



Security Council

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Letter dated 24 February 2020 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I wish to convey the comments and observations of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning the tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat ([S/2020/95](#)).

- The Syrian Arab Republic has always respected the role of the United Nations in combating terrorism and appreciated its efforts in that regard and will continue to do so. However, while Syria continues to combat terrorism alongside genuine partners that take the matter seriously, it has yet to receive any clear, meaningful or practical counter-terrorism support from the United Nations.
- Without any desire to politicize efforts to combat terrorism, it should be stated clearly and objectively that the current approach of United Nations counter-terrorism bodies continues to suffer from a lack of professionalism and impartiality, so much so that it is frequently divorced from the reality on the ground. In essence, it remains subject to the dictates of the Governments of States that wield political and financial clout at the United Nations. How else can one explain the enormous contradiction between the report, in which it is recognized that the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic has major implications for regional challenges and trends, and developments associated with the evolving threat of terrorism, and the total disregard shown by the United Nations for the fundamental role played by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in combating terrorism and its refusal to lend support to or maintain contact with the one Government that, more than any other, is responding to and countering the terrorist threat?
- With regard to what has been referred to as the changing face of terrorism, the Syrian Arab Republic wishes to emphasize the following points:
 1. The battle against terrorism in which the Syrian Arab Republic is engaged provides a real-world example of the dangers arising from the changing face of terrorism. Syrian and foreign terrorists have switched allegiance on various occasions, primarily in response to the directives and strategies drawn up for terrorist groups by the foreign intelligence services in the neighbouring State of Turkey and some Arab and Western countries. The situation on the ground and the extent of the damage inflicted on those



terrorist groups by the Syrian Army and its allies have also played their part, as has the lure of money, influence and the ability to gain control of financial resources. Those latter factors have fuelled the rise and spread of certain terrorist groups as the fortunes of others have declined. A case in point is that of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL): as it disintegrated, the Levant Liberation Organization, supported and financed principally by the Governments of Turkey and Qatar, grew in strength and extended its control.

2. In that regard, particular attention should be paid to paragraph 36 of the report and to the Secretary-General's observations contained in paragraphs 89 to 91, in particular on the transnational threat of terrorism. Paragraph 36 is marred by a glaring flaw: no mention is made of the part played by the Turkish Government in transferring foreign terrorist fighters and Syrian terrorist mercenaries from Idlib to Libya to join in the military conflict raging in that country. Their transfer serves the interests of the Turkish Government, which is intent on interfering in that country's affairs, sowing greater discord between its political factions and spreading chaos and destruction there.
 3. The United Nations does not lack the necessary legal instruments and practical tools to combat terrorism. It is vital that it develop them in order to respond to the new challenges posed by global terrorism. What is important, however, is not the documents and resolutions, but rather their just implementation on the ground. It is imperative that all Governments, without exception, demonstrate genuine political will to coordinate efforts to combat terrorism and to address the global threats it poses.
- With regard to information in the report on foreign terrorist fighters and their possible return or transfer to other regions, in particular to some African countries, it should be noted that certain Governments bear the blame, whether by omission or commission, for the emergence and spread of foreign terrorist fighters. By pointing this out, we do not mean to make political accusations, but rather to ensure that such alarming situations do not recur in other parts of the world. We must bear in mind that the Security Council and the General Assembly have devoted five years of work and meetings to countering the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, and that they have now spent three years addressing the return of foreign terrorist fighters. However, preventive diplomacy worthy of the name must concentrate on pre-empting grave threats to international peace and security, rather than addressing their effects. At heart, the nature of the work of the United Nations is preventive and proactive, not reactive.
 - With regard to references in paragraph 6 of the report to challenges in securing the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq and attempts by ISIL to rebuild and regroup, the Syrian Arab Republic wishes to emphasize the following points:
 1. The Syrian and Iraqi Governments are working with their Russian and Iranian counterparts through a joint security coordination centre in Baghdad to secure a genuine and decisive victory over that terrorist organization. However, the forces of the so-called international coalition and Turkish military forces have hampered that process by directly attacking and occupying Syrian territory by force of arms and by supporting and arming illegal armed militias.
 2. If terrorism in the Syrian Arab Republic is to be eliminated, the United Nations must act in a forthright manner to implement the counter-terrorism resolutions; to end external interference in the political process in Syria,

particularly as regards respect for the sovereignty, unity, integrity and independence of the Syrian Arab Republic; to bring an end to all forms of illegal foreign military presence, and indeed to all illegal armed presence, in the country; and to restore Government control over all Syrian territory.

3. Without a definitive and comprehensive solution to the situation in the Hawl camp, the issue of how to secure the borders will continue to fester. The camp tragically epitomizes the terrible repercussions of foreign interference in Syria, including the dangers alluded to in paragraphs 9, 10, 11 and 17 of the report. Any such solution will require, first and foremost, the withdrawal of the illegal international coalition forces from Syria, the disarmament of illegal, non-State armed groups and the redeployment of Syrian Government forces to areas under the control of those groups. Foreign terrorist fighters and their families should be sent back to their home countries, the Governments of which bear the sole responsibility for bringing them to trial and holding them accountable, and for their rehabilitation and integration into their own societies.
- If the United Nations is to succeed in eliminating terrorism, implementing the resolutions of the Security Council on counter-terrorism and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and responding to dangerous terrorist organizations that have a global reach, it must first acknowledge that certain States and parties have persistently played a part, directly and indirectly, in promoting extremism and deviant religious ideologies; radicalizing thousands of people; recruiting them to the ranks of armed terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida, the Nusra Front, the Levant Liberation Organization and their associated groups; training, arming and funding them; and facilitating their infiltration into Syria and Iraq through neighbouring States. Foremost among the States in question is Turkey. Its Government, which is affiliated with the global Muslim Brotherhood organization, has plans to impose an extremist politico-religious doctrine on States in the region by investing politically and militarily in terrorism and extremist ideology.
 - The ongoing presence of armed terrorist groups such as ISIL and Al-Qaida, or the emergence of new terrorist organizations, will continue to stoke extremism and sectarian tension. That is the real challenge facing the international community as a whole. It must act through the United Nations to resist violent extremism conducive to terrorism, monitor violent narratives on social media, satellite channels and the Internet and in sermons, religious institutions and political discourse, and hold to account Governments that support, finance or turn a blind eye to such dangerous conduct.
 - The report's authors would have done well to focus on the risks associated with terrorist organizations in the Syrian Arab Republic acquiring drones, modern types of heavy weaponry and surface-to-air missiles. Those organizations would have been unable to obtain drones and heavy weapons in such quantities without the direct complicity or tacit connivance of the Governments of certain States. We refer in particular to the Turkish Government, which has been funnelling drones and weapons into Syria. The report primarily addresses the danger posed by ISIL, but this type of aircraft has been supplied in large numbers to armed terrorist groups, whether ISIL or the Nusra Front, and to their associated groups, in the countryside around Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Ladhikiyah. They are delivered exclusively across the Turkish-Syrian border, which is controlled on the Turkish side by the Turkish army and security services, and on the Syrian side by armed terrorist groups supported by Turkey and other States. The Syrian Government has been reliably informed that armed terrorist groups in the Idlib countryside possess more than 200 drones brought in from Turkey. They have been modified to:

- Carry out aerial reconnaissance, battlefield monitoring and early warning functions;
 - Be used as offensive missiles capable of delivering projectiles and explosives, some of them armed with toxic chemical substances;
 - Take part in electronic warfare by releasing chaff in order to jam air defence systems;
 - Identify targets and verify whether they have been hit;
 - Record video footage for online propaganda to galvanize and recruit terrorists.
- The Syrian Arab Republic continues to believe in the role and standing of the United Nations and remains prepared to cooperate with it in the closest possible fashion, on the basis of national ownership, compliance with the Security Council's resolutions on counter-terrorism and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States. Those resolutions should be implemented fairly and impartially, without double standards, and they should not be misinterpreted, misapplied or used as a pretext to encroach on State sovereignty and independence.
 - The Syrian Government stresses that bilateral and multilateral exchange of information and expertise among States, including international judicial cooperation, will take place only with the Governments of States that respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic and that maintain political and diplomatic relations with the country based on the principles of international law, particularly as regards non-intervention in the internal affairs of States and respect for national choices, priorities and specificities.
 - For United Nations counter-terrorism efforts to be credible, independent and effective, they require first and foremost sustainable, stable and predictable funding. The Office of Counter-Terrorism and all of the competent entities should be funded through the regular budget rather than through voluntary contributions by Member States. The latter approach is fundamentally flawed, politicizing and hobbling the Organization's counter-terrorism efforts and marring them with double standards.
 - With regard to the international community's efforts to overcome the most significant drivers of extremism and violence, it is imperative to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, end unilateral coercive economic measures and put a stop to the blatant interference by certain Governments in the affairs of other States, including through the use or threat of the use of military force against them. The international community must also make a genuine and balanced commitment to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and building real confidence in relations between States and within the United Nations on the basis of multilateral preventive diplomacy. The implementation of a balanced and just international policy in that regard will doubtless help to check terrorism and to prevent armed terrorist groups from gaining a foothold among young people and the poor.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be issued as a document of the Security Council.

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