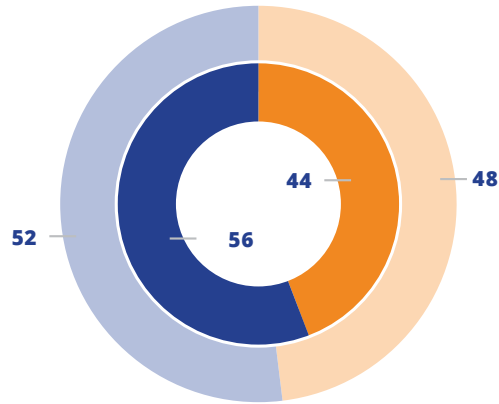
119 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System*, para. 68.

120 For an assessment of the strengths and challenges of the UN gender parity strategy, see Paige Arthur, "The UN Strategy on Gender Parity," New York University Center on International Cooperation, September 2017, https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/publication_arthur_un_gender_parity.pdf.

Figure 4. Gender Parity for Global Compact Entities and the UNOCT

UNOCT AND GLOBAL COMPACT ENTITIES, OVERALL BALANCE

Gender Breakdown (%)



UNOCT

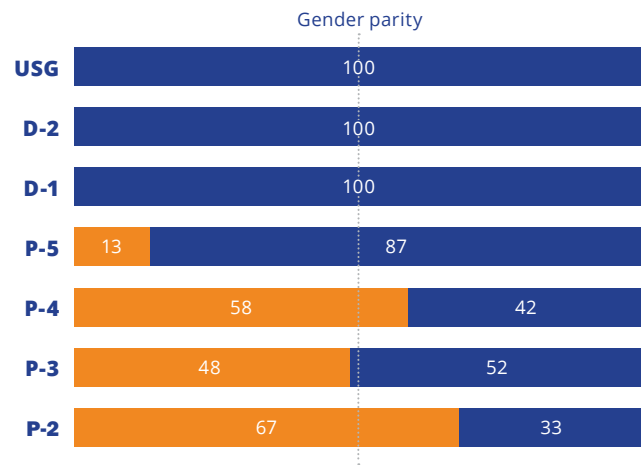
● Women ● Men

Select Global Compact entities

● Women ● Men

UNOCT STAFF, BY LEVEL

Professional and higher, by level (%)



Note: Data are available for the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Department of Global Communications, UN Department of Peace Operations, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN Department of Safety and Security, Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Office of Information and Communications Technology, UN Office of Legal Affairs, UN Development Programme, and UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Source: "UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard," <https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard> (accessed 12 September 2020).

MEASURING THE STRATEGY'S IMPLEMENTATION

The previous Blue Sky report suggested a framework and benchmarks to assess how the newly established counterterrorism architecture supports Strategy implementation at the global, institutional, and programmatic levels.¹²¹ Such an assessment first should seek to measure progress by governments and the international community against gains and negative consequences for human security from terrorism and counterterrorism activities. By combing individual projects, meetings, internal and external engagements, and other efforts, a second level of assessment should seek to understand if the overall efforts of UN agencies are effective in furthering Strategy implementation and leveraging the UN system's comparative advantages. Finally, a third level of assessment should examine if the financial resources invested in individual programs, regional and high-level conferences, and other efforts produced results of equal or greater value. Measuring progress and evaluating impact are essential for informing policy coordination and the delivery of technical assistance. It requires a substantial investment of personnel, expertise, and time; an inclusive and transparent planning phase to generate a well-conceived theory of change; realistic and measurable targets with associated indicators, baselines, and means to measure; and a framework to facilitate a collaborative process of monitoring and learning based on input from a diverse spectrum of stakeholders.

Objectively assessing global progress on implementation of the Strategy and its accompanying plan of action is difficult given the current reliance on voluntary contributions and “self-reporting” from member states, UN agencies, and civil society. The 2020 Secretary-General report notes that many member states have made “significant efforts” to implement the Strategy since the review in 2018, based on input received from only 44 member states, 55 civil society organizations, and 25 Global Compact entities. The report does not qualify progress in detail or provide a

global assessment of the extent of Strategy implementation and the positive and negative consequences of counterterrorism, CFT, and PVE efforts. Lacking a formal assessment mandate and framework such as the CTED Global Implementation Survey, the Secretary-General's report depends on the voluntary submissions of member states, with limited political and mandate-based room to draw on other UN-generated data, such as the Universal Periodic Review. The wealth of expertise to be gained beyond member state submissions and mandate-based input is left critically underused. The Secretary-General's call to action for human rights encourages “the full use of human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, the human rights treaty bodies and the special procedures, as well as national human rights institutions to contribute to [Sustainable Development Goals] implementation, particularly at the national and local levels.” The same attention should be afforded for developing the infrastructure to gather this data, as well as civil society input.

To better understand ways to improve assessment of the Strategy, member states requested in the 2018 review that the Secretary-General submit a report “containing concrete recommendations and options on ways to assess the impact of and progress in the implementation of the Strategy by the UN entities.”¹²² The Secretary-General suggests that member states may wish to ask the United Nations to develop a comprehensive, human rights-based results framework for the Strategy that includes “anticipated outputs, outcomes and impact in delivering the four pillars of the Strategy” with results “defined by key performance indicators, which would need to be quantifiable and measurable using data from verified sources.” These steps are certainly important, but due consideration should also be given to other types of frameworks, such as the establishment of an independent review body or the creation of a peer review mechanism to assess

121 Millar, “Blue Sky IV,” p. 22 (recommendation 20).

122 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System*.

Strategy implementation, taking inspiration from those employed by the Peacebuilding Commission,¹²³ FATF, the UN Human Rights Council, and the UNODC Implementation Review Mechanism.¹²⁴ The establishment of such a framework will allow for results to feed into the Secretary-General's biennial report prior to the Strategy review to better inform the negotiation process and priority setting.

Inspiration may also be drawn from other UN strategy review processes to improve on the Strategy review. For instance, the Peacebuilding Strategy Review offers a model for an inclusive, deliberate review that includes an independent assessment by eminent persons and regional and thematic consultations with member states, UN entities, and civil society.¹²⁵ The findings of these informal engagements, which are principally led by a core group of UN entities,¹²⁶ are then compiled and submitted to the Secretary-General for their report on peace-building and sustaining peace.

At the programmatic and institutional levels, an increasing number of UN entities are implementing a wide range of capacity development and related counterterrorism and PVE activities. Yet, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and staff resources to assess the effectiveness and impact of such activities vary considerably and often prioritize measuring deliverables related to the individual entities' mandates rather than against Strategy implementation at the national, regional, and global levels.¹²⁷ Without appropriate investments in monitoring and evaluation, the selection and funding of projects remains opaque, the impact of individual projects remains unclear, duplication and overlap are difficult to avoid, and their

overall contribution to the actualization of the Strategy remains uncertain.

Since the last review, individual Global Compact entities have worked to improve the caliber of assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of UN counterterrorism efforts. A December 2018 audit of the UNCCT highlighted 12 recommendations for improvement, including updating the UNCCT five-year plan, reviewing roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Board, enhancing reporting mechanisms, and clarifying staff duties.¹²⁸ The Secretary-General announced earlier this year that 90 percent of the report's recommendations have since been enacted or are on target for implementation. Nonetheless, on the request of the Advisory Board chair, an independent consultant firm was contracted to undertake an external evaluation of the UNCCT, which was released in September 2020.¹²⁹

One of the most significant developments has been the creation within the Global Compact of the Working Group on Resource Mobilization and Monitoring and Evaluation, which seeks to respond to member states' expectations for practical, results-oriented support for the implementation of the Strategy. The working group is developing a common monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the outcomes and impact of UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts. Co-chaired by the UNOCT, CTED, and UNODC, the working group also endeavors to mainstream the use of CTED analyses and assessments to inform technical assistance in line with Security Council Resolution 2395. The working group undertook a process of measuring recommendations derived from CTED country assessments

123 The Peacebuilding Commission agreed to a three-part informal phase for the review of the peace-building agenda, which includes an independent assessment from eminent persons selected by the Secretary-General. Other parts include broad member state consultations and regional and thematic consultations. Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, "A Roadmap for the 2020 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Chair's Summary," n.d., https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/psc_retreat_2019_chairs_summary.pdf.

124 See Millar, "Blue Sky IV," p. 22 (recommendation 20).


125 Twin 2016 resolutions called for a "comprehensive review" of UN peace-building. UN General Assembly, A/RES/70/262, 12 May 2016; UN Security Council, S/RES/2282, 27 April 2016. The Peacebuilding Strategy Review includes a robust, informal phase, prior to the co-facilitator-led process comprising (1) consultations with member states on various aspects of peace-building and sustaining peace; (2) an independent assessment from eminent persons, selected by the Secretary-General; and (3) regional and thematic consultations organized by member states and UN entities with civil society.

126 These include the Peacebuilding Support Office and the Policy and Mediation Division of the UNDP; the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training in the UN Department of Peace Operations; the UN Development Coordination Office; UNDP; UN Women; and OHCHR.

127 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System*, para. 60.

128 UNCCT audit, exec. summ.

129 KPMG, "Evaluation of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre: Final Report," 30 September 2020, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/20201009_evaluation_of_the_uncct_5_year_programme_final_kpmg_report.pdf.



against UNOCT-supported technical assistance programs from the last three years. The findings of this process were used to inform the Secretary-General's February 2020 report and should help shape the coordination and delivery of technical assistance by Global Compact members.

The efforts of the working group are critical to standardizing monitoring and evaluation frameworks across UN counterterrorism, CFT, and PVE efforts. A database of all relevant UN projects to support the monitoring and evaluation process can also help ensure that technical assistance initiatives are carefully coordinated and informed by CTED assessments and other verifiable data sources. Project data captured in the database should ensure alignment of UN activities

with member state needs and the evolving threat of terrorism, while structurally including human rights and gender criteria for all projects supported by the Global Compact.

Lastly, accountability must be built into the oversight mechanisms for the expenditure of counterterrorism and PVE funds.¹³⁰ For example, an advisory board of 21 member states oversees the UNCCT budget (60 percent of the overall trust fund), programs, projects, and proposals. Now that the UNCCT is part of the UNOCT, it is unclear to what extent the board's responsibility extends to UNOCT functions that are supported by UNCCT funds and more broadly what its future role, membership, chairmanship,¹³¹ working methods, and reporting needs are.

¹³⁰ See UNOCT, "April in Review 2020"; UNOCT, "Funding and Donors."

¹³¹ Saudi Arabia has held this position since its inception.



UN headquarters
9 June 1959
UN Photo

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The normative role of the United Nations has been a fundamental feature of its ability to act on behalf of all peoples, as derived from the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. As it approaches its 75th anniversary, the organization faces growing challenges to its leadership in a changing world, one in which hard-won normative gains are confronted with the stark realities of skyrocketing socioeconomic inequality, a rising tide of nationalism, and the shrinking space for human rights and humanitarian action. The interconnectedness of global economies and the complex peace and security landscape require principled, coordinated international responses.

The United Nations' global reach and field presence has uniquely positioned it among the constellation of actors working to prevent violence, end conflict, and build lasting peace. As the nature of conflict is becoming increasingly decentralized, so too have the responses adapted to counter its threat. UN entities can serve as global monitors in assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field, communicating insights derived from local contexts and realities to help anticipate crises and direct technical assistance efforts. The UN Secretary-General's emphasis on prevention widens the lens on peace and security issues and implicates a reorientation of counterterrorism-related efforts, centrally anchored in the Strategy.

To seize its comparative advantage in counterterrorism and PVE efforts, the United Nations needs the support of member states to invest in policy leadership and coordination that systemically account for human rights and civil society engagement to benefit human security.

This report makes the following recommendations to improve UN efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, building on the United Nations' comparative advantages as a norm-setter, convener, provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field.



UN Photo /Eskinder Debebe

Mona Juul, Norway's ambassador to the United Nations, casts a vote during UN Security Council elections on 17 June 2020 at UN headquarters in New York.

CALIBRATE THE UN COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE

- 1. Prioritize UNOCT leadership and coordination functions across UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.** Considered by many member states to be the *raison d'être* of the UNOCT and its Under-Secretary-General, strategic leadership and coordination are central to reducing redundancies, leveraging existing initiatives, and maximizing efficiencies within expansive UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts. Leadership and coordination should include capturing the full potential of the wide-reaching membership of the Global Compact, UN Resident Coordinators, and UN country teams to identify priorities and needs in the field and eliminating the need for liaison offices and conflicting reporting lines.
- 2. Leverage the UNOCT's comparative advantage in convening and coordinating Global Compact members and other stakeholders to lead on program delivery.** The UNOCT should improve the Global Compact's overall coordination and coherence in policy

development, program implementation, and resource mobilization. Many Global Compact member entities have extensive expertise and strong track records in delivering programs through field and project offices and in cooperation with local partners. The UNOCT, in particular the UNCCT and the Special Projects and Innovation Branch, should limit its active involvement in programming to larger, more complex programs that benefit from its unique ability to coordinate among multiple Global Compact members and respond to urgent priorities.

- 3. Develop a set of performance indicators and strategic priorities to direct the activities of Global Compact working groups and entities, and report on this biennially.** Guided by the Strategy and in consultation with other compact members, the working group chairs should develop clear policy and program priorities. All strategies and programs should include targets and indicators that focus on measuring impact, reductions in terrorism, and improvements in human security. These should be informed by UN country teams, CTED recommendations, and field-based research and input and need to be in close alignment with the Secretary-General's general reform efforts, call to action, and prevention focus. Chairs of other Global Compact working groups need to actively consult the chairs of the victims and human rights and the resource mobilization, monitoring, and evaluation working groups to ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights are properly mainstreamed, the assessment of this effort is standardized, and resource mobilization and allocation are realized.
- 4. Develop a comprehensive counterterrorism and PVE resource mobilization strategy and a more inclusive, multiyear appeal process.** Resource mobilization should be based on a consultative and collaborative process and organized around clear strategic priorities, including widening the donor base for UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts. The UNOCT and other Global Compact members should endeavor to attract a combination of mostly unearmarked contributions that can be invested in UNOCT leadership, Global

Compact coordination efforts, and a number of flagship technical assistance programs prioritized through the Strategy review, alongside a broad range of unearmarked and program-specific contributions for other Global Compact entities.

SITUATE UN COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS WITHIN THE PREVENTION AGENDA

- 5. Clarify how counterterrorism and PVE efforts can be best situated within broader UN peace and security efforts in the field, accounting for existing field staff representing Global Compact entities and the UN Resident Coordinators' broader conflict prevention and coordination roles.** The Secretary-General should direct greater integration of counterterrorism and PVE efforts within the UN peace and security and development agendas. UN Resident Coordinator capacities should be increased to include these efforts where and when appropriate as part of their broader engagement, avoiding the centering of counterterrorism as the single or principal focus and its potentially distorting effects. Particular care should be taken to leverage existing field staff from Global Compact entities and assess the interplay of human rights, development, and peace and security priorities.

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT CIVIL SOCIETY

- 6. Engage and support civil society proactively as part of UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.** Acknowledging initial UNOCT efforts to develop a civil society engagement strategy, the UNOCT must transform the way it works with civil society organizations to be more consultative and reflective of their views and experiences. This should involve soliciting civil society input and participation in informing policy priorities and program design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Several Global Compact members already have mechanisms for engaging civil society, including UN Women and OHCHR, which can

serve as models for the UNOCT and other Global Compact members. UN leadership should advocate, internally and externally, for the integration of civil society actors in a positive manner and allocate adequate resources and technical capacities for their engagement and in support of their activities.

- 7. Protect civil society space actively by addressing the issue of shrinking civic space correlated to counterterrorism efforts and measures to counter the financing of terrorism.** The shrinking of civic space related to counterterrorism, CFT, and PVE measures requires express commitments to its promotion and protection. UN leadership and counterterrorism entities should publicly condemn the misapplication of counterterrorism measures and raise this issue in their dialogue with member states. They should also account for the effects on civil society engagement in their decision-making with regard to, for example, the framing of issues, selection of venues, collection and use of data, and review of national counterterrorism legislation. Measures that aim to eliminate barriers to engagement with civil society and to increase the diversity of perspectives should be promoted across all UN work.
- 8. Engage civil society in all stages of the Strategy review process, including through consultations that inform the Secretary-General's biennial report and by access to related briefings.** The Secretary-General should develop a robust consultative process for garnering civil society input for the development of his biennial report assessing the threat landscape and progress made in implementing the Strategy. In addition to receiving input from civil society directly, views gathered by UN Resident Coordinators from local civil society should be sought to ensure the broadest, most representative perspectives. Direct solicitations for civil society input should be widely communicated with ample notice and privacy protections, and access to relevant briefings should be provided to nongovernmental actors.

- 9. Monitor engagement with civil society by the UNOCT and Global Compact members.**

The UNOCT Civil Society Engagement Strategy should be consistent with and benchmarked against the UN system-wide strategy on civic space and guidance set out in the Secretary-General's call to action for human rights, which aims to promote and protect civic space, respond to undue restrictions on civic space, and protect the space for different stakeholders to express their views. In advancing the recently adopted UNOCT strategy, a civil society hub is likely best integrated within its Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch and should work closely with human rights, humanitarian, peace-building, and gender officers across Global Compact entities and should leverage existing civil society networks.

MAINSTREAM HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS

- 10. Strengthen UNOCT leadership's commitment to the mainstreaming of human rights across UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.**

Mainstreaming human rights issues must be a strategic priority of the UNOCT. A unit should be formed to oversee this priority across all UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts and to ensure that these efforts are undertaken in compliance with human rights standards, from their identification and development to their staffing, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation. Resources should be diverted to this unit following change management within the UNOCT, which prioritizes coordination and strategic leadership on human rights. The unit would set strategic goals with clear human rights benchmarks across all Global Compact entities, could be led by OHCHR or a team of independent experts, would liaise directly with the Global Compact secretariat, and would require adequate and sustained resourcing. The entity should be encouraged to leverage existing human rights mechanisms, the human rights treaty bodies, and the special procedures to support evidence-based

decision-making consistent with the Secretary-General's call to action on human rights.

- 11. Guide member states to implement the Strategy in a manner that complies with human rights obligations.** Global Compact entities, with the support of the Under-Secretary-General and entities that focus on human rights and humanitarian affairs, should consistently orient and guide member states' efforts to implement the Strategy in line with human rights considerations, including by developing practical guidance on human rights-compliant approaches concerning emergent and priority issues. Issue areas include the collection and use of surveillance information in terrorism investigations and the effects of CFT measures on principled humanitarian action.
- 12. Advance gender parity in staffing at the UNOCT and other Global Compact members and mainstream gender-sensitive, responsive counterterrorism and PVE approaches that support broader women, peace, and security objectives.** Global Compact entities should account for gender equity and representation among their own staff and beneficiaries and in project partners. They should develop projects that actively center and support women's and gender-nonbinary voices, account for the gender dimensions of political and social economy in assessments, and advocate for mainstreaming the issues of gender equity and empowerment.

ASSESS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

- 13. Establish a mechanism to assess Strategy implementation.** Member states should endorse the Secretary-General's recommendation to develop a comprehensive, human rights-based results framework for assessing the implementation of the Strategy across all four pillars. This should include a more structured framework for UN entities and member states to report on their

Strategy implementation efforts. Consideration should also be given to a peer review mechanism for assessing Strategy implementation, such as those employed by FATF, the UN Human Rights Council, and UNODC.

- 14. Ensure civil society input in the Strategy review process.** The Secretary-General should solicit input from civil society on UN entity performance in counterterrorism and PVE efforts, including on their adverse impact. Similar actions to engage civil society need to be undertaken by the President of the General Assembly and the Strategy review co-facilitators to ensure that the review negotiations are enriched by the many perspectives and experiences of civil society actors closest to the issues on the ground.
- 15. Request that the Secretary-General produce an updated report on activities of the UN system in advance of the seventh review.** The report would update the Secretary-General's February 2020 report and provide member states with revised information pertaining to changes in the threat landscape, progress made in Strategy implementation, and developments in the UN system. The Secretary-General should facilitate a rigorous process for gathering key insights, including from civil society. The process for developing the report could include an independent assessment from eminent persons selected by the Secretary-General.
- 16. Continue to improve monitoring and evaluation approaches at the programmatic and institutional levels.** Monitoring and evaluation should be evidence based and track individual capacity development programs and their relation to and impact on overall Strategy implementation. A common monitoring and evaluation framework with integrated human rights metrics would allow for more consistent and comparable system-wide tracking. The resource mobilization, monitoring, and evaluation working group should ensure regular reporting and oversight to analyze and course-correct efforts, where appropriate, and work closely with the human rights unit.

APPENDIX A. UN GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COORDINATION COMPACT ENTITIES

GLOBAL COMPACT MEMBERS

	1267 Committee Monitoring Team		1540 Committee Expert Group
	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)		Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)
	UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS)		UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO)
	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)		UN Department of Global Communications (DGC)
	Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General Rule of Law Unit (EOSG RoL)		International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
	International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol)		International Labor Organization (ILO)
	International Maritime Organization (IMO)		International Organization for Migration (IOM)
	UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA)		UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (UNOICT)
	UN Office of Legal Affairs (UNOLA)		Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
	Office of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth		Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
	UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide		UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism

Appendix A. — continued



Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict



Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children



UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)



UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)



UN Development Programme (UNDP)



UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)



UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)



UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)



UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)



UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)



UN Office of the UN Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA)



Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC)



World Customs Organization (WCO)



World Health Organization (WHO)



UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)



UN System Staff College (UNSSC)

GLOBAL COMPACT OBSERVERS



UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)



Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)



UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)



UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)



UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)



The Global Center works to achieve lasting security by advancing inclusive, human rights-based policies, partnerships, and practices to address the root causes of violent extremism. We focus on four mutually reinforcing objectives:

- Supporting communities in addressing the drivers of conflict and violent extremism.
- Advancing human rights and the rule of law to prevent and respond to violent extremism.
- Combating illicit finance that enables criminal and violent extremist organizations.
- Promoting multilateral cooperation and rights-based standards in counterterrorism.

Our global team and network of experts, trainers, fellows, and policy professionals work to conduct research and deliver programming in these areas across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South, Central, and Southeast Asia.