

Returning foreign terrorist fighters pose 'enormous challenge with no easy solution,' Security Council told

28 November 2017 – The head of the United Nations Office against Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, told the Security Council on Tuesday that the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters requires an urgent and concerted response and that UN Member States should strengthen their cooperation to tackle it.

Mr. Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the recently-created [UN Office of Counter-Terrorism](#) told the Council that at one time, more than 40,000 combatants from over 110 countries had joined terrorist groups fighting in Syria and Iraq.

"The threat stemming from foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) affects all Member States, even those far away from the conflict zones," he said, laying out the scale of the problem.

Noting that while travel measures implemented by countries and military victories against the so-called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Daesh) have "significantly decreased" flows to the region, combatants have since tried to relocate to Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan – fuelling existing conflicts in these countries.

Meanwhile, some 5,600 fighters from 33 nations have returned home, many equipped to carry attacks out on their native soil, or drum up new recruits.

"Returning foreign terrorist fighters pose an enormous challenge with no easy solution," Mr. Voronkov continued.

"A tempting response, and certainly the easiest one, would to be throw all returnees into prison [...] But full compliance with international law is vital to combat the threat of foreign terrorist fighters," he stressed.



Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office, addresses the Security Council meeting on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts and foreign terrorist fighters. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe



Michèle Coninx, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED). UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Lone terrorists, an alarming trend

Speaking on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), Executive Director Michèle Coninsx strongly condemned the recent “heinous and cowardly terrorist attack” in Egypt, and expressed her deepest condolences to the families of all victims of terror attacks.

“All acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation,” she told the Council.

Despite recent successes, Ms. Coninsx acknowledged the significant challenges posed by the global terrorist threat. She noted the accelerated rate with which foreign terrorist fighters are returning to their original or a third State, along with an increase in the percentage of terrorist plots resulting in fatalities.

“Of particular concern is the increasing trend towards attacks carried out by lone terrorists, who are often guided by handlers located in other parts of the world,” she underscored.

“Many recent attacks that appear to have been inspired by ISIL, conducted in its name, or claimed by ISIL, were initially reported as ‘lone actor’ attacks. Subsequent investigations have shown however, that those individuals received support or resources from elsewhere, often via the Internet or social media,” Ms. Coninsx added, pointing out that terrorists are also increasingly using new technologies to transfer funds to those individuals.

She cited a number of challenges in combatting foreign terrorist fighters, saying “International cooperation continues to be undermined by practical and political challenges, as well as by inconsistent compliance with human rights obligations.”

The Executive Director espoused the importance of strengthening partnerships between and among Member States, UN agencies and partner organizations, asserting: “It takes networks to beat networks.”