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The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Letter dated 10 September 2019 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, I write to transmit my country's observations and comments concerning the contents of your report entitled "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" (A/73/866).

As a concerned State that is directly exposed to the risk and threat of terrorism, the Syrian Arab Republic agrees in principle with the recommendations and options set out in the report with a view to assessing the impact of the Strategy and the progress made in its implementation by United Nations entities and, primarily, by the Governments of Member States. It hopes, however, that negotiations among Member States concerning the draft resolution to be adopted next year in the course of the seventh biennial review of the Strategy will be more serious and professional, and will avoid the political pressures that generally lead to an artificial consensus reflecting neither the will of the international community nor the Organization's firm resolve to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

Allow me to set out the national observations and comments of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning the recommendations and options contained in the report.

1. The report stresses the need to support pillar II of the Strategy and states that the United Nations should intensify its work with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) to expand access to its databases for law enforcement, border security and customs agencies through National Central Bureaus to reduce the cross-border movement of terrorists and their affiliates and to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. The Syrian Government finds that emphasis commendable. However, practical experience and the facts on the ground show that negative practices persist when it comes to preventing the cross-border movement of terrorists and associated persons, or to cooperating sincerely with INTERPOL. The Governments of certain Member States bear total responsibility for those practices. The situation in Syria is clearly a case in point: to this day, my country has been affected by the actions of the Government of a neighbouring State that persistently invests in armed terrorist groups with a view to intervening in the internal affairs of



the Syrian Arab Republic. For that purpose, that Government has helped to fund and arm terrorists belonging to Al-Qaida, the Levant Liberation Organization and other associated groups, and facilitated their transit across its border and into northwest Syria.

2. My country shares the Secretary-General's concern; indeed, it condemns the negative role played by the Governments of certain Member States that have perpetuated the suffering of thousands of people, including women and children, with links to United Nations-designated terrorist groups. Many of those people remain stranded in overcrowded camps in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, with limited access to food, medical care, due process and other fundamental rights and services. In that connection, two critical issues need to be mentioned:

(a) Foreign military forces remain present on Syrian soil under the pretext of combating terrorism, without a resolution or mandate from the Security Council. They were not invited by, and have not cooperated with, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. That situation constitutes an open act of aggression and occupation, and a violation of the resolutions of the Security Council concerning counter-terrorism and the situation in Syria, all of which reaffirm the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Alarming, those very military forces, which continue to sponsor illegal secessionist armed militias, are overseeing the camps with a view to taking advantage of the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and their families for the purposes of extortion. The Secretary-General therefore needs to state clearly that the presence of those forces and the associated secessionist militias is illegal and that the Syrian State must be in control of all its territory so that it can, along with the United Nations, fulfil its national duty by resolving the situation in the camps and closing them definitively.

(b) Those considerations lead us to another point, namely that certain Governments have persistently flouted the counter-terrorism resolutions of the Security Council by refusing to repatriate foreign terrorist fighters and family members who are nationals of their States. My country is determined to eradicate all terrorist remnants and put a definitive end to the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. Once again, it calls on the Secretary-General to give due attention to that issue by calling on the Governments of Member States to repatriate their citizens and residents who have been involved in terrorism in Syria, along with their family members, in order to comply with international humanitarian law and strike a balance between, on the one hand, accountability and fair prosecution under the law and, on the other hand, the reintegration of those people into the societies from which they travelled to Syria or Iraq.

3. As regards assessing the overall impact of United Nations counter-terrorism activities, my Government supports the Secretary-General's recommendation for the establishment of a mechanism to monitor and track progress against the expected results and impact under each of the four pillars, a process that should take place in full cooperation and coordination with the Governments of Member States. My delegation is prepared to cooperate with the Secretariat and with Member States in order to include that recommendation in the resolution that will be adopted in the course of the seventh biennial review of the Strategy in 2020. My Government is completely convinced that it is imperative for the traditional approach to the biennial review of the Strategy to change. In many instances, that approach has prevented additions or revisions that would have ensured a genuine, collective response to the terrorist threat and the emergence of new forms of terrorism. The recommendation of the Secretary-General should ensure that the Organization's response is free from the narrow political motivations of certain Governments, which can at times amount to supporting terrorism and endangering international peace and security.

4. As regards strengthening the coordination and coherence of United Nations counter-terrorism activities, my Government shares your assessment that the large number of United Nations entities delivering an increasingly broad range of capacity-building projects and other activities means that some duplication of efforts may remain. The Syrian Arab Republic will examine with interest the option of working with Global Compact entities to develop and implement tailored, inclusive plans of action, possibly in two or three pilot countries affected by terrorism. Nevertheless, as a Member State, it has a right and a duty to remind the Secretariat that the Syrian State and its allies have, for more than eight years, confronted the crimes of organizations that have been included on terrorism lists. Foremost among those organizations are Al-Qaida, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Nusra Front and the Levant Liberation Organization. That bitter reality has not, however, persuaded the United Nations of the need to provide the Syrian State with the requisite technical and financial assistance. Nor has it prompted the vast majority of United Nations entities involved in coordinating and promoting counter-terrorism efforts to contact the Syrian side directly in order to discuss ways to cooperate and coordinate their efforts.

Those examples and facts go to show, yet again, that the Organization's counter-terrorism efforts continue to fall short in terms of effectiveness, results, professionalism and impartiality, owing to the double standards and polarizing policies imposed by the Governments of certain Member States that wield political and financial influence at the United Nations.

5. As regards ensuring the balanced implementation of all elements of the Strategy, my Government emphasizes that when Member States negotiate towards the biennial review of the Strategy, the approach taken makes it perfectly clear that, sooner or later, the national priorities and specificities and, in some cases, the interests of certain Governments will blow apart the consensus that prevailed when the Strategy was adopted in 2006. Yet the threat of terrorism has escalated significantly over the last two decades; it has taken new forms and adopted modern, advanced methods and weapons that pose a genuine threat to international peace and security.

My Government cannot object to granting pillar IV the importance it deserves, particularly as my country is emerging from the effects of a horrific terrorist war in which all components of Syrian society, especially women and children, have been exposed to the most appalling practices by armed terrorist groups. For its part, my Government emphasizes that it is imperative to strike a balance among the four pillars of the Strategy. Moreover, it wishes to ask the Governments of those States that continue to refuse the repatriation from Syria of foreign terrorist fighters and family members who are nationals of their countries how they can constantly insist on the paramount importance of pillar IV, and on the need to concentrate on human rights and the gender dimension when countering terrorism, while at the same time refusing to repatriate the foreign terrorist fighters who bear their nationality. In short, the key to implementing the Strategy is to match words with actions.

6. As regards the most important issue, namely securing additional resources for United Nations counter-terrorism activities, the Syrian Arab Republic is more convinced than ever before that, if the Organization's counter-terrorism efforts are to be credible, independent and effective, what they need most of all is sustainable, stable and predictable financial resources. This means that the Office of Counter-Terrorism and all of the competent entities need to be funded through the regular budget, as opposed to voluntary contributions made by Member States. Such contributions are just one more reason why counter-terrorism efforts under the aegis of the United Nations have been politicized and marred by double standards.

7. I wish to conclude the national observations of the Syrian Arab Republic by stressing that combating terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism is primarily the task and prerogative of Governments of Member States, whether in the context of national sovereignty or of concerted United Nations action, with a view to strengthening sustainable peace and security, building resilient societies and delivering economic and social development. The United Nations is an organization that brings together the efforts of the Governments of Member States. Accordingly, any partnership or cooperation among civil society organizations, community leaders, women, youth or other such categories must take place through the Governments of Member States in order to ensure that the Strategy is implemented in an effective and balanced manner.

In 2018, we successfully completed the periodic review of the Strategy and adopted a resolution by consensus. Of course, that achievement was based on the traditional paradigm that everyone should come out of the negotiation equally dissatisfied. Notwithstanding the importance of consensus in our work, that consensus was unfortunately based on politicized approaches and deals, largely because Governments' positions were too far apart with regard to defining best practices and the means to combat global terrorism, prevent its financing, freeze terrorist assets and tackle its intellectual and ideological roots. We hope that a different, more positive and wide-ranging approach will be taken during the seventh review in order to guarantee sustainable peace, security and prosperity for all without exception.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 120.

(Signed) **Bashar Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
