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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Outline of the counter-terrorism strategy for Syria and Iraq, with particular focus on foreign fighters

Following the meeting of the Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects) held on 15 January 2015 and as agreed by the Council, delegations will find attached the outline of the counter-terrorism strategy for Syria and Iraq, with particular focus on foreign fighters, for public information purposes.

Outline of the counter-terrorism strategy for Syria and Iraq, with particular focus on foreign fighters

1. This strategy is one element of the EU's wider foreign and security policy towards both Iraq and Syria. Although the focus is counter-terrorism, it is situated within the wider political and regional context, which includes support to the moderate Syrian opposition, working with Iraq to ensure a more inclusive system of governance, addressing the humanitarian crisis; these wider elements also provide essential levers to undermine support for terrorism.
2. This strategy is built on the EU's criminal justice-based approach to tackling terrorism while protecting human rights. The EU firmly believes that the rule of law and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are the foundation of the fight against terrorism. All measures taken to counter terrorism must comply with international law, including human rights law (including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where appropriate), refugee law, and international humanitarian law.
3. This paper has been drawn up by the EEAS in close consultation with the CTC and the services of the Commission, and with Member States.

Aims

4. The overall aim, to which this strategy contributes, is to enhance or restore conditions conducive to political stability in the region.
5. Counter terrorism cannot work in isolation from wider political processes. It must be woven into the international community agenda as part of a comprehensive approach, which includes an emphasis on preventative work. Within that context, the aims of this strategy are two-fold: to provide a longer-term framework that:
 - Minimises the risks to Europe and European interests, and the threat to regional stability, from terrorism emanating from Syria and Iraq.

- Contributes to the strategic defeat of ISIL/Da'ish and Jabhat al-Nusra, including of their violent ideology.

Priorities for action

6. The immediate objective must be to ensure that the threat does not grow, i.e. staunch the flow of new recruits; and that the threat does not bleed further beyond the Syria/Iraqi borders. However, containment by itself will help mitigate the threat; but it will not defeat it. That will require a broader and more coherent approach and a wider range of tools.
7. The political dimension is an important lever in the fight against terrorism. In order to stem the development of ISIL/Da'ish and its support among the population, the Iraqi authorities must promote reconciliation and implement inclusive policies. The international community expressed its support to the Iraqi authorities at the Paris Conference on peace and stability in Iraq of 15 September 2014, which was an important first step.
8. The Syrian regime has the primary responsibility for the chaos currently prevailing in Syria. It has let ISIL/Da'esh prosper, thereby allowing the situation to worsen. Its ongoing repression of moderate opposition fuels extremism. As a consequence of its policies and actions, the Assad regime cannot be a partner in the fight against ISIL. Our immediate counter-terrorists actions must support the moderate opposition and must be combined with renewed efforts in favour of a political transition in Syria.

9. Closely co-ordinated with our internal Prevent work, **external Prevent** work under the EU CT strategy (2005) needs to be sensitive to the differing motivations for travel, including between different diaspora communities. We should aim to strengthen our efforts to fight the possible sources of ISIL/Da'ish financial and recruitment needs. We should also work with and in third countries that are significant sources of foreign fighters, particularly the Maghreb, or transit countries. We should share best practice developed inside the EU; equally, we should ensure that we are learning and applying lessons from others' experiences in this area. We should aim in particular to provide alternative non-violent outlets such as diversionary activity for those who are attracted to the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. There is a wealth of counter-narrative material available which we should exploit for our work both externally and internally to challenge terrorist narratives and their claimed ideology. Given the important role that social media appears to be playing, in particular in ISIL/Da'ish strategy, we should prioritise online work. We must combat online incitement to hostility or violence more effectively through encouraging the removal of violent extremist content online while protecting the right to freedom of expressions. Dialogue with major private enterprises active in social media networks should be further encouraged to strengthen their collaboration in countering ISIL/Da'ish propaganda and removing content where possible. We should build priority third country capacity regarding strategic communications, possibly modelled on the work of the internal Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT).

10. Regarding the **Pursue** pillar of the EU CT strategy, we should build human-rights compliant capacity regarding the rule of law and CT-related investigations and prosecutions, to enable suspects to be identified, detained, prosecuted and – if appropriate – incarcerated, in accordance with international standards, including the possibility of making full use of the provisions of the Rome Statute, where applicable. In support of MS efforts, we should work with third countries to improve operational co-operation in order to identify and dismantle recruitment and facilitation networks, as well as identify and prosecute (as appropriate) foreign fighters. Further action against terrorist financing should be a priority, building on UNSCR 2170 (2014) and UNSCR 2178 (2014). This should include tackling ISIL/Da'ish funding sources (including sale of oil and other commodities), supporting Safer Giving campaigns, promoting outreach to countries in the region and building third country capacity to counter terrorist financing. Given the role of kidnapping for ransom in raising funds for ISIL/Da'ish, we should promote the EU's position on this issue and raise awareness of the risks, in particular with the private and non-governmental sectors. We should consider action to strengthen border security (including at airports and other border crossing points) in countries surrounding Syria and Iraq in order to help detect and complicate travel and identify quickly those leaving who may pose a threat. We should work in addition to better understand how terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq are acquiring their weapons and equipment, and act to prevent weapons proliferation (both into, and out of, Syria and Iraq).
11. Under **Protect**, building capacity regarding aviation security regionally should also be a priority. Containing the threat within the Syrian and Iraqi borders must also include action to prevent advanced conventional weapons or weapons-technology from seeping out. Finally, regarding **Respond**, we should build capacity in the region to respond to terrorist attacks. This should include helping empower civil society, including developing crisis management tools, to enable them to respond to attacks that target their communities.

Engaging with key partners

12. EU will not be able to deliver this strategy alone. Engagement between and with regional partners – including building their capacity to contain the terrorist threat as appropriate – as well as with other key partners, will be essential for success. The Paris Conference on 15 September 2014 on peace and security in Iraq was an important first step in this regard.
 13. The UN, centred on the Security Council, will have a key role. Specifically, UNSCR 2170 and UNSCR 2178 call on all member states to take decisive action to stop the flow of foreign fighters, counter ISIL/Da'ish financing, and combat its incitement. We should actively support countries implementing these and related UNSC resolutions. We must continue to engage in relevant GCTF initiatives.
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