DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE (DSC)
SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSATLANTIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION (DSCTC)

REPORT

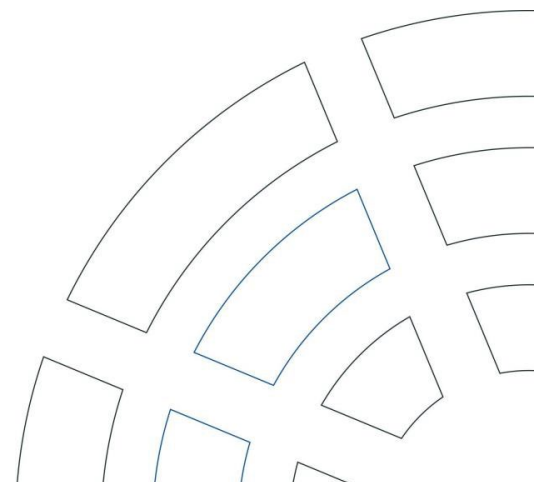# THE EVOLVING TERRORIST THREAT: ADAPTING THE ALLIED RESPONSE

Report
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While Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, notably the unprovoked full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, is the principal threat to Allied peace and security today, terrorism remains the main asymmetrical threat. Terrorism has been a key challenge for Allies since the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001.

This report demonstrates that terrorism is an evolving and complex challenge. The threat facing Allies in 2001 principally came from al-Qaeda as a centrally organised, isolated, and ideologically driven network in Afghanistan. Twenty years later, the threat is more dispersed geographically along the arc of instability from Afghanistan through to the West African coast. The most prominent groups today, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and their growing network of global affiliates, continue to have expansive goals and networks, and, given the freedom to do so, would seek to plan and execute attacks against Allied populations.

Today, the Sahel appears to be the epicentre of the global terrorism challenge. However, al-Qaeda's and ISIS's recent resurfacing across the Middle East and North Africa in terms of scale and scope of attacks suggests they (and their affiliates) are far from being eradicated as a threat. In addition, the resurgence of al-Qaeda and other groups in the Taliban-Haqqani network-controlled Afghanistan is raising concerns that the country has the potential to return to its pre-9/11 days as an unmatched global terrorist group safe haven.

This report reviews the current global terrorism challenge as it has evolved in recent years and the persistent threat it poses to Allied populations and interests. It also reviews NATO's existing policies, initiatives, missions and operations, as well as partner outreach which Allies combine to degrade, disrupt, and deny terrorist groups' organisational and operating capacities. The conclusion outlines a series of recommendations for Allied parliamentarians.

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I- INTRODUCTION

1.   While Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy – notably the unprovoked, brutal and unjustified attack and full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 – is the principal threat to Allied peace and security today, terrorism remains the most direct asymmetrical threat. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept confirms the enduring imperative nature of the threat, declaring: "terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most direct asymmetric threat to the security of our citizens and to international peace and security" (NATO, 2022k). It goes on to note that Allied counterterrorism efforts play an "essential" role in collective defence, contributing to all three core tasks – collective defence, cooperative security, and crisis response – "and is integral to the Alliance's 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence" (NATO, 2022k).

2.   Terrorism has been a key challenge for Allies since the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. Allied and partner military forces deployed to Afghanistan under a UN mandate in 2001 in response to these attacks to deny international terrorist networks in the country the ability to organise and launch attacks on NATO member countries. The Organisation became active in this theatre in 2003 and then conducted an advisory and training mission for the Afghan security forces between 2014 and 2021. Allies and partners accomplished this original guiding mandate: no terrorist attacks have been launched from Afghanistan on Allied territory since 2001.

3.   Yet, as NATO official statements make clear, the terrorist challenge has evolved significantly since NATO and its international partners first went into Afghanistan. This shift in the challenge international terrorism poses to Allies and their forces has driven the adaptation of the Alliance's counterterrorism policy today.

4.   The terrorist challenge continues to evolve significantly, with groups changing *loci* and tactics quickly, and, as a result, posing significant threats to Allied interests and populations. Terrorist groups, principally the global actors al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have grown in number: in 2020, the US Department of State designated over four times as many Salafi jihadist terrorist groups than in 2001, and these numbers continue to grow (US Department of State, 2020). In addition, the PKK terrorist organisation remains a salient threat: The group, along with many others across the region, continues to exploit the ongoing instability across both Iraq and Syria. These groups have expanded their networks, increased their capabilities, and incorporated new technologies to expand their reach and amplify the impact of their attacks.

5.   As conflict in Syria and Iraq has faded, ISIS and al-Qaeda and their associated groups focus principally on exploiting instability across much of Africa. The Sahel now appears to be the epicentre of the global terrorism challenge. This does not, however, mean the other areas along the arc extending from Afghanistan to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are largely free from the scourge of terrorism. The recent operation eliminating al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in central Kabul makes it clear that the Taliban are not respecting the agreement of 29 February 2020 between them and the US Administration to prevent groups like al-Qaeda from using Afghanistan as an operational base. ISIS's and al-Qaeda's recent resurfacing across the MENA region in terms of scale and scope of attacks suggests they (and their affiliates) are far from being eradicated as a threat in the region as well.

6.   This report reviews the current global terrorism challenge as it has evolved in recent years and the persistent threat it poses to Allied populations and interests. It will also review NATO's existing policies, initiatives, missions, operations and partner outreach, used by Allies to degrade, disrupt and deny terrorist groups' organisational and operating capacities. It concludes with a series of recommendations for Allied parliamentarians.

II- THE SHIFTING EPICENTRES OF GLOBAL TERRORISM

A. TRENDS AND PATTERNS ALONG NATO'S ARC OF INSTABILITY

7.   Recent global trends and patterns reflect important shifts in the terrorist threat but also highlight the enduring complexity of the challenge. In the West, terrorist attacks have fallen every year for the past four years, representing a 68 percent decline since 2018 (GTI, 2022). In 2021, experts note the distinct shift in the drivers of attacks in the West – with 'political terrorism' far surpassing 'religious terrorism' (GTI, 2022; Hoffman, 2021). These numbers are far off the 2015-2016 peak which witnessed a sharp spike in terrorist attacks in Allied nations – Germany, Belgium, Denmark, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Turkey – the most significant being the coordinated attacks and suicide bombings in Paris and Saint-Denis on 13 November 2015, which killed 130 people and injured 416 more.

8.   While terrorism in the West has been muted and shifted motivation, it has intensified outside the West. The arc abutting NATO's southern periphery from Afghanistan to the western Sahel[1] has been continuously marked by rolling insecurity over the past several decades. Today, numerous powerful armed groups across NATO's southern borders control territory, conduct violent terrorist campaigns against national security forces, UN peacekeeping troops, and civilians, and coerce populations under their control to adhere to oppressive ideologies. Recent UN reports warn of the continued significant challenges ISIS, al-Qaeda, and groups affiliated with both play across this expanding area to the south of NATO's European territories today.

9.   In Syria and Iraq, the core ISIS challenge has evolved into an 'entrenched insurgency', capable of converting the weaknesses of local forces into safe havens and mounting attacks against forces engaged with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS (UN, 2021; UN 2022a). Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, a range of reports have raised the alarm of al-Qaeda and its affiliates' resurgence in Afghanistan and the region - newly sympathetic partners in Afghanistan after the Taliban returned to power in Kabul in August 2021, particularly due to the Taliban-Haqqani network power-sharing agreements (Pantucci and Basit, 2021; UN 2022b; Jones, 2022). These reports' concerns seem to be justified with the recent successful operation by the United States to eliminate al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri while at his safehouse in central Kabul. All experts agree, however, that both groups, and their local affiliates, are gaining ground, growing their ranks, expanding revenue sources and territory, and amassing more firepower across Africa – especially across the Sahel and West Africa (GTI, 2022; The Economist, 2022b; UN 2021).

10.   The Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and, increasingly, West and Central Africa are witnessing growing levels of terrorist activity, making the area the new epicentre of global terrorism (Bacon and Warner, 2021). In fact, over the last 15 years the Sahel has witnessed a 1,000 percent increase in deaths as a result of terrorism (GTI, 2022). More people have been killed in terrorist attacks in sub-Saharan Africa than any other region in the world since 2017, even reaching approximately 50 percent of global deaths from terrorism in 2021 (GTI, 2022). This translates into almost 12,000 deaths over the last two years in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, and over 3.5 million conflict-displaced persons in the same area plus Chad (The Economist, 2022a).

11.   Instability in the Sahel and West Africa is exacerbated by weak governance: the region has experienced six coups (two unsuccessful) over the past two years, the most recent being the January 2022 ousting of Burkinabé President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré by the military (Maclean, 2022). Experts warn, however, that while the Sahel may be the growing centre of today's terrorism challenge, the threat is moving south into West African coastal states. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo

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[1]   The Sahel region is situated between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea, and bordered by the Sahara to its north and the Sudanese Sahara to its south. The region covers Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Sudan, and Eritrea.

have all witnessed a growing number of attacks over the last 18 months (Kwarkye, 2022). The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, of which NATO is an active member, has declared Africa the "new global priority region" (Seldin, 2021).

12.   While the epicentres of the challenge have shifted significantly over the years, areas impacted by the scourge of violent terrorist groups are often prone to a resurgence of violence, as the root causes driving their appearance in the first place often remain in place. The cycle of violence, enduring local grievances, and weak state institutions have a dual impact on the regions. While violence, corruption, and state incapacity push populations out of the region to seek a more peaceful and potentially prosperous life, armed groups move in or rise up to exploit the power and security vacuums left behind. Russia's war on Ukraine is likely to reinforce this downward spiral, as global food security, particularly in Africa, relies upon the reliable export of Russian and Ukrainian grain (Bilger, 2022). In addition, climate change is expected to worsen conflict along NATO's periphery by increasing food and water insecurity in already fragile regions like the Sahel (Mbaye and Signé, 2022). As such, while it is likely that centres of terrorism will continue to shift over the coming years across the arc of instability to NATO's south, the broader challenge will remain.

B.   Shrinking Safe Havens, Shifted Focuses, Post-Pandemic Order, and the Challenge of New and Emerging Technologies

13.   Expanded governmental focus, investment in new and existing political, intelligence, security, and treasury institutions, as well as better inter-agency coordination over the years have clearly been key to the success in mitigating terrorism in the West. Coordination among Allies and partners, as made clear below, however, is also essential to garnering a more complete picture of the evolution of the terrorist challenge and deploying the instruments necessary to break down networks, stymie plans, and dry up key sources of funding and recruits. In fact, as experts point out, these collective efforts have led to the decline of reliable safe havens from which terrorist groups can operate (Byman, 2021; Hoffman, 2021).

14.   Experts estimate that between 10,000 and 20,000 foreign fighters found their way to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to train in al-Qaeda camps (UNODC, 2021). The common arena for training, indoctrination, and planning allowed for a disparate generation of international volunteers to unify behind al-Qaeda's extremist agenda. Today, while there are multiple safe haven options for terrorist groups, they are smaller, scattered, under constant pressure, and, as a result, incapable of rivalling pre-9/11 Afghanistan (Byman, 2021).

15.   In addition to the shrinking areas to serve as training and planning safe havens, terrorist groups are increasingly finding themselves forced into local civil wars, rather than free to launch attacks against external targets. In fact, in 2020, 97.6 percent of deaths from terrorism occurred in conflict-affected countries (GTI, 2022). Terrorist groups' focus on fighting in local civil wars is altering the training of fighters, and, as one expert notes, "local leaders often assign the most promising local recruits and foreign volunteers to important roles in local conflicts rather than give them international assignments" (Byman, 2021).

16.   A recent report by the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) of the UN Security Council has found that terrorist groups have sought to exploit some of the principal challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions – social isolation and increased internet exposure, the spread of misinformation, and domestic political divisions – to bolster recruitment efforts, expand influence, and undermine national governments' authority
(UN, 2021). The Financial Action Task Force has also reported that the increased use of contactless transactions and the broader digitalisation of payments have allowed new outlets for exploitation by terrorist groups – both in terms of receiving external financial support, and financing operations (FATF, 2020). Further, terrorist groups have also reportedly found ways to divert or co-opt pandemic relief funding into their own coffers (UN, 2021).

17.   Experts are also warning about some of the medium to longer-term challenges that will change terrorists' ability to organise and launch attacks and impact those forces trying to mitigate the terrorist threat to civilian populations. Terrorist groups today have increasing access to advanced technologies, which are expanding these groups' global reach and effectiveness, and dual-use technology access is giving terrorist groups access to more powerful, military-grade technologies, which is in turn amplifying their power potential (Schori Liang, 2022). Terrorist groups' recent attempts to use 3-D printing, autonomous vehicles, drones, and AI are cited as evidence of increasing efforts to use technology as a means of amplifying and honing their capacities for organisation and strike (Clarke, 2021; Ware, 2019; Schori Liang, 2022).

C.   PROMINENT TERRORIST GROUPS ALONG NATO'S SOUTHERN BORDERS

18.   As noted above, ISIS and al-Qaeda, as well as regional groups pledging various degrees of association with or affiliation to them, continue to be disruptive forces along the arc abutting NATO's southern flank.

19.   **Iraq and Syria**. According to UN reporting, **ISIS** maintains distinct organisational structures in these two states (UN, 2022a). In stark contrast to its 2015-2016 peak when it held vast swathes of territory in both countries, **ISIS** has been pushed back to small enclaves in the Syrian desert, with no ability to hold territory in Iraq. Despite this significant level of degradation in its 'core' area, ISIS sustains an active 'entrenched' insurgency in both countries, claiming responsibility for almost 7,000 attacks between 2018-2021 (Knights and Almeida, 2022). In January 2022, ISIS-affiliated gunmen attacked a Syrian prison to free 3,500 ISIS fighters. It took days of fighting, with US ground and aerial support, for local forces to regain control of the prison; over 180 people died due to the violence (Hubbard, 2022a). Continued attacks, such as a June 20 ambush of a bus in northern Syria that killed 11 soldiers and 2 civilians, point to ISIS's ability to strike even though it does not hold significant territory (Reuters, 2022). With the international community focused on Ukraine, and the potential for the war there to exacerbate food insecurity and further destabilise the Middle East, ISIS may be able to capitalise on the suffering and grievances to regain some of its former strength (Lister, 2022; Adar et al, 2022).

20.   **Al-Qaeda** and its affiliates, particularly **Hurras al-Din** and **Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**, have dominated northwest Syria for years. The estimated number of rank-and-file fighters in the groups ranges anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 (UN, 2021; Vohra, 2022). The ebb and flow of rebranding and allegiances have complicated the picture of who is whom in the region. For example, while HTS claims to have severed ties with al-Qaeda to become an independent force in the ongoing Syrian civil war, many experts question just how independent the group really is; two of ISIS's leaders were incapacitated while hiding out in HTS-controlled territory, and, with the group continuing to push al-Qaeda's agenda in the region, many analysts believe the group has split in name only to avoid pressure from US global counterterrorism (CT) efforts (Vohra, 2022).

21.   **Leadership attrition**: Both groups have witnessed relentless counterterrorism strikes by the United States, France, and their allies and partners on their leadership and bases which has resulted in the quick elimination of a significant number of leaders across the groups and their affiliates (UN, 2021). A succession of ISIS leaders have been killed by US commando raids: on 3 February 2022, a US operation in northwest Syria uncovered the location of ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, who blew himself up, along with his wife and children, rather than surrender. He was the third to have been eliminated in rather short succession (US DoS, 2022a; Hubbard, 2022b). His successor, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi al-Quarashi, was arrested in Türkiye only a few months later on 26 May, and, in July, the group's overseas operator, Maher al-Agal, was killed by a drone strike, also in northwest Syria (Seldin, 2022; The Economist, 2022e). In June 2022, US-led coalition forces captured Hani Ahmed al-Kurdi, a senior ISIS leader in Syria (Crisis Group, 2021; Callahan and Cole, 2022). French forces took out **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara** (ISGS) leader Adnan Abou Walid al-Sahraoui in August 2021.

22.   Al-Qaeda has also seen many of its top commanders killed (Hoffman, 2021). In 2019, French forces eliminated **Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin** (JNIM) leader Ali Maychou. In 2020, a French strike on the Mali-Algeria border killed Abdelmalek Droukel, who led al-Qaeda's branch in North Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, aka Abu Muhammad al-Masri, al-Qaeda's second in command, indicted for his role in the 1998 attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, was reportedly killed in Iran in August 2020 (Goldman et. al., 2020). In February 2022, French forces in Mali incapacitated Yahia Djouadi, a senior leader of AQIM responsible for finance and logistics (France 24, 2022). Most recently in June 2022, a US strike in northwest Syria killed Abu Hamzah al Yemeni, a senior leader of Hurras al-Din, and, as described in more detail below, on 31 July, a US airstrike killed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri (Seyler, 2022; Goldbaum and Gibbons-Neff, 2022).

23.   The result, experts note, is hollowing al-Qaeda "to its core" (Mendelsohn and Clarke, 2021; Byman, 2021). This leadership attrition is also having profound impacts on the groups' organisational capacities. As unifying figures at the top disappear, the core groups have been less and less capable of broader strategic planning and operations, and affiliates are increasingly focused on local conflicts as they lose touch with the global vision of al-Qaeda and ISIS cores (Mendelsohn and Clarke, 2021; UN, 2021).

24.   **Afghanistan**: Just prior to the collapse of the Ghani government in Kabul in August 2021, al-Qaeda was still present in at least 15 Afghan provinces. ISIS's Afghanistan affiliate, the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), also continues to operate with significant impact – its suicide bombing on 26 August 2021 during the Allied evacuation of Kabul Airport resulted in over 170 dead, of which thirteen were US armed service members, and 200 injured, making it the deadliest terrorist attack globally in 2021, and in Afghanistan since 2007 (GTI, 2022; Schmitt and Cooper, 2022). Afghanistan remained the country with the most deaths from terrorism in 2021, followed by Iraq and Somalia (GTI, 2022). In 2022, terrorist groups undertook attacks targeting diplomatic premises, civilians – including religious minorities – and civilian infrastructure throughout the country. In April, terrorist groups targeted schools in Kabul as well as mosques in Kunduz and Kabul. On April 28, ISKP carried out an attack against two minibuses in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing 9 and wounding several others. The group has continued to direct and execute a spate of attacks across the country over the summer. On June 18, an attack on a Sikh temple killed and wounded several worshippers (Goldbaum and Rahim, 2022). Since mid-August 2021, the Afghan population has continued to suffer, and a June 2022 earthquake killed at least 1,000 and has once again worsened the country's already fragile humanitarian and security situation, which only further engenders conditions favourable to terrorist group recruitment and activities.

25.   According to the recent UN monitoring team report, the Taliban did not break their ties with terrorist groups, including (and particularly) al-Qaeda, when it came to power in 2021. Instead, the Taliban integrated these groups into their interim government, thereby strengthening them and their affiliates and giving them greater freedom in the country "than at any time in recent history" (UN, 2022b). Given the global reach of these terrorist organisations, the risk emanating from Afghanistan is, therefore, once again cross-border and transnational. The report found that although the risk of an international terrorist attack emanating from Afghanistan is unlikely in the short term, the risk of an attack will increase in the future as groups such as al-Qaeda and ISKP reorganise and build capacity under the Taliban regime (UN, 2022b).

26.   On 31 July 2022, US counterterrorism forces conducted a drone strike in central Kabul, Afghanistan which neutralised al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Zawahiri was instrumental in the organisation and execution of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States; he was also central to the group's attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000. He assumed leadership of the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation after the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011. Al-Zawahiri's death is significant for two principal reasons. First, it provided an opportunity for US officials to reiterate what had been argued in support of the 2021

withdrawal, namely that the US would retain the ability to conduct 'over-the-horizon' attacks on terrorist forces in Afghanistan with assets based outside of the country (Goldbaum and Gibbons-Neff, 2022). Second, despite the agreement the Taliban made with the United States to prevent Afghanistan from returning to its past as a safe haven for terrorists to organise and plan attacks, the Taliban have indeed been allowing terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, the freedom to regenerate in Afghanistan (Goldbaum and Gibbons-Neff, 2022). Choosing to isolate themselves, the Taliban have shown no sign of heeding either the demands of the international community that were clearly expressed in Security Council Resolution 2593 – their actions being the basis on which their compliance will continue to be assessed – or the pressing needs and expectations of their own population.

27.   **Other ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates:** The proliferation of ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates demonstrates the impact these two groups continue to have on the evolution of terrorism globally. Some of ISIS's most successful affiliates are largely operating in Central and West Africa, while those of al-Qaeda are in Somalia and across the Sahel.

28.   **Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)**, although fragmented and significantly degraded due to infighting and counterterrorism efforts, continues a guerrilla fighting campaign out of Yemen (Kendall, 2021). Some experts believe, however, the group's fragmentation has allowed AQAP splinter groups to seek a degree of integration with the significant organised criminal networks that have been flourishing over the years of Yemen's highly internationalised civil conflict (Kendall, 2021).

29.   **Al-Shabaab (Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen)** is al-Qaeda's official branch in the Horn of Africa and presents the most significant terrorist threat to the region. Formed in 2006, the group aims to establish its own government across the Horn of Africa as an extension of its commitment to global jihad (Felter et al., 2021). In February 2012, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri (now deceased) declared al-Shabaab part of the global jihad, inviting some of its founding members to receive training in Afghanistan (Blanchard, 2020). Over the years, al-Shabaab established informal links with armed groups across Africa, including Nigeria-based Boko Haram and AQIM (BBC, 2017). Despite international efforts to degrade and destroy the group, al-Shabaab has been responsible for most terrorist attacks in Africa since 2011 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2020). Recent UN reporting estimates al-Shabaab currently has anywhere between 7,000 and 12,000 fighters, and earns between USD 50-100 million annually, of which it is able to allocate USD 24 million annually to weapons, explosives and, increasingly, drones (UN, 2022a). Over the years, al-Shabaab has maintained its ability to conduct significant high-profile attacks across Somalia and the broader region; it has also maintained its stated desire to conduct attacks across the West (US Department of State, 2020; Crisis Group, 2022). In 2021, al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Diriye called for an increase in external attacks by the group, particularly focused on Western targets across the Horn of Africa (Seldin and Olad, 2022). A July 2022 raid by approximately 500 al-Shabaab fighters into Ethiopia and the significant fighting that ensued demonstrates the size and scope of the operations of which the group is capable in the region (Seldin and Olad, 2022).

30.   In the Sahel, the transnational groups with links to al-Qaeda (**AQIM** and **JNIM**) and ISIS (the **Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA)** and **ISGS**) are the main drivers of larger-scale violence[2]. ISGS operates several cells across its area of influence, which cover parts of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso[3], and present a degree of operational autonomy (CSIS, 2021a). ISIS propaganda portrays ISGS as a sub-branch of ISWA (Humud, 2021). JNIM was formed in 2017 with a merger of disparate extremist groups and is active across the Sahel and sub-Saharan regions (CSIS, 2021b). Upon the

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[2]   Groups such as Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun, and the Katiba Macina also exist in the region and are quite violent, but the focus of their attacks is almost exclusively on local issues (ethnic-nationalist-religious).

[3]   Most of the violent attacks in the Sahel stem from the Liptako-Gourma region which covers eastern Burkina Faso, south-eastern Mali, and south-western Niger.

group's creation, it pledged allegiance to al-Zawahiri. The 2022 Global Terrorism Index ranks JNIM as the fastest-growing terrorist organisation in the world, responsible for 351 deaths in 2021, and ISWA as the most lethal (GTI, 2022).

31.   ISIS's African affiliates have made significant gains in new areas across Africa in 2022 as well. In Nigeria, where the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) witnessed a string of successes against Boko Haram, it has displaced the group in many areas and co-opted many of its fighters (Burke, 2022). **ISIS Central African Province (ISCAP)**, which operates in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique, have been using increasingly brutal tactics to solidify and expand their areas of control in the countries (Burke, 2022).

D.   CONTINUED CHALLENGES TO ALLIED INTERESTS

32.   The impact of these groups' violence has both direct and indirect effects on Allied and partner interests. For example, while ISGS and JNIM attacks in the Sahel inflict horrendous civilian casualties, they also target UN personnel, as well as national and international forces operating across the region. ISGS alone killed approximately 400 members of Sahelian security forces in 2019 (Le Figaro, 2020). Just recently, in December 2021, JNIM attacked MINUSMA[4] forces in Mali's central Mopti region, which resulted in the deaths of seven peacekeepers, among the deadliest attacks in the mission's history (ACLED, 2021). Attacks on MINUSMA peacekeepers have continued, and as of June 2022, 275 have been killed since the mission began in 2013 (AFP, 2022). Since it began its broader counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel under *Operations Serval and Barkhane*, France has lost 58 soldiers in its clashes with transnational and regional Salafi jihadist groups (*Ministère français des armées*, 2022). In October 2017, an ISGS attack on a US-Niger convoy in Niger resulted in the death of four US soldiers (Lewis and Bavier, 2017). In January 2020, al-Shabaab raided Manda Bay Airfield in Kenya, killing a US soldier and two US contractors operating there.

33.   Extremist groups run successful propaganda campaigns to mobilise supporters to join the group in their combat arenas (such as Syria or Somalia), motivate lone-wolf attacks, or garner financial support from individuals overseas. Prior to its territorial defeat, for example, ISIS was able to draw in over 40,000 volunteers (multiple thousands from the West) in its fight in Syria.
Al-Shabaab's ability to attract foreign supporters, particularly among the Somali and Sudanese diaspora in the United States, has raised concern among US officials regarding American citizens joining the terrorist group's ranks (Blanchard, 2020). AQAP continues to call for attacks in the US and against French forces in the Sahel (Kendall, 2021).

34.   Terrorist groups across the Sahel and the Horn of Africa have also successfully embedded themselves into smuggling and trafficking networks and developed the ability to extract revenues and resources by utilising these networks (Crisis Group, 2018). By creating necessary push factors, these groups can manipulate migratory flows toward Europe, and exploit the same routes to smuggle drugs and arms.

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[4]   The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali is referred to by its French acronym, MINUSMA (*Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali)*.

E. INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT TERRORIST GROUPS

35.   Outside the major US-led campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, the UN, NATO, African Union (AU), United States, and France have been the most actively engaged in operations and CT campaigns to address both the immediate challenges posed by terrorist groups and the root causes driving their proliferation over the past several decades. The following section overviews some of the larger-scale efforts – NATO's ongoing missions are outlined in more detail in section III.

36.   The UN-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has led multilateral counterterrorism efforts in Somalia and the wider region since 2007. Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, and Burundi, among other countries, support a 20,000-strong mission. AMISOM is principally mandated to support the Somali government's efforts to disrupt and degrade al-Shabaab and other armed opposition groups operating in the country. Despite a declaration that AMISOM would end in 2021, the mission continues its operations. NATO supports AMISOM by providing air- and sealift capabilities, capacity-building support, and expert training to African Union forces (NATO, 2021a).

37.   The UN maintains a significant peace operation in Mali – MINUSMA. MINUSMA is mandated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to support peace and reconciliation efforts in Mali (UNSCR, 2021). A key focus of the mission is the protection of civilians and the re-establishment of state authority against the surge of terrorist violence across the country in recent years. The UN mission was renewed on 29 June for another year by the UN Security Council, though without French air support, which the transitional government in Bamako rejected (France 24, 2022b). MINUSMA currently has over 17,000 personnel. Since 2013, MINUSMA has reported 275 fatalities among its peacekeeping force, making it the deadliest of the UN's current peace operations.

1) GLOBAL COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS AND OPERATION INHERENT RESOLVE

38.   When the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS was formed in 2014, the US and its NATO Allies articulated the five principal lines of the Coalition efforts as partnering military support; impeding foreign fighter flows; disrupting terrorism support networks; addressing regional humanitarian crises; and counter-messaging to undermine ISIS propaganda. The Global Coalition operates in coordination with the US's Operation Inherent Resolve, which is the operational name for ongoing US military efforts to disrupt, degrade, and deny ISIS's operating capacity in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. To date, 85 states and multilateral institutions (including NATO Allies, the European Union and other relevant institutions)[5] participate in the parallel efforts of the Global Coalition. The Global Coalition has an ongoing training, advising and equipping mission in support of Iraqi security forces to carry out ground operations against ISIS. In Syria, the Coalition continues to support opposition forces and other local actors in anti-ISIS operations.

39.   To address the worsening ISIS-affiliate jihadist threat in Africa, the Coalition announced the formation of the Africa Focus Group on 2 December 2021. The establishment of the group demonstrates the member states' growing concerns about the threat ISIS affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa pose to regional peace and security, which can quickly have far-reaching effects if significantly undermined by the growing impact of the groups' operations. Morocco, Niger, the United States, and Italy are serving as the inaugural co-chairs of the group. As the Coalition's statements note, "the Africa Focus Group will enable the Coalition to undertake civilian capacity-building programmes to help address the Daesh [ISIS] threat across Africa, and to synchronise those efforts with existing initiatives on the ground" (Global Coalition, 2022).

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5   https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/

2) EUROPEAN AND US COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIP ACROSS THE SAHEL

40.   French forces entered Mali in 2013 under *Operation Serval* to stop a jihadist rapid advance toward the capital, Bamako. In 2014, France turned *Serval* into a broader counterterrorism effort across the Sahel, *Operation Barkhane*, to disrupt, deny, and degrade jihadists' safe havens in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger, from which they were launching attacks across the region. A broader concern was also that the groups would be able to re-create an Afghanistan-like area in which they could train fighters, as well as plan and launch attacks on the West (The Economist, 2022a).

41.   While *Barkhane* started with 3,000 troops and a relatively small amount of supporting air and ground systems, the operation grew over the years, reaching a peak of 5,100 forces across a larger number of forward operating bases with more firepower. Early on, the United States threw significant support behind *Barkhane* by adding intelligence and logistics support, particularly air-to-air refuelling and strategic lift (Husted et al., 2021). France also enlisted significant collaborative support from all G5 Sahel countries[6] in the mission. By February 2017, G5 leaders also launched their own initiative, the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), to counter the growing terrorism threat across the region.

42.   France was joined in this fight by many European countries, most of which were involved in the Takuba Task Force to train the Malian army and accompany it on its counterterrorism missions across the country (Lory, 2022). Fourteen countries supported the task force – Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, the United Kingdom – and some of them, notably the Czech Republic and Estonia, sent along special forces personnel to bolster the operational capacity of the 800-strong contingent. Since *Operation Serval* in Mali, Spain has also supported France in its anti-terrorist operations, largely through air logistics support which facilitates the mobility of *Operation Barkhane* over an extremely large area. For its part, the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM), to which Spain, the Czech Republic, and Germany are the largest contributors, helps build the capacity of the Malian armed forces by providing military advice, training, education and mentoring, while the European Union Capacity-Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) supports the fight against organised crime and terrorism in the country. The EUTM is currently in its fifth mandate, which will last until 18 May 2024.

43.   A pair of coups in August 2020 and again in May 2021 resulted in a military junta seizing power in Bamako, which significantly strained relations with the French forces present in the country. The months following the second coup witnessed a profound divergence in perspectives between France and Mali, principal among them being the transitional government in Bamako's counter-terrorism policies and its handling of the complex interwoven governance and security issues facing the vast country (AP, 2022a). The transitional government further alienated regional and international partners by severing ties with Barkhane and Takuba forces and by withdrawing from the G5 Sahel in May 2022, after the other members blocked the country from assuming the group's rotating presidency (Douce, 2022). France, in coordination with its partners – Sahelian and neighbouring countries as well as international partners – therefore announced the gradual drawdown of *Operation Barkhane* in June 2021. In February 2022, President Emmanuel Macron announced a total withdrawal from Mali and the reconfiguration of *Operation Barkhane* across the region, and, in parallel, European leaders announced the withdrawal of the Takuba Task Force. As President Macron noted at the time, "We cannot remain militarily involved" alongside a Malian transitional government with whom, "we do not share the same strategy and goals" (AP, 2022a). The approximately 2,400 French forces of *Operation Barkhane*, as well as over 800 forces

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[6]   The Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) was founded in 2014 as a regional intergovernmental organisation focused on security and development. Its five members are Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

composing the Takuba Task Force operating in Mali, completed their withdrawal over the summer of 2022.

44.	France has signalled that it remains committed to assisting with efforts to return peace and stability to the region. The French government has a continuing role in the fight against armed terrorist groups and in supporting the political, civilian and military efforts of ECOWAS and the region's states, in full coordination with active European and American partners. A 15 July visit to Niamey, Niger by French foreign and defence ministers confirmed that Niger will partner with France, and other regional and global partners, to serve as a hub for security operations across the Sahel (Girard, 2022). France announced it will reconfigure its forces across the broader region, positioning its approximately 2,500 remaining deployed forces to be in more of a supporting role for local forces, with a view to co-construction (France 24, 2022d). In a speech during a July 2022 visit to Cameroon, Benin, and Guinea-Bissau, French President Macron said France's reconfigured mission will extend "beyond the Sahel, to the Gulf of Guinea and second-layer countries which now have to face terrorist groups which are expanding and shaking up the whole region" (France 24, 2022d).

45.	The United States currently has over 5,100 soldiers and an additional 1,000 civilians dedicated to US Africa Command (US AFRICOM) (Husted et al., 2021). Most US forces in Africa are stationed at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, serving as the only enduring US military base in Africa (Husted et al., 2021). The United States maintains approximately 831 military personnel in Niger, and another 760 across US facilities in West Africa (White House, 2021; Husted et al., 2021). In May 2022, the US announced that it would redeploy roughly 500 troops to Somalia to combat al-Shabaab (Hansen, 2022). The US counterterrorism strategy in Africa predominantly revolves around supporting African security forces through train, advise and equip programmes, as well as strong support to France's *Barkhane* mission (Husted et al., 2021). The United States also performs its own intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) activities in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin and, when necessary, engages in kinetic strikes to disrupt terrorist networks (Husted et al., 2021). US CT air strikes and commando operations over the last decade have focused almost exclusively on Libya and Somalia (Husted et al., 2021).

## 3)	RUSSIA'S GROWING SECURITY FOOTPRINT IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

46.	Mali's rejection of French and other European actors' assistance, and its withdrawal from the G5 regional security architecture has resulted in a paralleled, significant growth in terrorist-related attacks and militant group operations. Over the summer of 2022, a spate of attacks, several of which were closer to the capital Bamako than any other since 2013, has rattled the country and revived fears of the country's potential collapse (France 24, 2022c). As its European security partners have withdrawn due to ongoing political disagreements with the transitional government in Bamako, Malian governing officials have been increasing their cooperation with the Russian private security contractor, the Wagner Group. The group's growing presence in Africa is fast becoming a significant challenge to counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa.

47.	Although private military companies are officially illegal in Russia, the Wagner Group is closely associated with Russian oligarchs, particularly with Putin associate Yevgeny Prigozhin. The group functions as an auxiliary of the Russian state and allows the Kremlin to project force and expand its influence abroad while maintaining plausible deniability for its actions (The Economist, 2022a). It has been involved in conflicts in several countries, including Ukraine, Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic, and it has rapidly increased its footprint in Mali over the past year. It is estimated that there are over 1,000 Russian operatives in Mali alone (Brown and Maillard, 2022).

48.	Wagner Group mercenaries maintain that they are in the region to assist African governments in counterterrorism training and intelligence, but they are often driven by other motivations.

The group has profited directly from profitable contracts with African governments, estimated, for example, to be USD 10 million per month in Mali, and it exploits these contracts to gain access to minerals and natural resources (The Economist, 2022d). Private military contractors also factor into Russia's broader geopolitical goal of edging Western governments – namely France and the United States – out of the region and propping up authoritarian regimes friendly to the Kremlin. The Wagner Group's partnership with Mali's ruling military junta has worsened already strained relations between the country and the international community (The Economist, 2022c).

49.   Although Wagner forces act officially as non-combatant advisers, they have been accused of participating in fighting and committing atrocities against civilians. In the Central African Republic, where the Wagner Group has operated since 2018, Russian forces have been linked to summary executions, arbitrary detention, torture, and sexual violence (HRW, 2022a). Since the Wagner Group entered Mali in December 2021, civilian deaths have multiplied, with the number of civilian fatalities in the first quarter of 2022 exceeding the total for the entire year of 2021. In the town of Moura, in March 2022, Russian forces and the Malian military summarily executed 300 civilians and suspected jihadists (HRW, 2022b). In April 2022, the French government – citing drone and satellite footage – accused the Wagner Group of arranging dead bodies at a former French military base to falsify evidence of a massacre the group committed as part of a smear campaign against France and its efforts inside the country (Doxsee and Thompson, 2022; Mednick, 2022). While Mali denies the presence of Wagner members in the country and admits only to housing "Russian instructors", both the United States and France recognised that the country had hired Russian mercenaries in formal statements (Fabricius, 2022; US Department of State, 2022b).

50.   Rather than mitigating terrorism, the Wagner Group exacerbates it where it is present. Through its lawlessness and brutality, the Russian mercenaries accelerate cycles of violence between state militaries, jihadist groups, and other militias. In a recent example, a July 2022 attack by al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM on Mali's main military base was claimed by the group to be in direct response to the government's collaboration with the Wagner Group and the atrocities committed by the group's mercenaries (VOA, 2022). Civilians in these countries say the violence committed by the Wagner Group even exceeds that of terrorist groups (Doxsee and Thompson, 2022).

4) CHINA'S GROWING FOOTPRINT IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

51.   China has rapidly scaled up its investment across Africa over the past two decades and is now the continent's largest trading partner, with Chinese firms producing approximately an eighth of its industrial output (The Economist, 2022e). China's Belt and Road Initiative reaches into 43 of the 54 countries in Africa, to which, between 2000 and 2020, China lent USD 160 billion, most of which financed large infrastructure projects (The Economist, 2022f). To defend these expanding economic partnerships and interests, China is also deepening its military and political ties in parallel. China's security investments, from base construction to cooperative security outreach with African governments, potentially allow it to develop a counterterrorism policy of its own, while the Allies and their partners on the continent are also pursuing such a policy through a cooperative security approach.

52.   When compared to US, French, or other European military investment in Africa, China's military presence on the continent is still relatively minor, but it is expanding. China established a military base in Djibouti in 2017, and it is reportedly seeking to establish another on the African Atlantic coast, likely in Equatorial Guinea (Reuters, 2017; Tanchum, 2021). Officially, China states that its base in Djibouti is to support anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, but military analysts believe the facility could accommodate larger military hardware, such as aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines (The Economist, 2022g). If China were to open a similar base in Equatorial Guinea, it would be able to project power deep into the North Atlantic for the first time.

53.   China is also increasing its troop presence on the continent. It is the second-largest financial contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, and the tenth-largest in terms of personnel, with most located in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Sudan, and South Sudan (UNDPKO, 2022). While UN peace operations are humanitarian in nature, there is a geopolitical component as well: they offer China an opportunity to secure its investments on the African continent, give its military much-needed experience, and boost its reputation globally. The number of Chinese peacekeepers in South Sudan, for example, has increased alongside growing investment in the country's oil industry (Dyrenforth, 2021).

54.   China's deep footprint in UN peace operations in Africa has given rise to opportunities for the country to expand its cooperative security outreach across the continent in parallel. For example, China has conducted joint military exercises with Tanzania, trilateral naval exercises with South Africa and Russia, and it has built military facilities for the armed forces of Tanzania and Equatorial Guinea (The Economist, 2022g). In addition to an official troop presence, Chinese security firms employ thousands of personnel across the continent. In Kenya, 2,000 contractors are employed just to guard the Chinese-built Mombasa–Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (Nantulya, 2021).

55.   China has also integrated itself into African regional security arrangements. Since it was founded in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been the primary platform for dialogue on security issues between China and 53 African states. The triennial summits have resulted in a number of Chinese-led security initiatives. At FOCAC in 2015, China pledged USD 60 million in military assistance to African countries, and in the same year, Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged USD 100 million to the African Union to aid the launch of an African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises. The 2019-2021 FOCAC Action Plan foresaw the formation of 50 security programmes to increase Sino-African defence cooperation. FOCAC, in 2021, focused on further strengthening the "China-Africa Community" and the development of a pan-African security architecture (Tanchum, 2021). Most recently in 2022, President Xi announced the Global Security Initiative (GSI) with the aim of boosting China's diplomatic credentials, and China is increasingly positioning itself as a conflict mediator in Africa (Perlez, 2022).

56.   After FOCAC in 2021, Senegalese foreign minister Aïssata Tall Sall called for China to become more involved in Sahel security and counterterrorism efforts (Mboya, 2021). So far, China has not done so, but the country's deepening bilateral ties with African countries, and its efforts to integrate itself into multilateral security arrangements on the continent, could compete with Allies' relations with African governments as they seek to deepen their cooperative security ties across the continent. In recent years, Allies and their partners have indeed shifted their approach to counterterrorism more broadly, preferring cooperative security outreach to kinetic strike operations. Cooperative security outreach programmes, principally train, advise, and assist efforts with local forces, are an effort to help partner nations invest in modern defence forces capable of maintaining peace and security over the longer term. China's growing economic, political, and, increasingly, military presence across the continent threatens to undermine these efforts by offering Chinese-led alternative approaches, which will not necessarily align with either local governments' long-term interests or the interests of those areas impacted by the disruption of the cycles of violence caused by violent extremism.

III- NATO'S EVOLVING COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACH

57.   Allies first identified terrorism as a "risk" to NATO security in the 1999 Strategic Concept. The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, however, drove a sea change in the Alliance's approach to terrorism. Within 24 hours of the attack, Allies invoked Article 5, their collective defence clause, and vowed to "undertake all efforts to combat the scourge of terrorism" (NATO, 2001). A month later, Allies took a series of measures to support the United States as it adapted its global counterterrorism response.

58.   Allies' early post-9/11 counterterrorism actions included a broad range of cooperative support measures and the launch of two CT operations: *Operation Eagle Assist*, in which NATO Airborne Warning & Control System (AWACS) patrolled US air space, and *Operation Active Endeavour*, which saw elements of the Alliance's Standing Naval Forces patrol the eastern Mediterranean to detect and deter illegal terrorist activities on the seas, including trafficking. By May 2002, Allies agreed to cooperate with the US-led operations in Afghanistan under the International Assistance Force (ISAF) banner.

59.   The November 2002 Summit in Prague, however, would lay out the action areas for NATO adaptation to include measures necessary to develop and implement effective counterterrorism policies and initiatives – the broad contours of which remain in place today. These included: a Military Concept for Defence Against Terrorism, a Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, a range of counter-CBRN initiatives, a Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan for the protection of civilian populations, NATO missile defence to counter missile system proliferation, increased attention to cyber defence, broader CT cooperation with international organisations, and, not least, improved intelligence sharing (NATO, 2002).

A.   NATO'S COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY GUIDELINES AND ACTION PLAN

60.   In 2012, Allies agreed to a set of policy guidelines for collective counterterrorism efforts. These outlined a broad strategic direction and provided for Allied initiatives and action areas to bolster Allies' and partners' ability to prevent terrorism, as well as enhance resilience to acts of terrorism. Three core principles guide the Alliance's efforts: compliance with international law, support to Allies, and non-duplication and complementarity.

61.   In December 2018, NATO foreign ministers directed the organisation to encapsulate the Alliance's role in the fight against terrorism into a coherent plan – at the time, the initiative sought to highlight the Alliance's CT approach as an integral part of NATO's 360-degree approach to defence and deterrence and projecting stability.

62.   The resulting 2019 Counter Terrorism Action Plan is designed to be updated at regular intervals according to the evolution of the terrorism challenge facing Allies. The three areas around which the CT Action Plan is structured – enhanced intelligence sharing, operations and missions, and capacity-building and partnerships – align with NATO's three core tasks: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. Allied publications and statements simplify the CT Action Plan with the ***awareness, capabilities, engagement*** formula.

B.   NATO'S CT TODAY: AWARENESS, CAPABILITIES, AND ENGAGEMENT

63.   ***Awareness:*** Allied and partner consultations, enhanced intelligence-sharing, and continuous strategic analysis and assessment shape a deep understanding of the evolution of the terrorist threat. Intelligence-sharing between Allied and partner agencies is facilitated by the Intelligence Liaison Unit in Brussels, and the Intelligence Liaison Cell at Allied Command Operations in Mons, Belgium. Since 2017, the Hub for the South, based at NATO Joint Force Command in Naples, supports enhanced situational awareness in the South through information collection as well as threat assessment. The Hub for the South also connects relevant stakeholders from NATO, partner countries, and relevant organisations (NATO, 2021b).

64.   The Terrorism Intelligence Cell (TIC) in the Joint Intelligence and Security Division was also established in 2017 (Von Loringhoven, 2017). Replacing the previous practice of having all Allies agree upon intelligence prior to presenting it, the cell gathers intelligence from individual Allies and partners and develops stand-alone analysis shared directly with all Allies. TIC reporting, NATO officials note, gives all Allies access to a more accurate and timelier picture of the evolving terrorism threat.

65.   *Capabilities*: Structured coordination between members and among partners helps ensure each Ally and partner has the necessary capabilities to withstand and counter terrorist threats. Training, education, and exercises are key components of capacity-building efforts; a multitude of programmes and initiatives to develop innovative technologies and methods to counter asymmetric threats bolster this effort. The following overviews current NATO CT initiatives and programmes.

C.   DEFENCE EDUCATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME (DEEP)

66.   NATO initiated its first standardised curriculum on counterterrorism in June 2020 to help Allies and partners to develop and strengthen national skills and improve counterterrorism strategies (NATO, 2021c). DEEP works primarily as a reform vehicle to provide tailored support to individual countries in developing and reforming their professional military education institutions. DEEP projects contribute to projecting stability and defence and security sector reform (NATO, 2021d).

D.   DEFENCE AGAINST TERRORISM PROGRAMME OF WORK (DAT POW)

67.   DAT POW programme members and partners lead projects to develop advanced technologies or measures to counter terrorist and other asymmetric threats. Projects cover topics such as force protection, infrastructure hardening and harbour safety (NATO, 2021e). DAT POW has successfully implemented projects on technologies to defend against unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), on the development of innovative technologies in the field of biometrics, and more. As part of DAT POW, in 2020, NATO developed a technical exploitation policy to counter terrorist capabilities. The aim is to collect material that has been in the possession of terrorists and other adversaries, such as weapons, computers, and cell phones, and to use scientific tools and analysis to identify the actors, their capabilities, and intentions. The policy will drive the development of capabilities across NATO, including through the use of artificial intelligence and data-sharing solutions. DAT POW has also intensified efforts to develop counter-UAS technology. In 2021, the programme supported the development of artificial intelligence/machine learning techniques to track, classify and identify drones.

E.   COUNTERING CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL, RADIOLOGICAL, AND NUCLEAR THREATS

68.   NATO places a high priority on defending against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats and hazards. The Combined Joint CBRN Defence Task Force is designed to respond to and manage the fallout from the use of CBRN agents. The NATO-certified Centre of Excellence on Joint CBRN Defence in the Czech Republic further enhances NATO's capabilities. As part of these efforts, in 2018, NATO launched a new initiative to develop an integrated system of sensors and data fusion technologies capable of detecting explosives and concealed weapons in real-time, and thus to secure mass transport infrastructures, such as airports, metro and railway stations. This initiative is constituted by several projects all working together to achieve a live demonstration in 2022.

F.   DEXTER: DETECTION OF EXPLOSIVES AND FIREARMS TO COUNTER TERRORISM

69.   As a part of programme DEXTER, which focuses on the detection of explosives and firearms in the fight against terrorism, NATO has developed a prototype, which it tested in Italy at the end of May, to counter the threat that these weapons pose to densely populated public spaces. The three technologies developed as a part of DEXTER make it possible to identify people carrying firearms or explosives among crowds instantly and at a distance. The device will go further than existing security measures in place and allow authorities to detect threats discreetly, without having to carry out random checks on passengers or resort to checkpoints. Developed using the latest advances in

sensors, detection, and artificial intelligence, this device is a perfect example of how NATO intends to make use of emerging and disruptive technologies. Eleven public organisations and research institutions from four NATO members (France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands) and four partner countries (Finland, the Republic of Korea, Serbia, and Ukraine) participated in the DEXTER programme, which is sponsored by NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme (NATO, 2022j).

70.   Another concern is arms proliferation: Experts also expect challenges with arms proliferation after the end of the conflict in Ukraine. The end of the conflict will necessitate increased surveillance with all existing tools, both legal and political. These experts ask that measures be taken in order to avoid what happened in the Western Balkans, which became a hub of arms trafficking at the end of the 1990s (Magnenou, 2022). [7]

G.   TECHNICAL EXPLOITATION AND COLLECTION OF BATTLEFIELD EVIDENCE

71.   Under the NATO Battlefield Evidence Policy, which Allies approved in October 2020, the Alliance collects biometric data[8] for further analysis to assist NATO operations. The policy aims to improve sharing of information collected under NATO missions and operations to further operational goals, assist legal proceedings, and support law enforcement. Relatedly, under the Practical Framework for Technical Exploitation, NATO forces can extract valuable intelligence from the field. This includes, in particular, the analysis of weapons, cell phones, drones, and other technologies collected on the ground to uncover the identities, capabilities, and intentions of malign actors. This is done through a range of methods, including fingerprint collection and the tracing of technologies used in terrorist activities (NATO, 2021b).

H.   CURRENT NATO CT OPERATIONS: COUNTER-ISIS COALITION AND OPERATION SEA GUARDIAN

72.   The Alliance has been supporting the Global Coalition Against ISIS since 2016 via the provision of AWACS surveillance aircraft, which have proven crucial for the Coalition in terms of air space management (NATO, 2017). In parallel, the Alliance's mission in Iraq contributes to the Coalition's efforts by bolstering the capacity of Iraq's armed forces. The Alliance has reassigned a significant number of trainers from the Afghanistan mission to Iraq since the end of NATO efforts in the country.

73.   *Operation Sea Guardian* [9] is a non-Article 5 maritime security operation working with Mediterranean stakeholders and partners to maintain maritime situational awareness, deter and counter terrorism, and enhance capacity-building. The operation assists counterterrorism efforts by planning and carrying out a multitude of operations to disrupt and defend against "maritime-based" terrorist activities (NATO, 2021f).

I.   CRISIS MANAGEMENT

74.   The Alliance supports project development to identify better methods to protect critical infrastructure in the event of terrorist attacks. For example, a NATO set of guidelines on planning

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[7]   On the subject of existing strategies for managing border security in the Euro-Atlantic area, refer to the 2019 CDS report.

[8]   The biometric data collection policy is in compliance with national and international law and is subject to national restrictions.

[9]   *Operation Sea Guardian* succeeded *Operation Active Endeavour*, which was launched in 2001 under Article 5 as part of NATO's immediate response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks to deter, detect and, if necessary, disrupt the threat of terrorism in the Mediterranean Sea. *Active Endeavour* was terminated in October 2016.

and preparing for terrorist CBRN attacks includes guidance on maintenance of logistics, raising public awareness, warning information systems and training and exercises (NATO, 2020).

75.   **Engagement**: Allied engagement with partner countries and international organisations is the third key pillar of NATO's counterterrorism efforts. The Alliance commits to effective cooperation and coordination with partner countries and international organisations as a key means of projecting stability. Partnerships with the United Nations, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the African Union are emblematic of this effort.

76.   NATO works closely with the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, and many of its component organisations, including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. NATO also works closely with UN agencies responding to international disasters, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the UN 1540 Committee.

77.   In their July 2018 Joint Declaration, NATO and the EU committed to combatting terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. NATO-EU cooperation in counterterrorism has since reached unprecedented levels, with regular exchanges on counterterrorism projects and on related activities such as work on the protection of civilian populations against CBRN attacks. Inter-staff relations between the NATO International Secretariat and the European External Action Service's counterterrorism section and the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator's office, for example, help foster mutual understanding and complementarity.

78.   NATO maintains close relations with the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department's Action against Terrorism Unit, various field offices, and the Border College in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), which works to create secure open borders via specialised training of senior officers from national border agencies. Other areas of joint interest between NATO and the OSCE include gender and terrorism, a whole-of-government approach to counterterrorism, and countering terrorist financing.

79.   NATO-AU cooperation revolves around operational, logistical, and capacity-building support. As noted above, since June 2007, NATO has provided AMISOM air- and sealift support (NATO, 2021g). NATO is also providing capacity-building and expert training support to the African Standby Force (ASF). [10] In November 2019, NATO and the African Union signed a newly expanded cooperation agreement (NATO, 2019). In December 2019, NATO hosted the first counterterrorism dialogue with the AU. NATO supports the African Union and conducts air policing missions at the request of its Allies (NATO, 2021b). These developments were preceded by the first joint counterterrorism training in Algiers between NATO and the AU in April 2019. Most recently, on 17 May 2021, NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme and Algerian partners inaugurated the first terahertz imaging technology in North Africa, which will enable the discovery of harmful materials such as firearms and explosive munition, potentially protecting targeted sites from attacks (NATO, 2021h).

80.   Finally, NATO's December 2020 strategy for the Sahel focuses on two main areas: developing the partnership with Mauritania, primarily training; and creating links with the G5 Sahel structures, particularly through the respective Defense Colleges. The Alliance has already established links with the G5 Sahel, in particular with Mauritania, a NATO partner in the Mediterranean Dialogue. The NATO Defense College also has a partnership with the G5 Sahel Defense College based in Nouakchott.

J.   COOPERATION WITH TUNISIA, JORDAN, AND MAURITANIA

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[10]   The ASF is a crisis response force, representing the AU's vision for a continental, on-call security apparatus with some similarities to the NATO Response Force.

81.   Defence capacity-building assistance is a key pillar of Allies' projecting stability initiative, and cooperation with Jordan and Tunisia are good examples of this outreach. In 2014, NATO signed an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme with Tunisia focused on counterterrorism and border security with Algeria and Libya.[11] In 2015, a wave of terrorist attacks, the deteriorating situation in Libya, and growing extremist-led violence pushed Tunisia to seek to deepen cooperation with NATO. As a result, Allies accepted Tunisia's request for a NATO Defence Capacity Building (DCB). NATO's DCB package expanded focus to developing cyber defences, counter-IED, transparency in resource management, as well as education and training activities for the Tunisian Armed Forces. As an Enhanced Opportunities Partner, Jordan benefits from close cooperation with NATO on security matters, interoperability programmes and exercises, and increased information sharing. NATO's DCB assistance focuses on counter-IED, cyber defence, civil preparedness and crisis management, and border security. In 2021, NATO announced upgraded DCB assistance to include additional counterterrorism support. NATO is also working to deepen its political and security partnership with Mauritania, a country which Allies deem essential to broader stability in the Sahel. NATO-Mauritania cooperation will likely include military education and training, small arms and light weapons training, and crisis management (NATO, 2021i).

K.   NATO MISSION IN IRAQ

82.   In February 2018, following a request by the Iraqi government and the Global Coalition, the Alliance decided to launch NATO Mission Iraq, an advisory, training and capacity-building mission (NATO Mission Iraq, 2022). The mission aims to strengthen Iraqi security forces and institutions to prevent the return of ISIS, to fight terrorism and stabilise the country. It currently involves several hundred personnel from Allied and partner countries, including Australia, Finland, and Sweden.

83.   In February 2021, upon request from the Iraqi government, Allied defence ministers agreed to expand the scope of NATO Mission Iraq[12]. In doing so, the Alliance expanded the training mission from 500 to around 4,000 personnel. Related to the decision, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the expanded training activities would be able to include more Iraqi security institutions and areas beyond Baghdad.

L.   CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE (COE)

84.   COEs play a key role in training and educating personnel and specialists from NATO member and partner countries. They cover a range of areas of interest, including countering terrorism. They are a crucial function of the Alliance's engagement efforts with partner military and security personnel. The Centre of Excellence for Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) in Ankara serves both as a location for meetings and as a catalyst for international dialogue and discussion on terrorism and counterterrorism. In addition, several of NATO's 25 other COEs have counterterrorism-related mandates and activities.

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[11]   The NATO-Tunisia partnership was initiated in 1994 under the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

[12]   NATO operates in full respect of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and coordinates and consults closely with other international partners like the Global Coalition, the United Nations, and the European Union.

IV- CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

85.   In the context of its illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, Russia is the principal threat to Euro-Atlantic security today. Terrorism, however, remains the main asymmetrical challenge. As such, while Allies focus on the imperatives of necessary adaptations to their collective defence and deterrence posture today, they maintain a constant vigilance regarding the evolution of the terrorist threat.

86.   As this report notes, the threat terrorism poses to Allies, their partners, and their interests has evolved significantly since NATO started to focus on the problem over two decades ago. While the major safe havens of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria were disrupted by large-scale military campaigns, many more smaller ones exist today, playing host to a far larger number of Salafi jihadist groups either affiliated to al-Qaeda or ISIS explicitly, or with varying degrees of unofficial interlinkages. As major fighting has subsided in Syria and Iraq, as well as Afghanistan, the epicentres of terrorism have shifted to the Sahel and Horn of Africa, with experts warning of the violence drifting south toward the coastlines. These groups cause significant death and destruction across their areas of operation and the civilian population, as well as the local and international forces working to counter these groups, pay a heavy price.

87.   However, these groups remain less capable of planning, organising, and launching attacks outside their areas of operation principally due to two main factors: the relenting focus of counterterrorism efforts on their operations, and the groups' own focus on fighting in local conflicts. Successful counterterrorism efforts by Allies and their partners have attritted the leadership of terrorist groups and degraded the quality and security of safe havens, while the groups' focus on local conflicts has repurposed trained fighters and volunteers away from focusing on attacking abroad. The relative decline of attacks across the West in recent years is a clear sign of the successes of Allies' and their partners' efforts to coordinate intelligence-sharing, know-how, and best practices. Still, the challenge is far from eradicated and clearly has the potential to increase again. Allies have incorporated their counterterrorism efforts into their core tasking to remain well placed to handle the challenge adequately.

88.   The Taliban's recapture of Kabul and control of Afghanistan in August 2021 also has the potential to revitalise the country's role in global terrorism. The drone strike eliminating al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in the centre of Kabul makes it clear that the Taliban have not upheld their agreement to prevent terrorist groups from using the country as an operational haven. It is, therefore, essential that Allies continue to demand that the Taliban sever all links – direct, indirect, or financial – with terrorist groups. In addition, experts have warned of the inspiration the Taliban's victory will have on like-minded extremist groups operating across the globe, which could lead to increased campaigns of violence. Allies and their partners must, therefore, increase their vigilance of threat evolution accordingly.

89.   The NATO Action Plan put in place in 2019 shows clearly how Allies' collective ability to degrade and deny the terrorist threat is structured around the Alliance's three core tasks – collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security – respectively: ISR sharing and strengthening, operations and missions, and capacity-building with Allies and partners. This plan is designed to be adapted to the evolution of the threat. Today, the kinetic action of NATO operations has receded to the background post-Afghanistan, as the other two pillars of NATO's CT efforts have surged to the forefront.

90.   As this report makes clear, Allies' ability to identify and engage with the terrorism threat more broadly, and with any particular threat specifically, has been greatly assisted by efforts to streamline intelligence sharing; a key element of which has been the establishment of the Terrorism Threat Intelligence Cell, which has allowed Allies to circumvent a previously laborious process to gather

intelligence and information for dissemination among Allies and partners at the speed necessary for action (NATO interview, 2022). Together, Allies also continue to focus on developing the tools necessary to counter terrorists' quickly evolving instruments. This is evident across a range of initiatives, from the rapidly evolving toolset provided by NATO's counter-IED initiatives – as a Defence and Security Commission delegation saw first-hand during its 2018 visit to the Counter-Improvised Explosive Devices Centre of Excellence (C-IED COE) in Spain – to Allies' recent counter-drone efforts, a range of which has been recently tested successfully (NATO interview, 2022).

91.   This does not mean the Alliance is idle at the military operations level. On the contrary, as noted above, the Alliance remains active in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, mainly via the provision of AWACS and its training mission in Iraq, and *Operation Sea Guardian* still patrols the Mediterranean. NATO officials are quick to note that the Global Coalition will continue in its effort, as it is focused on the longer-term challenge posed by the proliferation of ISIS-affiliated groups, rather than focusing on any number of specific groups – the Coalition's evolution is, in fact, shaped by the will of those nations engaged within it (NATO interview, 2022). The Coalition's expanding focus on the growing challenges ISIS affiliates pose in Africa is indicative of the adaptable nature of the effort (NATO interview, 2022).

92.   Allied parliamentarians must remain focused on the terrorism threat and continue to think about the ways and means available to them to direct the tools of their respective governments to continue to disrupt, degrade, and deny terrorist groups' ability to operate – domestic security remaining, however, a national responsibility. A key part of these policies must involve closer cooperation with NATO Allies and their partners. More specifically, NATO Parliamentarians should consider supporting the following.

a.   Creating the domestic frameworks necessary to allow for even better intelligence sharing about terrorist threats with Allies and partners. Allies with their partners have an invaluable amount of information about most of the active armed terrorist groups currently threatening Allied interests and populations. Clearly, despite significant steps forward in intelligence sharing, more can be done. While there are certainly many understandable national sensitivities about intelligence sharing – from exposure of sources to the ways and means used to collect information – access to timely and accurate information for all Allies when threatened must drive more work, wherever possible and appropriate, to lower the continued hurdles to intelligence sharing as much as possible.

b.   Allies must also find ways to allow for increased cooperation between their homeland security institutions – though the core of international cooperation on terrorism is through bilateral relations, other organisations, such as the EU and UN, and *ad hoc* intelligence sharing, including on the issue of foreign terrorist fighters. Such cooperation will allow for institutional learning through exchanges of best practices, organisational efficiency, and structure. It will also allow for mutually beneficial assistance on a range of cross-border challenges such as cross-border tracking, capturing, and prosecuting of potential terrorists.

c.   Strengthening domestic legislation frameworks to identify, track, and prosecute returned foreign fighters when necessary, and to enable the resources required to reintegrate them when possible. While the massive flows of foreign fighters have ebbed substantially since the peak of 2014-2015, when tens of thousands swelled the ranks of ISIS and al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq, they remain a problem. As experts note, while a significant number of the spouses and children of foreign fighters may be trying to return to their home countries in the West, a vast majority of the fighters still alive remained behind and have been captured or have continued to fight in various battlespaces. As such, significant numbers remain at large.

d.   Embedding more international norms on counterterrorism into domestic legislation. Terrorism is a complex challenge for governments at the domestic and international levels. When faced with immediate public pressure to protect a population from terrorist threats, it can be tempting to use more open-ended and opaque solutions set to deal with the problem. Such solutions, however, run the risk of undermining the democratic principles at the heart of the Alliance and are counter to the established international humanitarian and human rights frameworks undergirding the current rules-based international order. Legal shortcuts at home may be a short-term solution but will likely only aggravate the long-term terrorism challenge.

e.   Increasing support to those international organisations working to mitigate the root causes of the cycles of violence and, therefore, to weak states, which engender much of the terrorist violence across the arc of instability along NATO's southern flank. The NATO 2030 initiative rightly calls for an expansion of the instruments available to Allies to manage the complex range of security challenges NATO faces, particularly a stronger role for the Alliance's political voice. While the Alliance will certainly continue to adapt, it is unlikely it will seek to equip itself with the instruments necessary to deal with the root causes of instability across its southern flank as described in the report – nor should it. Helping counter the root causes of terrorism is something at which other international organisations, particularly the United Nations, excel. By encouraging increased political and financial support to organisations like the UN, Allied governments can help support efforts to improve governance in those states impacted by the cycles of violence from armed terrorist groups. The UN, EU, and AU all have proven track records of helping states adhere to the rule of law, counter corruption, and reform their institutions. Combined with NATO's efforts to reform and strengthen security sectors of willing partner states, the cycles of violence can be broken. Greater investment by NATO on its southern flank, particularly in Africa, could then be achieved through the development of technical partnerships – counter-IED training; securing ammunition storage sites; training special forces – which should be defined according to the needs expressed by the countries of the region, while taking care not to duplicate or compete with bilateral or European initiatives, but rather to complement them.

f.   Allies must also maintain or provide concrete support to existing kinetic counterterrorism operations. The kinetic initiatives of France and the United States, as well as the active and self-sacrificing contributions of many other Allied countries, have proven effective at degrading terrorist networks by attritting their leadership, disrupting their sources of income and support, and eradicating safe spaces. When paired with the proper political and financial engagement with local governments, these efforts can go a long way to deny terrorism a foothold.

g.   Finally, Allied governments should not lose focus on counterterrorism efforts as they turn their attention to the broader global challenge of great-power competition. To argue the two are mutually exclusive is incorrect – as US AFRICOM Commander Stephen Townsend has noted: "In Africa, building partner capability is global power competition" (Townsend, 2020). By turning attention away from the global counterterrorism struggle, Allies would only give global competitors more opportunities to undermine the Alliance. Building reliable and stable partners in counterterrorism across the arc of instability will only serve to bolster Allies' broader efforts to strengthen the rules-based international order by building trust in democratic institution-building, fostering stronger diplomatic partnerships, increasing respect for human rights, and promoting mutually beneficial trade regimes.

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