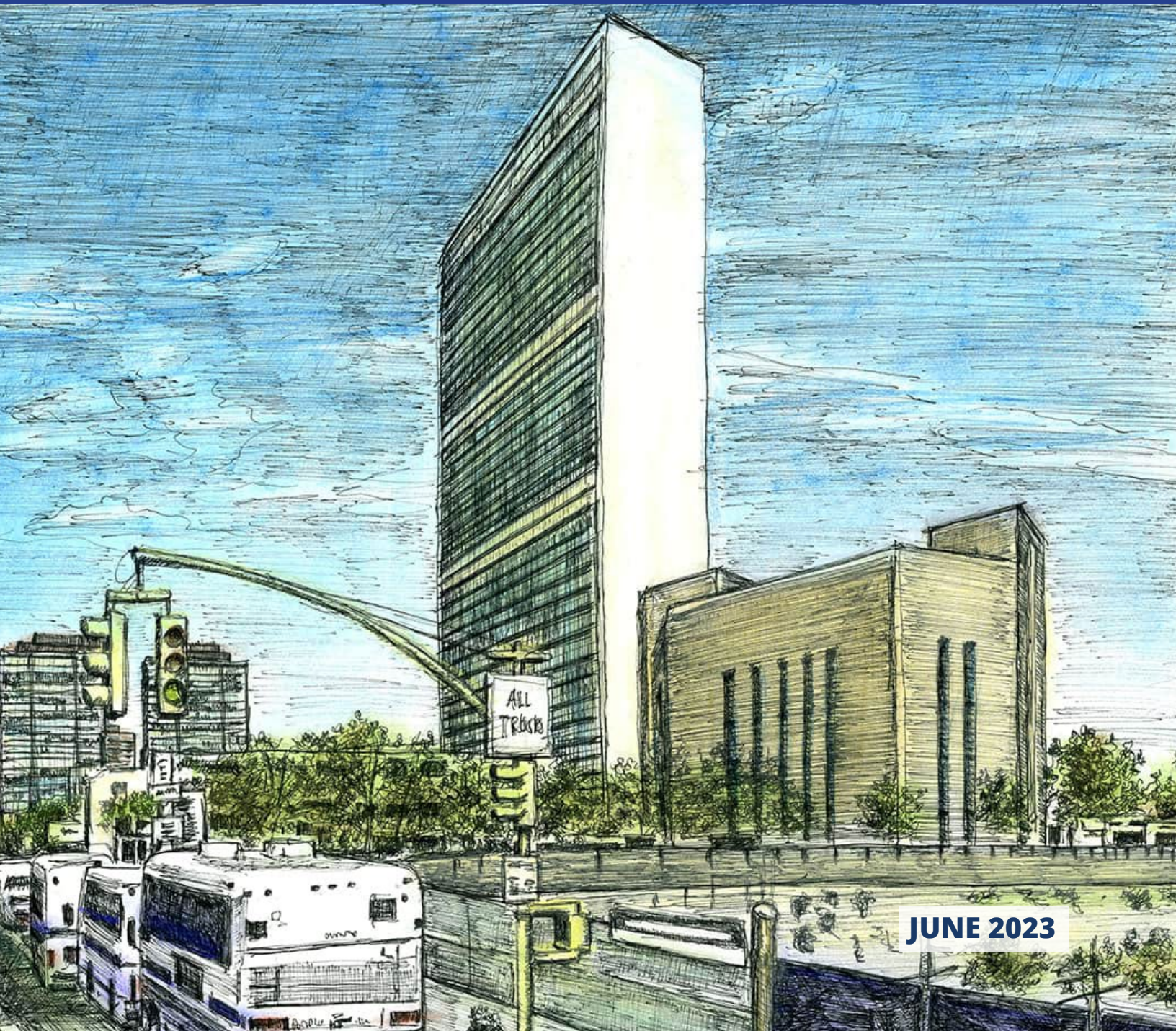


BLUE SKY VI

An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts



JUNE 2023

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS: Melissa Lefas, Tracey Durner,
Eelco Kessels, and Franziska Praxl-Tabuchi

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since 2012, the Global Center on Cooperative Security has released the latest version in its Blue Sky report series on the margins of the UN General Assembly's biennial review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. The series advances a central argument: the United Nations and its partners should take steps to optimize the comparative advantages of the organization in the spheres of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism. The reports focus on the United Nations' attributes as a strategic leader across its three pillars of human rights, peace and security, and development, including as a norm-setter, convener, provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field.

This report is informed by interviews with representatives of UN agencies and member states, academia, civil society groups, and human rights organizations, as well as various research. It has been enhanced by a multi-stakeholder dialogue held under nonattribution rules during a 2022 retreat on 25–27 May reflecting on Strategy implementation, a 2023 retreat on 7–8 March at the Tarrytown House Estate in New York, and a hybrid high-level event for civil society on 9 March at UN Headquarters in New York, which provided viewpoints concerning the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on UN system activities in implementing the Strategy. This report also draws from the Global Center's ongoing programming, research, and analysis, including its monthly roundtable series on varied thematic topics.

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ACRONYMS

CTC	Counter-Terrorism Committee (UN Security Council)
CTED	Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UN Security Council)
DPO	UN Department of Peace Operations
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
ICT	information and communications technology
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	UN Office of Internal Oversight Services
PBSO	UN Peacebuilding Support Office
PVE	preventing violent extremism
SPIB	Special Projects and Innovation Branch (UNOCT)
UN	United Nations
UNCCT	UN Counter-Terrorism Centre
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNDPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNOCT	UN Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime



Flags outside UN Headquarters in New York.

Executive Summary

This report, the sixth in the Global Center on Cooperative Security’s Blue Sky series, explores how the United Nations’ comparative advantage can be leveraged to improve the policy development, inter-agency coordination, delivery, and impact of counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts. It seeks to inform member states, UN entities, and other stakeholders as they prepare for the biennial review process for the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*. The report opens with a broad overview of changes in the security landscape and reflections on UN counterterrorism and PVE responses. Chapter two highlights key developments in the UN ecosystem since the seventh review of the Strategy, providing context and background to support member states, UN entities, and other stakeholders in situating core issues that are expected to emerge in the eighth review, as discussed in chapter three. The report concludes with recommendations on ensuring the United Nations’ counterterrorism and PVE efforts are fit for purpose.

The Strategy was adopted in 2006, a time when perspectives on the terrorism threat were dominated by al-Qaida and the Taliban. Today, the terrorism landscape is more dispersed, diverse, and dynamic. Years after the territorial defeat of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Syria, thousands of people continue to remain in squalid, sprawling camps and inhumane detention centers, with faltering repatriation efforts perpetuating a humanitarian crisis and acute security risks. Sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as an epicenter of terrorism activity, home to five of the top 10 countries most affected by terrorism in 2022 and suffering nearly half of all terrorism-related deaths. Afghanistan is now governed by the Taliban. In the West, violent right-wing extremism has increased steadily over the last decade, and attacks are often perpetuated by individuals with no formal affiliation to a recognized organization.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted declining multilateralism that threatens a unified response to terrorism and creates opportunities for states to further undermine international law, including international human rights law. The lack of a universal

definition of terrorism and the proliferation of repressive security measures to counter terrorism continue to play outsized roles in shrinking civic space and perpetuating serious, systemic human rights violations. By one measure, only 3.2 percent of the world’s population now lives in countries with open civic space.

This year, the eighth review of the Strategy offers an opportunity for member states to refine and direct the UN system toward a more right-sized, effective, and impactful counterterrorism and PVE agenda. This includes an opportunity to address key questions left unanswered in the seventh review: exploration of a grant-making function for the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT); integration of the rule of law, human rights, and gender issues; and development of a results framework to ensure comprehensive, balanced implementation of the Strategy. Although many questions linger, some positive developments have occurred since the seventh review, including the first international UN conference on the topic of human rights and counterterrorism and the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2664 establishing a landmark standing humanitarian “carve-out” within UN sanctions regimes.

Optimizing the UN Architecture

Within the UN counterterrorism architecture, mandates were renewed in 2021 for two key Security Council bodies: the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. Within the Secretariat, UNOCT has undergone rapid expansion and evolution since its founding in 2017. It has received more than \$340 million in voluntary contributions through the UN Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism, expanded to approximately 200 staff members, and opened a growing number of offices around the world.

With this growth comes a need for member states to review critically and guide the long-term operations of UNOCT to effectively realize its important leadership and coordination functions. UNOCT operationalized a dedicated human rights and gender section in

2022 and received approval to convert 25 positions previously funded through voluntary contributions into posts funded from the regular budget in 2023. A further conversion of 24 more posts to the regular budget looms on the horizon in 2024. As regular budget positions are very rarely abolished, these decisions crystallize UNOCT's structure and indicate prioritization of core functions. In 2023, UNOCT prioritized the conversion of positions within the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and the heads of branches. Some argue that regular budget positions help UNOCT achieve greater independence by reducing its reliance on voluntary contributions from individual donor states. Others stress that the regular budget positions must help recalibrate UNOCT's current overemphasis on programming, which often puts it in competition with other UN entities that have deep experience in capacity development and a well-established field presence.

In addition, long-term resourcing implications require careful and critical strategic consideration. UNOCT's 2023 projected budget of \$67.6 million indicates it will remain heavily reliant on extrabudgetary funding that is largely earmarked, reinforcing concerns about prioritization of programmatic work over leadership and coordination functions. Its current spend rate indicates there will be very few resources left in the trust fund by the middle of 2025, barring significant new contributions, raising concerns about voluntary contributions and the extent to which they may skew UNOCT priorities even with increased regular budget positions. Of note, two donors still account for 71 percent of total contributions to the trust fund: Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The current "pay to play" culture enables member states to pick and choose which aspects of the Strategy receive greater attention by earmarking funds thematically and geographically. A February 2023 audit of the trust fund by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services called for UNOCT to develop a resource mobilization strategy that focuses on diversifying its funding base and securing more sustainable, predictable funding.

The resolution of the seventh review of the Strategy requested the Secretary-General to undertake "a review to determine the most cost-effective mechanism for the provision of grants and payments to the

implementing partners" of UNOCT. The process has been delayed, offering member states the opportunity to further clarify and consider the request, including by understanding to whom UNOCT can currently disburse funds and on what conditions and thus for which specific beneficiaries they are seeking this grant-making mandate. UNOCT must make significant progress in mainstreaming civil society engagement and avoiding the instrumentalization of civil society or the limitation of its role to project implementation only. Effective grant-making also requires clear governing policies and procedures. Secretariat bodies typically do not have the accountability and management mechanisms to be good grant-making organizations.

UNOCT serves as the coordinator for the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, which has grown to become the largest coordination framework at the United Nations, with 40 members and six observers. The Compact has become gradually more active, hosting dozens of working group meetings, establishing an online digital coordination platform, and engaging in the joint delivery of programs. Yet, it is still finding its footing in many ways. The effectiveness of individual working groups is described as highly contingent on the ambitions, commitment, and personalities of their respective chairs, co-chairs, and vice chairs. Opportunities for civil society and UN country staff to participate in meetings are emerging but remain limited and ad hoc. As the Compact continues to evolve, the eighth review of the Strategy provides an opportunity for member states to encourage formalization, standardization, and optimization of Compact operations at the practical and strategic levels. Although a core selling point of the Compact was its potential to mobilize joint resources for coordinated UN efforts, some say it has resulted in intensified resource competition among its entities. Structural resource inequalities in the UN architecture further impact the ability of its members to contribute to its operations. The chronic, systemic underfunding of human rights efforts means that the entities that are called on the most to contribute in cross-cutting ways are the least well positioned to do so.

How the Compact can and should realize its comparative advantages in ensuring coherence across

counterterrorism and PVE efforts is also a point of debate. Compact entities typically receive only heavily redacted versions of CTED country assessments, leaving some to feel that CTED recommendations are cherry-picked to justify predeveloped programs and projects. Further concerns were expressed about the Compact undervaluing knowledge outside of the UN counterterrorism architecture from human rights mechanisms and reporting on progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as from non-UN entities such as academia, think tanks, and civil society.

A potential strength of the Compact is its ability to draw on the diverse expertise of its members to produce consensus guidance that assists member states in implementing counterterrorism and PVE measures in a manner consistent with their obligations under international law, including international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. Leveraging the Compact in this way embodies an “all of UN” approach by signaling unified agreement on desired practices and approaches. Critically, there is no procedure for Compact entities to indicate institutional redlines that are nonnegotiable. Absent an established process for reconciling feedback, some questioned how different contributions were being prioritized, respected, and meaningfully integrated.

Resource Mobilization

UNOCT, CTED, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime serve as co-chairs of the Compact Working Group on Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation. In this capacity, they lead the development of multiyear appeals that serve as the principal resource mobilization tool for UN counterterrorism efforts. The working group recently compiled a set of lessons learned from the second Multi-Year Appeal, which found that the appeal lacked a clear theory of change and value proposition. Although UNOCT vetted the 52 projects to ensure alignment with CTED assessments and human rights and gender mainstreaming objectives, there remains uncertainty regarding why certain projects were selected. Monitoring and evaluating the results of the appeal is also difficult given the lack of a standardized reporting framework among Compact entities.

Current planning is underway for a more targeted 2023 appeal focused on technical assistance provision for African member states, with its launch timed for the 2023 UN Counter-Terrorism Week. Taking onboard some of the lessons from the prior appeal, the 2023 appeal intends to focus on fewer initiatives that will be implemented jointly by Compact entities. It remains unclear if this is just a one-off change in scope and how the 2023 appeal will correlate to a theory of change or demonstrate its impact in driving forward balanced implementation of the Strategy by member states. The eighth review of the Strategy presents an opportunity to request this clarification and push for a more focused, collaborative approach to the appeal’s development. Importantly, the release of the next phase of the Multi-Year Appeal may predate decisions that impact its effective utilization. For example, the lessons learned report advises the establishment of a pooled fund to support strategic joint initiatives by two or more Compact entities. There are valid questions regarding whether a second counterterrorism fund is needed, especially given pending discussion on whether UNOCT should receive a grant-making mandate.

Integrating the Rule of Law, Human Rights, and Gender Commitments

Protecting and promoting human rights in counterterrorism and PVE efforts is discursively embraced by the General Assembly, but is not matched with the global political will, leadership, and accountability mechanisms necessary to uphold human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of all counterterrorism activities. In the eighth review of the Strategy, member states have an important opportunity to improve their oversight of UN efforts to implement the Strategy; ensure the integration of the rule of law, human rights, and gender considerations; and prevent and mitigate negative impacts of counterterrorism measures. By doing so, member states will be better placed to assess the United Nations’ strengths and weaknesses in advancing balanced implementation of the Strategy.

In his 2023 report on the activities of the UN system in implementing the Strategy, the Secretary-General described appropriate internal technical capacity on

rule of law, human rights, and gender issues as a “necessary precondition” for the integration of human rights and gender-responsive measures in UN counterterrorism efforts. Dedicated capacities to realize these, however, are scant. It has also proven difficult to achieve system-wide gender and human rights mainstreaming objectives, which requires going beyond the baseline gender and human rights benchmarks being developed by the Compact’s victims and human rights and gender working groups. Across UNOCT and the Compact, the tools and resources necessary for program managers to conduct human rights risk and opportunity analysis, including gender-sensitive analysis and application of the human rights due diligence policy, are fragmented and woefully underdeveloped, considering the serious consequences of the counterterrorism agenda on human rights.

Meaningful Engagement With Diverse Civil Society

Despite some recent improvements, civil society participation in UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts remains ad hoc, opaque, and reliant on the priorities and interests of individual member states and Compact entities. Multiple important civil society consultation processes are taking place in 2023, including the global study of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the negative impact of counterterrorism measures on civic space and a scoping project assessing civil society interests, obstacles, and practical requirements for establishing more regularized and sustained engagement with the UN counterterrorism architecture organized by the Global Center in partnership with Rights & Security International.

For the first time since the Strategy’s adoption in 2006, negative impacts of counterterrorism measures were mentioned in the preambular language of the resolution of the seventh review of the Strategy. The eighth review provides an opportunity to further strengthen existing language to acknowledge the risks of targeted reprisals against civil society when engaging and associating with the United Nations, especially on sensitive topics such as human rights and counterterrorism. All


UN entities have a responsibility to protect, promote, and sustain civil society participation. UNOCT, including as secretariat of the Compact, must take a lead in these efforts in partnership with diverse civil society.

Measuring Strategy Implementation

Previous reports in the Blue Sky series have emphasized extensively the need for a comprehensive UN monitoring and evaluation framework to assess implementation of the Strategy across three levels of analysis: global, institutional, and programmatic. The need for evaluation remains urgent, but is stymied by a lack of nuanced conversation about what needs to be evaluated, by whom, and for what purpose.

At the global level, evaluation efforts should focus on the efficacy of the Strategy in orienting human rights-based counterterrorism and PVE measures, while accounting for their negative consequences on human security, human rights, and civic space. Currently, the biennial Secretary-General’s report serves as the principal mechanism for taking stock of and communicating progress made in the implementation of the Strategy, most prominently by the UN system. Although useful to take stock of some of the diverse actions being undertaken, the report falls short in comprehensively and objectively assessing progress and impact.

Evaluating progress at the institutional level involves examining whether the structure, resourcing, and collective efforts of the UN counterterrorism architecture are advancing balanced implementation of the Strategy. The intent is to assess the impact of the United Nations and its counterterrorism and PVE policies and programs against the priorities set out by member states in the reviews of the Strategy. A comprehensive institutional assessment has not been achieved, but several evaluations and audits have endeavored to improve more narrow components of the architecture and system. These evaluations and audits offer valuable recommendations that apply to the scope of their purview. Yet, such a piecemeal approach fails to capture a system-wide view to assess the support of UN entities in the balanced implementation of the Strategy.



Given the continued growth in programmatic investment and the mounting negative impacts of counterterrorism efforts, the inability of the United Nations to capture data and assess impact is seriously concerning. To realize effective monitoring and evaluation, member states will need to demand it from UN counterterrorism entities, resource it, and hold the UN system as a whole accountable for it. Improved monitoring and evaluation efforts must sit alongside parallel actions to

promote accountability and transparency in member state actions to address terrorism and advance balanced implementation of the Strategy at the national and global levels. Doing so will provide a critical evidence base to inform negotiations on the Strategy to ensure that the review process results in meaningful recalibration that addresses emerging threats and remains true to the core principles enshrined in the Strategy.



The UN flag is displayed during the 76th General Assembly at UN Headquarters in New York.

INTRODUCTION

Adopted by consensus in 2006 by the UN General Assembly, the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* provides a comprehensive framework for preventing and countering terrorism that was a landmark in its time for its focus on addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and defining the relationship between counterterrorism measures and the protection of human rights as “complementary and mutually reinforcing.”¹

Every two years, member states review the Strategy to reflect on the changing nature of terrorism threats, assess UN and member state implementation, and set priorities (box 1). The review of the Strategy results in a General Assembly resolution that guides member states in their efforts to prevent and counter terrorism while it directs the normative role of the United Nations, assesses its complex counterterrorism architecture, and focuses its counterterrorism efforts.

The fifth report in the Blue Sky series, released in 2020 by the Global Center on Cooperative Security, serves as a reference guide that unpacks the complex web of UN entities engaging in counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) efforts and should be consulted as such in conjunction with this report. It noted the dramatic expansion of and investments in the UN counterterrorism architecture and the proliferation of member state obligations, which have resulted in a disproportionate amount of attention on technical assistance at the cost of greater leadership and coordination of relevant UN actors and actions.²

Against the backdrop of declining multilateralism and rising global authoritarianism, observers worry this ballooning counterterrorism architecture is emerging as an informal pillar alongside the United Nations’ peace and security, development, and human rights pillars, noting the ways in which its growing presence has already altered the priorities of many UN funds, agencies, and programs.³ The conversion

of a significant number of posts in the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) from voluntary to regular budget funding, coupled with key mandate renewals for the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team,⁴ indicate that the UN counterterrorism architecture has been solidifying since the seventh review of the Strategy, in 2021.

Most of the concerns about the expansive nature of counterterrorism efforts at the United Nations stem from the chronic underfunding and underprioritization of the fourth pillar of the Strategy—a reflection of a wider systemic imbalance whereby human rights issues receive less than 4 percent of the total UN budget. UN-wide efforts to protect and promote civic space and to ensure gender-sensitive approaches are lagging. There are also concerns about the possible effect of counterterrorism efforts on the United Nations’ broader peace and security work, as evidenced by the mixed reviews for UNOCT’s appointment as one of the four co-chairs for an ongoing process to develop the “New Agenda for Peace.”

This report is the sixth in the Global Center’s Blue Sky series of independent assessments on how the United Nations can improve balanced implementation of the Strategy by leveraging its comparative advantage as a norm-setter, convener, provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the fields of counterterrorism and PVE. It opens with a broad overview of changes in the security landscape and reflections on UN counterterrorism and PVE responses. Chapter two highlights key developments in the UN ecosystem since the seventh review of the Strategy, providing context and background to support member states, UN entities, and other stakeholders in situating core issues that are expected to emerge in the eighth

1 UN General Assembly, *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006, annex, para. IV.

2 Global Center on Cooperative Security, “Blue Sky V: An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts,” November 2020, p. 7, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/GCCS-Blue-Sky-V-2020.pdf>.

3 See, e.g., Ali Altiok and Jordan Street, “A Fourth Pillar for the United Nations? The Rise of Counter-terrorism,” Saferworld, June 2020, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/ct-textpp-final-file.pdf>.

4 The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team was created pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1526 and Resolution 2253 concerning the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Daesh), al-Qaida, and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities.

Box 1. Reviewing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, adopted by consensus in 2006 in the form of a General Assembly resolution and a plan of action, contains four pillars.^a

Pillar I	Pillar II	Pillar III	Pillar IV
Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism	Measures to prevent and combat terrorism	Measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard	Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism

The General Assembly reviews the Strategy every two years. Although there is no prescribed, standardized procedure, the review generally follows a similar process each time. The President of the General Assembly appoints two co-facilitators for consultations with member states on the outcome of the review. In October 2022, the permanent representatives of Canada and Tunisia were announced to facilitate the eighth review. The Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) has served as the secretariat of the review process by supporting edits to the resolution of the review, ensuring it appropriately aligns with past resolutions and other UN documents and processes, and addressing questions from member states relating to past resolutions, mandates, and activities.

The review process formally begins when the Secretary-General submits a report to the General Assembly on the activities of the UN system in implementing the Strategy.^b In preparing the report, UNOCT invites member states, UN entities, and civil society to submit updates on and assessments of implementation. The 2023 report included submissions from 42 member states, five regional organizations, 19 entities participating in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, and 23 civil society organizations.^c

Shortly after the report's release, UNOCT organizes a briefing for member states to present the highlights of the report and allow for a discussion among participants. The co-facilitators then develop a zero draft of the review resolution based on the previous review's resolution, initial discussions with member states, and the Secretary-General's report. The zero draft is given a first

reading by the UN membership, commencing the first round of negotiations.

Subsequently, member states hold several rounds of informal meetings to work toward an agreed text. Some of them may volunteer as "burden sharers" or may establish working groups to work with colleagues to find agreement on specific thematic areas. Formal negotiation rounds are planned at critical points in the process.

A date set for adoption of the resolution is presented by the co-facilitators and validated by member states. Since the sixth review, in 2018, adoption of the resolution has been timed to coincide with the biannual UN Counter-Terrorism Week held in late June.

Generally, the negotiations take place behind closed doors and offer no formal opportunities for nonstate stakeholders to participate. Nevertheless, engagement with nongovernmental actors has increased, most notably during the process for the seventh review by its co-facilitators, the permanent representatives of Oman and Spain. UNOCT also took incremental steps in 2022 to provide civil society with opportunities for input beyond written submissions, including a virtual meeting held for a group of civil society representatives in December 2022. The Global Center on Cooperative Security, in close cooperation with the co-facilitators, organized a high-level civil society-led event to share reflections on the Secretary-General's report. The event was held on 9 March 2023, the day of the first reading of the zero draft.^d It was followed by a town hall for member states to engage with civil society on the margins of the second formal round of negotiations. These activities demonstrate an evolution in

the process, with co-facilitators recently providing more regular avenues for nongovernmental actors

to contribute to the discussion of the review of the Strategy.

- a UN General Assembly, *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, A/RES/60/288, 20 September 2006.
- b UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/77/718, 2 February 2023.
- c *Ibid.*, annex I.
- d United Nations, “Civil Society Reflections on the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy,” UN Web TV, 9 March 2023, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k18/k18h8jrcps>.

review, as discussed in chapter three. The report concludes with recommendations to realize the United Nations’ comparative advantage on counterterrorism and PVE issues.

EVOLUTIONS IN THE TERRORISM LANDSCAPE

The Strategy was developed at a time when perspectives on the terrorism threat were dominated by the activities of al-Qaida and the Taliban. Today, the terrorism landscape is more dispersed, diverse, and dynamic than when the Strategy was first adopted. The rapid evolution and expansion of new technologies continue to create new opportunities and challenges.

The deaths of key group leaders, including al-Qaida’s Ayman al-Zawahiri in August 2022, Boko Haram’s Abubakar Shekau in May 2021, and two emirs of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), have led to divisions and splinters. The Sahel and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa have seen affiliates of al-Qaida and ISIL continue to operate with relative impunity while contributing to dangerous levels of instability and human insecurity. On the continent, terrorist groups are intermingling with nonstate armed groups and organized crime groups. Worldwide, more than 88 percent of terrorist attacks and 98 percent of the resulting deaths in 2022 occurred in countries with ongoing violent conflict, where groups fuel violence and instability, undermine peace efforts, and hinder humanitarian aid and development efforts.⁵ That same year, just 10 countries accounted for 85 percent of all



Photo by Trent Inness/Shutterstock

Al-Hol refugee camp in northern Syria.

deaths from terrorism: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Mali, Niger, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, Syria, and Pakistan.⁶ Accountability for terrorism crimes remains low globally.⁷

Some national policies ushered in a wave of defections and surrenders among individuals associated with violent extremism, including across the Lake Chad Basin region where efforts to develop strategies for prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration need concerted attention. In Syria, thousands continue to remain in squalid, sprawling camps in the northeast, as well as inhumane detention centers, perpetuating a humanitarian crisis and acute security risks. Although some states have expanded their repatriation efforts, not enough is being done.

Violent right-wing extremism continues to pose a threat, principally but not limited to states in the West. The wide-ranging ideologies that drive these groups

5 Institute for Economics & Peace, “Global Counterterrorism Index 2023: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism,” *IEP Report*, no. 88 (March 2023), p. 2, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-270323.pdf>.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

7 The Soufan Center, “Bringing Terrorists to Justice: Prosecuting ISIL War Crimes and Terrorism,” *TSC Issue Brief*, June 2021, https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/TSC-Issue-Brief_Bringing-Terrorists-to-Justice_June-2021.pdf.

include neo-Nazism, anti-immigrant attitudes, misogyny, and antigovernment sentiments. In the West, political terrorism exceeded religiously motivated terrorism fivefold in 2021, a trend that continued in 2022.⁸

Declining multilateralism and growing authoritarianism, fueled by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and heavy-handed responses to public demonstrations and the COVID-19 pandemic, have further politicized counterterrorism efforts. Repressive state measures have worsened. Civil society organizations often find themselves to be the target of terrorists and security forces. The lack of an international definition of terrorism and the proliferation of repressive security measures to counter terrorism and its financing have played an outsized role in shrinking civic space, alongside a deterioration of such other rights as freedom of expression and association.⁹ By one measure, only 3.2 percent of the world's population lives in countries with open civic space.¹⁰

EVOLUTIONS IN THE UN RESPONSE

The continued absence of a universal definition of terrorism has restricted efforts to establish an international jurisprudence and crystallization of customary law. At the same time, overly broad and vague terminology, including more recent attempts to define violent right-wing extremism, is also harmful. Although the potential effect on state practice should not be overstated, the lack of a unified legal framework has a downstream effect on the adoption of human rights-based counterterrorism policies and practices, including the ability of the global system to hold states accountable for the abuse and misuse of terrorism frameworks.

Initial counterterrorism and security measures were negotiated through the treaty and convention process, which has largely been sidelined in the last two decades. Instead, the Security Council has been at the forefront in mobilizing global action in response



UN Photo

UN peacekeepers of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

to terrorism threats, with periods of intense activity corresponding with global spikes in terrorist activity. In addition to sanctions regimes established in the late 1990s, the Security Council adopted eight counterterrorism resolutions in the three years following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States. After a 10-year pause, the rise of ISIL was met with the adoption of a further 18 resolutions between 2014 and 2019.¹¹ For many member states, it has been difficult to keep pace with the sheer volume of obligations to prevent and counter terrorism, as well as far-reaching and technical requirements, notably in relation to biometrics and Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Records.

There are questions about the suitability of the Security Council's outsized role in driving counterterrorism norms, noting the structural dominance afforded to its five permanent members and their veto power. Elected members are seen to leverage their position sometimes to secure resolutions on key national priorities. There are concerns that the Security Council has underprioritized critical safeguards for human rights and humanitarian action.

The Strategy represented an important leadership moment for the General Assembly. Through its adoption, the full membership provided a consensus-based,

8 Vision of Humanity, "Global Terrorism Index 2022: Key Findings in 6 Charts," n.d., <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/global-terrorism-index-2022-key-findings-in-6-charts/> (accessed 6 April 2023).

9 See Ben Saul, "The Legal Black Hole in United Nations Counterterrorism," International Peace Institute, 2 June 2021, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/06/the-legal-black-hole-in-united-nations-counterterrorism/>.

10 CIVICUS, "Civic Space in Numbers," 16 March 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/facts/>.

11 "United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Resolutions," n.d., https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil.ctc/files/unscr_infographic.pdf.

normative counterweight to the hard security–centric counterterrorism agenda initially prescribed by the Security Council. The Strategy was groundbreaking for its recognition that respect for human rights and the rule of law are the fundamental bases for the fight against terrorism and its emphasis on preventative measures that address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. The latter was furthered in 2015 through the Secretary-General’s plan of action to prevent violent extremism.¹²

The process for review of the Strategy provides a routine opportunity for member states to guide and recalibrate counterterrorism norms and practices at the United Nations. Counterterrorism efforts in general and the Strategy in particular ostensibly retain widespread support among member states, which can be perceived as a strength and a weakness. The consensus adoption of the Strategy and of all seven of its biennial review resolutions sends an important political message of unity, but it also lends itself to a more political than strategic process for determining substance and priorities, creating vulnerabilities based on prevailing political climates. This has led some to question the frequency of reviews and the value of seeking the lowest common denominator among states, compared to the potential for more forceful change presented by a voted resolution.¹³

It is also fair to apply a critical eye to the expansive nature of the resolutions for the review of the Strategy. The 2021 co-facilitators managed to streamline that year’s resolution by reorganizing it around the

Strategy’s four pillars, but the number of operative paragraphs still grew by 38 percent, from 86 in 2018 to 119 in 2021, with many remaining cross-cutting in nature and thus not easily placed under a single pillar. Observers have raised concerns about which issues “secure ink” in the review resolutions, as well as which parts of the Strategy are meaningfully advanced by member states and supported through the actions of the UN counterterrorism architecture.

One critical, pervasive area of underimplementation remains Pillar IV, on human rights and the rule of law. There have been recent efforts to mainstream human rights and gender equality issues across the work of the United Nations, but that realization has fallen short of meaningfully advancing the promotion and protection of human rights in counterterrorism efforts globally. States continue to abuse and misuse measures to counter terrorism and its financing to target political dissidents, constrict civic space, and justify infringements on fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression and association and individual rights to privacy and data protection. This suggests that the practical implementation of the Strategy has not lived up to the normative promise that it would recalibrate an understanding of effective counterterrorism practice. If the Strategy was intended to mark a departure from the failings of the “Global War on Terror,” then more robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate its contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism are imperative.

12 UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674*, 24 December 2015. The plan of action was helpful in reasserting the importance of an inclusive whole-of-society approach that focuses on addressing the root causes of terrorism, although it has raised concerns regarding the further securitization of traditional peace, development, and rule of law efforts, with significant risks associated with stigmatization and marginalization. See UN General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism, A/HRC/43/46*, 21 February 2020.

13 Naureen Chowdhury Fink, “Form Over Function? Reviewing the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy,” *TSC Issue Brief*, February 2023, pp. 6–7, <https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/TSC-Issue-Brief-Form-Over-Function.-Reviewing-the-UN-Global-Counterterrorism-Strategy-Feb-2023.pdf>.



Clouds over UN Headquarters in New York.

SINCE THE SEVENTH REVIEW

The Strategy review process is meant to enable reflection on counterterrorism efforts to date and orient strategic priorities for the future. To provide context for those discussions, this chapter highlights key developments in the UN ecosystem since the adoption of the seventh review of the Strategy in 2021 (box 2), prioritizing structural, institutional, and policy changes that are likely to influence the way the United Nations executes its counterterrorism agenda in the years ahead.¹⁴

OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM

Among his first actions as part of the broader reforms to the UN system, the Secretary-General established UNOCT within the Secretariat in 2017 and appointed Vladimir Voronkov as Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism. UNOCT's mandate includes providing leadership on the General Assembly's counterterrorism efforts; enhancing coordination and coherence of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact; strengthening the delivery of UN capacity-building assistance to member states to ensure balanced implementation of the Strategy; improving visibility, advocacy, and resource mobilization for UN counterterrorism efforts; and ensuring due emphasis of counterterrorism efforts across the UN system.¹⁵

The decision to centralize all UN counterterrorism efforts differs from broader reform efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General that sought to ensure the United Nations is a “field-based organization” with decentralized decision-making. The differing approaches have created conceptual and practical challenges that are still being reconciled. For example, at the national level, UN peace-building and sustainable development activities are organized through a cooperation framework signed with the host government. The framework is underpinned by a UN common

country assessment and implemented through a UN country team led by the Resident Coordinator. UNOCT is not part of the country team and does not contribute to the common assessment or coordinate its activities via the cooperation framework. Some view this as reinforcing siloes between counterterrorism and peace and development efforts, while others feel it protects peace and development work from oversecuritization.

UNOCT has continued to evolve in the six years since its founding, underpinned by more than \$340 million in voluntary contributions and steadily expanding to nearly 200 posts in 2023. In the seventh review of the Strategy, member states invited the Secretary-General to assess UNOCT finances and provide budgetary recommendations. In response, UNOCT developed a technical assessment in the latter half of 2021 that highlighted its heavy reliance on a small donor base and lack of predictable funding as key vulnerabilities to the sustainability of its mandate and emphasized the need to strengthen core functions of program governance, monitoring and evaluation, and information management.¹⁶ To address this, it proposed shifting 49 positions currently funded through extra-budgetary resources, principally from Qatar, onto the regular budget, adding to the eight existing regular budget posts for UNOCT.¹⁷ The positions were described as covering critical UNOCT functions, such as leadership, coordination, human rights and gender issues, administration, and evaluation.¹⁸ The request for additional UNOCT posts was larger than the requests made for any other department or office in the Secretariat in the 2023 regular budget. This raised questions among member states and UN observers about the Secretary-General's intentions, noting that counterterrorism activities are not highlighted among the commitment areas or key proposals in his 2021

¹⁴ UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Seventh Review*, A/RES/75/291, 2 July 2021 (hereinafter seventh review resolution).

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, *Capability of the United Nations System to Assist Member States in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/71/858, 3 April 2017, para. 64.

¹⁶ UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs*, A/77/6 (Sect. 3), 3 May 2022, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–130.

Box 2. Shaping the Dialogue

Following is a partial listing of meetings, briefings, and events held since the seventh review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* to assist stakeholders in tracking emergent issues and parallel processes that will intersect with the eighth review of the Strategy.

MAY 2022 The Government of Spain and the Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) held the High-Level International Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society, and Counterterrorism in Malaga, the first UN conference of its kind to have these issues as the main theme and to have engaged civil society holistically.^c

JANUARY 2022 The Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate released a study on the impact of counterterrorism measures on humanitarian action in the context of armed conflict and on linkages between terrorism and serious violations of international humanitarian law.^a

MAY 2022 A global series of civil society consultations and a workshop preceding the Malaga conference led by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism generated an outcome document, elevating existing recommendations and joint findings of civil society on the implementation of the Strategy, particularly on the meaningful participation of civil society and the promotion and protection of human rights.^b

MAY 2022 The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published its annual report, which addressed the relationships among equality, nondiscrimination, and counterterrorism, focusing on the extent to which state responses to terrorism adhere to the rights to equality and nondiscrimination in accordance with international human rights law.^d

a UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, *The Interrelationship Between Counter-terrorism Frameworks and International Humanitarian Law*, January 2022, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/files/documents/2022/Jan/cted_ihl_ct_jan_2022.pdf.

b "2022 Civil Society Workshop Outcome Document," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/sr>

/civilsocietyworkshop-malaga/2022-08-16/Civil-Society-Workshop-Outcome-Document-Malaga-Spain.pdf.

c UNOCT, "2022 UNOCT Malaga Conference," n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/2022-UNOCT-Malaga-Conference> (accessed 7 April 2023).

d UN General Assembly, *Terrorism and Human Rights: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, A/HRC/50/49, 12 May 2022.

report *Our Common Agenda* and remain seemingly isolated from the rest of the United Nations' efforts.¹⁹

The Secretary-General ultimately agreed with the conclusions of the assessment and on a phased approach to implementation: 25 posts in the proposed 2023 program budget and the remaining 24 posts to be proposed in 2024.²⁰ Although the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions disagreed with three of the 25 proposed conversions and more generally proposed a gradual and cautious approach,²¹ the General Assembly's Fifth Committee decided in

December 2022 to approve conversion of all 25 positions in the 2023 budget, bringing the current total of regular budget posts for UNOCT to 33 (table 1).

The vast majority (14) of the posts that were converted fall within the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, four went to the Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section, and four posts were converted within the Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch. Critically, five were allocated to the newly established Human Rights and Gender Section, although three of those are

19 UN General Assembly, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/75/982, 5 August 2021. See Eugene Chen, "Expanded Regular Budget Funding and a Grant-Making Mandate for UNOCT," *Global Center on Cooperative Security Policy Brief*, August 2022, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/GCCS-PB-expanded-regular-budget-funding-grant-making-mandate-for-UNOCT-2022.pdf>.

20 UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023*, p. 130.

21 UN General Assembly, *Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: First Report on the Proposed Programme Budget for 2023*, A/77/7, 18 August 2022, para. II.62.

SEPTEMBER 2022 The UN Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism enabled those affected by terrorism to exchange experiences and stories of resilience and to advocate for the strengthening of their rights and fulfillment of their needs.^f

OCTOBER 2022 The Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee held a special meeting in India on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorism purposes, resulting in the adoption of the nonbinding Delhi Declaration.^g

AUGUST 2022 The Secretary-General released a report on terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance or in the name of religious belief, calling on member states to develop and implement comprehensive, whole-of-society national action plans.^e

SUMMER 2023 The Special Rapporteur is expected to release the first independent global study to assess the impact of counterterrorism measures on civil society and civic space.^h

e UN General Assembly, *Terrorist Attacks on the Basis of Xenophobia, Racism and Other Forms of Intolerance, or in the Name of Religion or Belief: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/77/266, 3 August 2022.

f UNOCT, “2022 UN Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/2022-un-global-congress-victims-terrorism> (accessed 7 April 2023).

g UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, “Delhi Declaration on Countering the Use of New and Emerging

Technologies for Terrorist Purposes,” 29 October 2022, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/outcome_document_ctc_special_mtg_final_e.pdf.

h Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Civil Society and Civic Space,” n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism/global-study-impact-counter-terrorism-measures-civil-society-and-civic-space> (accessed 7 April 2023).

General Service positions. That section also has five positions currently funded through extrabudgetary support derived from project support costs.

The distribution of converted regular budget posts solidifies the organizational chart of the UNOCT, while placing emphasis on the office’s policy leadership, coordination, and coherence functions (fig. 1). By prioritizing positions within the Office of the Under-Secretary-General, some argue UNOCT has achieved a modicum of independence by reducing the need to court large-scale donors to secure financial support for its core functions. Yet, this does not necessarily resolve UNOCT coordination issues or its continued overemphasis on and extrabudgetary funding for program delivery through its Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) and Special Projects and Innovation Branch (SPIB)—in fact, quite the opposite.

UNOCT also has continued growing its global presence, with the number of staff outside of New York rising from 40 positions in 2022 to 55 in 2023. Staff work in program and project support offices and in

liaison and coordination offices (table 2). Discussions are underway about further expansion, including in Iraq to support a prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration program. The selection of locations seems arbitrary, does not seem to be directly correlated to the terrorism threat or geographic priorities, and is often based on a host state offering to accommodate a UNOCT presence. Some UNOCT posts are situated where other UN entities, including other counterterrorism actors, have an existing staff presence, giving rise to questions about the decision-making and coordination process.

GLOBAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COORDINATION COMPACT

The Compact seeks to advance an “all of UN” approach that leverages multidimensional expertise to support member states, at their request, in the balanced implementation of the Strategy and other relevant UN resolutions and mandates. The Compact comprises 40 members and six observers.²² Since the last review of the Strategy, three new members

22 UNOCT, “UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Entities,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/global-ct-compact/entities> (accessed 7 April 2023).

Table 1. UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Posts, by Regular and Extrabudgetary Funding, 2022–2023

UNIT	REGULAR BUDGET		EXTRABUDGETARY		TOTAL POSTS	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism	2	14	16	11	18	25
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre	2	1	77	71	79	72
Special Projects and Innovation Branch	0	1	40	45	40	46
Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section	1	5	10	5	11	10
Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch	3	7	30	28	33	35
Human Rights and Gender Section	n/a	5	n/a	5	n/a	10
TOTAL	8	33	173	165	181	198

Sources: UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/77/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2022, p. 139; UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2022: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/76/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2021, p. 156.



UN Photo

Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov (l.) and Secretary-General António Guterres during the opening session of the ninth meeting of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee.

have joined: the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and the International Monetary Fund.

The work of the Compact is organized through eight thematic interagency working groups that are aligned with the four pillars of the Strategy and the priorities of member states (fig. 2). A Coordination Committee, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General and composed of representatives from Compact entities and the chairs and vice chairs of its working groups,

provides oversight and strategic-level guidance to the working groups. The UNOCT Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch serves as Compact secretariat.

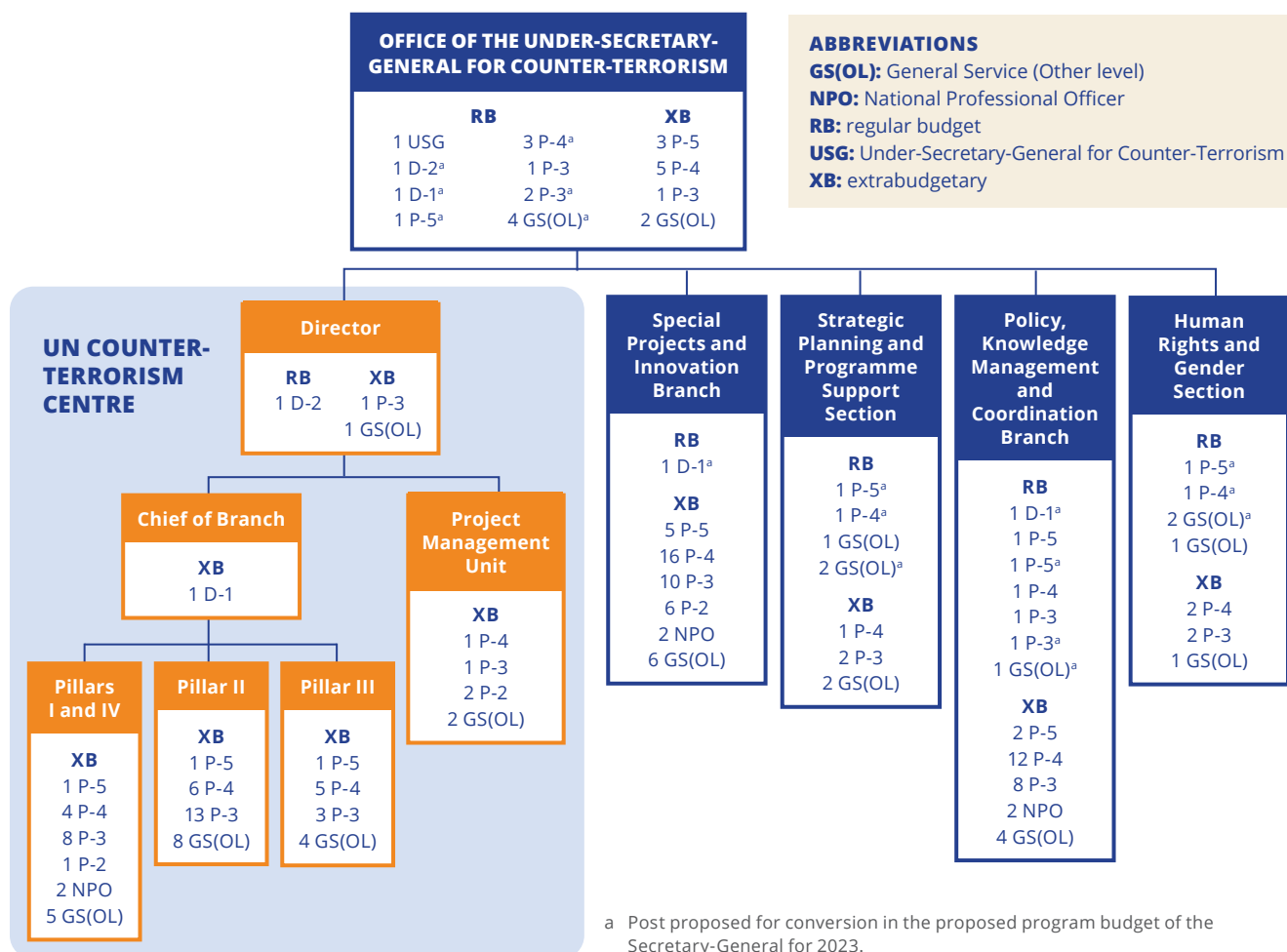
A password-restricted digital platform was launched in March 2020 to facilitate the Compact's work and coordination within the UN system and with member states. It currently has almost 1,000 registered users from member states, international organizations, and Compact entities. Its resource library contains more than 2,800 uploaded documents.²³

Operational for six years, the Compact has become gradually more active, hosting dozens of working group meetings, exchanging and reviewing documents through the digital platform, and engaging Compact entities in the joint delivery of programs. During 2017–2020, UNOCT provided \$2.3 million in seed funding to Compact working groups, supporting 20 joint projects including the development of guidelines, tool kits, research products, and pilot capacity development projects. Thirteen initiatives have been completed, and seven are ongoing. Since 2020, no new seed funding has been made available.

References to the Compact in the resolution of the review of the Strategy rose from 18 in the resolution of the sixth review to 29 in the resolution of the seventh,

²³ "United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in Review 2022," n.d., https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org/counterterrorism/files/221223_global_compact_year_in_review_2022_web.pdf.

Figure 1. Proposed 2023 UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Organizational Structure



Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism
 The office, which is headed by a Chief of Office, supports the Under-Secretary-General in carrying out responsibilities and is composed of three sections responsible for front office operations and communications, donor relations and resource mobilization, and appeal management and coordination with the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)
 UNCCT provides capacity-building assistance to support member states' efforts to counter terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism, based on the UNCCT Vision Statement, the UNCCT Five-Year Plan, and the guidance of the UNCCT Advisory Board, which has been headed by its biggest sponsor, Saudi Arabia, since its inception.

Special Projects and Innovation Branch
 This branch is responsible for leading the conceptualization, development, and implementation of special technical assistance programs that require increased coordination and partnership with other UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact entities, UNCCT, member states, the private sector, and academia.

Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch
 This branch provides strategic policy advice and analysis, drafts and coordinates the preparation of reports of the Secretary-General on counterterrorism, serves as the Compact secretariat, and supports relevant intergovernmental processes as mandated, including the biennial review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*.

Human Rights and Gender Section
 This section is newly created and operational since 1 January 2022 and reports to the Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General. It serves as the Office of Counter-Terrorism's (UNOCT's) lead on topics related to human rights, gender mainstreaming, women's empowerment, and intersectionality and consists of a Human Rights Unit and a Gender Unit.

Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section
 This section houses the secretariat of the Project Review Board and is responsible for strategic planning of UNOCT activities. It carries out several administrative functions, including the development of budget proposals and risk assessments and the coordination of UNOCT activities with the Department of Safety and Security and in accordance with the Security Management System.

Note: Two P-3s and three GS(OL)s are located in the joint Executive Office of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Department of Peace Operations to support the UNOCT.

Sources: UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/77/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2022, p. 139; UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Office Structure," n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/office-structure> (accessed 28 April 2023).

Table 2. UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Program and Liaison Offices, 2022

LOCATION	STAFF (BY CLASSIFICATION AND SECTION)	NO. OF STAFF
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan	One P-3 (UN Counter-Terrorism Centre [UNCCT] Pillar III)	1
Bangkok, Thailand	One P-4 and one GS(OL) (UNCCT Pillar III)	2
Brussels, Belgium	One P-4 (Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism)	1
Budapest, Hungary	Two P-3s (UNCCT Pillar II) Three P-3s (Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch) One P-5, three P-4s, three P-3s, one P-2, and two GS(OL)s (Special Projects and Innovation Branch) One P-5, one P-4, one P-3, and one GS(OL) (Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section)	19
Doha, Qatar	One P-5, three P-4s, two NPOs, and two GS(OL)s (Policy, Knowledge Management and Coordination Branch) One P-5, two P-4s, one P-3, and one P-2 (Special Projects and Innovation Branch)	13
Jakarta, Indonesia	One NPO (UNCCT Pillar I and Pillar IV)	1
Madrid, Spain	Two P-4s, two P-3s, and one GS(OL) (Special Projects and Innovation Branch)	5
Manila, Philippines	One NPO (UNCCT Pillar I and Pillar IV) One P-4 and one NPO (Special Projects and Innovation Branch)	3
Nairobi, Kenya	One P-4 and one GS(OL) (UNCCT Pillar III)	2
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso	One P-3 (UNCCT Pillar III)	1
Rabat, Morocco	One P-5, one P-4, two P-3s, one P-2, one NPO, and one GS(OL) (Special Projects and Innovation Branch)	7
TOTAL		55

Note: GS(OL) - General Service (Other level); NPO - National Professional Officer.

Source: UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/77/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2022, p. 139.

signaling its increasing importance to member states. The references encourage continued engagement with civil society, the private sector, and member states; field engagement with UN country teams and presences; close cooperation with regional and subregional organizations; and focused and integrated delivery of capacity-building assistance to requesting member states on a range of counterterrorism and PVE measures.

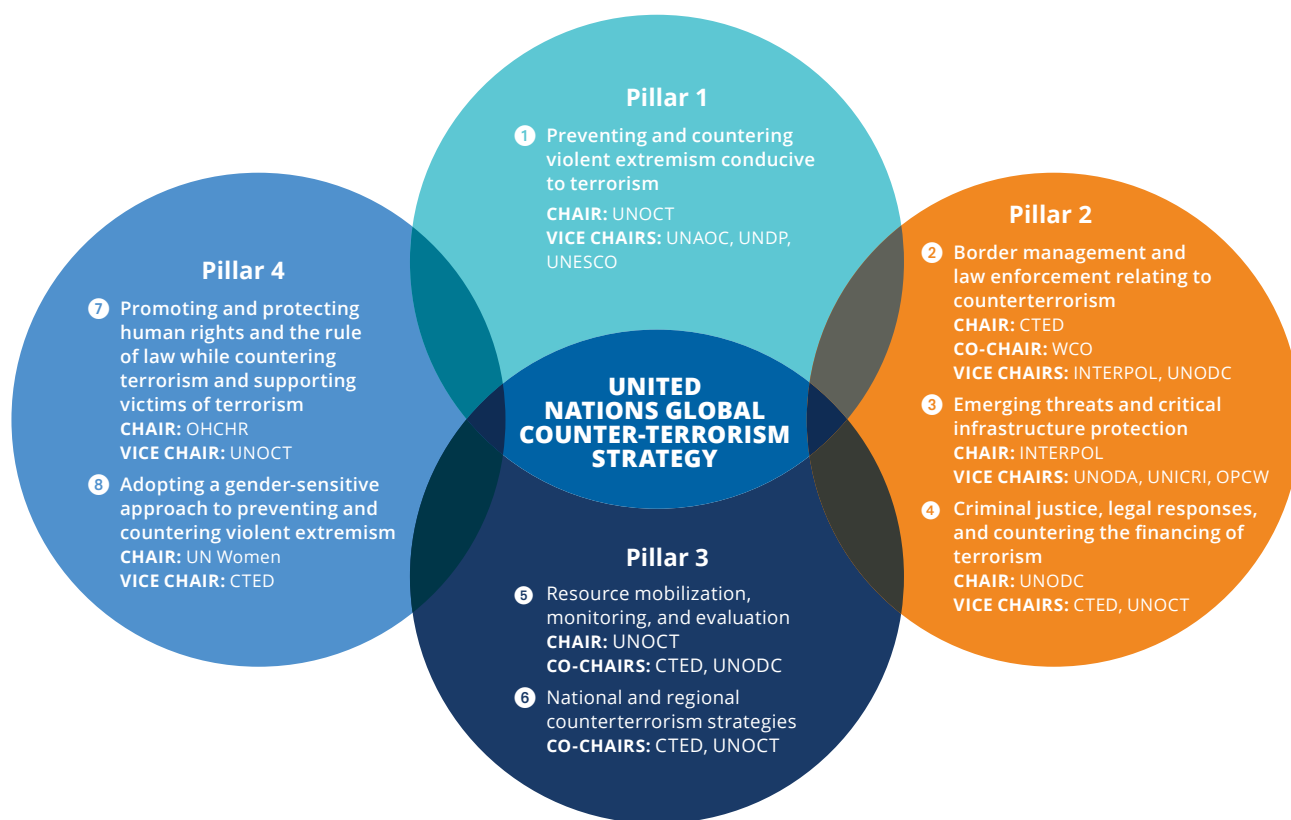
The Coordination Committee hosted its first set of civil society and private sector speakers at a January 2023 meeting and has expressed its intent for inclusion of speakers to become standard practice. Some working groups also have invited civil society experts to thematic “in focus” meetings or consulted with civil society as part of programs coordinated within the Compact framework. Despite these positive steps, overall civil society engagement with the Compact has been ad hoc and uneven.

Because UNOCT does not participate in other UN coordination frameworks at the national and regional levels, ensuring adequate engagement between Compact working groups and UN country teams is important to guaranteeing alignment, avoiding conflict, and delivering context-sensitive programming. In December 2021, the Coordination Committee endorsed seven steps for working groups to enhance regional coordination through the Compact, including the establishment of standing agenda items on thematic issues, invitation of field staff to working group meetings, accounting for country-specific recommendations from entities with expertise in country situations, and engagement with civil society, women- and youth-led organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector.²⁴

An evaluation of how the working groups have implemented these seven steps was conducted in 2022 and

²⁴ UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, “2021 Annual Report to the Secretary-General,” n.d., pp. 5–6, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/2021_ct_compact_annual_report_to_the_secretarygeneral.pdf.

Figure 2. UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Working Groups



Note: Interpol - International Criminal Police Organization; OPCW - Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; UNAOC - UN Alliance of Civilizations; UNESCO - UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNICRI - UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute; UNODA - UN Office for Disarmament Affairs; WCO - World Customs Organization.

Source: UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, “The Largest UN Counter-Terrorism Framework Explained,” 2022, p. 20, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/230418_global_compact_brochure2022_web.pdf.

was shared via the digital platform. In consultations, stakeholders indicated the results showed positive progress across Compact activities. For example, public reporting shows that the PVE working group has added a standing agenda item on “experience from the field” and engaged Resident Coordinators and UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representatives in Iraq and Tunisia.²⁵ Interlocutors described these efforts as possible due to UNDP’s local presence, noting that not all co- or vice chairs were able to draw from their institutional networks to invite speakers.

In October 2017, the Secretary-General’s Gender Parity Task Force released a paper titled *System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, which set deadlines between 2026 and 2028 for parity of female and male staff across the

UN system.²⁶ Gender parity is particularly important where persistent gender stereotypes and a lack of gendered perspectives in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation phases can limit the effectiveness of policies and programs. Although gender parity is an insufficient basis for achieving gender equity and justice goals in and of itself, many Compact entities have made progress toward equal representation in the workplace, but several members lag behind (fig. 3). UNOCT has made significant strides in the last three years, with a staff of 56 percent men in 2020 becoming a staff of 53 percent women at the end of 2022. Parity has been achieved at the P-4, P-3, and P-2 levels, but not at the senior leadership level. The UNOCT gender parity implementation plan, updated in September 2022, recognized this gap and addressed

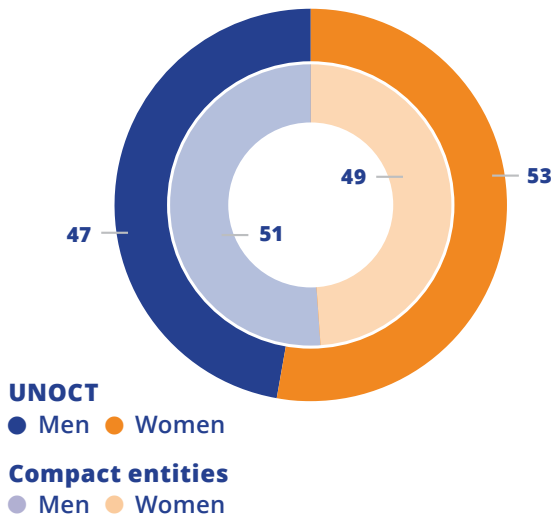
²⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁶ *System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, 6 October 2017, pp. 12–13, https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org.gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf.

Figure 3. Gender Parity for the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Entities

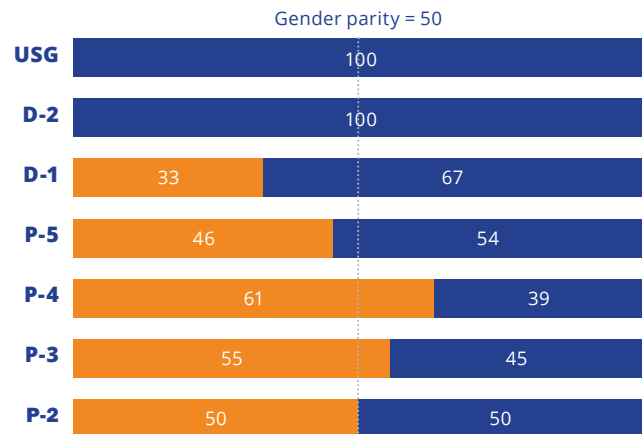
UNOCT AND COMPACT ENTITIES, OVERALL BALANCE

Gender breakdown (%)



UNOCT STAFF, BY LEVEL

Professional and higher, by level (%)



Note: As of April 2023. Data available for the following Compact entities: Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Department of Global Communications, UN Department of Peace Operations, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, UN Department of Safety and Security, UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, UN Office of Information and Communications Technology, UN Office of Legal Affairs, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

Source: "UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard," <https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard> (accessed 3 May 2023).

it when setting the goals for 2023.²⁷ The UNOCT *Gender Mainstreaming Policy & Action Plan* set out to nominate a Focal Point for Women to collaborate with its Gender Unit to support the Strategic Planning and Programme Support Section in the implementation of the *System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity*.²⁸

COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE AND ITS EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE

Within the Security Council, the Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC) works to bolster the ability of member states to prevent and respond to terrorism within their borders and across regions, and its Executive Directorate (CTED) assesses member state implementation of more than 20 Security Council resolutions that pertain to counterterrorism and countering violent

extremism. CTED has the Assessment and Technical Assistance Office, with geographic clusters and five cross-cutting technical groups that bring thematic expertise to bear across all regions. The technical groups have expertise in terrorism financing; border control, arms trafficking, and law enforcement; legal frameworks, including extradition and mutual legal assistance; technical assistance; and issues raised by Security Council Resolution 1624, as well as the human rights aspects of counterterrorism activities in the context of Resolution 1373. As of September 2022, CTED has conducted more than 182 visits to assess implementation by 112 member states.²⁹ It also regularly releases analytical products based on these assessments.

In December 2021, CTED's mandate was renewed for another four years under Resolution 2617. Its role as a special political mission remains largely unchanged,

27 UNOCT, "Implementation Plan of the Secretary-General's System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity," September 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/UNOCT-Strategy-on-gender-parity-2022-en.pdf>.

28 UNOCT, *Gender Mainstreaming Policy & Action Plan* (forthcoming) (copy on file with authors).

29 CTC, "About Us," n.d., <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/about-us-0> (accessed 7 April 2023).



UN Photo

Natalia Gherman, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, speaks at the launch of the summary findings and key recommendations from the Global Center on Cooperative Security report “Blue Sky VI: An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts.”

although some positive progress was made.³⁰ For example, the Security Council directed CTED, at the behest of member states, to engage with civil society “in advance of, during and after visits to and assessments of” member states.³¹ The resolution also maintained language on system-wide functioning, including through biannual briefings by UNOCT on its implementation of “progress in incorporating CTED recommendations and analysis into the implementation of its programs and mandates.”³² CTED launched a digital Detailed Implementation Assessment in January 2021, which allows password-protected access to “simplify and streamline CTED assessments, improve their utility for the design of technical assistance and capacity-building support, and facilitate current and real-time production of analysis and reports.”³³ Following a lengthy process, Natalia Gherman was appointed as CTED’s new Executive Director in December 2022.

In the wake of the CTC special meeting in India and the Delhi Declaration, it is anticipated that emerging technologies will become a central focus of CTED’s work in the years ahead. Specifically, the declaration calls for the CTC, with the support of CTED,

to develop a set of nonbinding guiding principles to assist member states to counter the threat of such technologies, consistent with international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. The CTC further requested CTED to produce a gap analysis on the capacities of member states to counter the use of new technologies for terrorism purposes.³⁴

MONITORING TEAM

The Monitoring Team is a panel of 10 experts based in New York assisting two Security Council sanctions committees: the ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Committee (the 1267 Committee, named after Resolution 1267), which addresses the global threat of terrorism posed by ISIL (Daesh), al-Qaida, and associated individuals and entities, and the 1988 Committee, named after Resolution 1988 and addressing the threat to the peace and security of Afghanistan posed by the Taliban. The team supports these committees in fulfilling their responsibilities to designate individuals and entities for the application of sanctions measures, including asset freezes, travel bans, and arms embargos. It also studies and reports on the changing nature of the threat posed by ISIL, al-Qaida, al-Nusra Front, Boko Haram, and the Taliban. The sanctions regime under Resolution 1267 is unique at the United Nations because it has an independent, impartial Ombudsperson tasked with reviewing and advising on delisting requests from sanctioned individuals, groups, or entities, although the institutional independence and fairness of the delisting process has been repeatedly challenged by prior mandate holders.³⁵

The Monitoring Team’s mandate with respect to the 1267 Committee was renewed most recently in December 2021 via Resolution 2610. The resolution did not significantly alter the scope of the sanctions regime, but did include a new provision that enables

30 Annabelle Bonnefont, Agathe Sarfati, and Jason Ipe, “Continuity Amid Change: The 2021 Mandate Renewal of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate,” Global Center and International Peace Institute, November 2021, <https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/21Nov22-Final-CTED-Policy-Brief-1.pdf>.

31 UN Security Council, S/RES/2617, 30 December 2021, para. 14.

32 Ibid., para. 25.

33 CTC, “Assessments,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/assessments> (accessed 7 April 2023).

34 UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, “Delhi Declaration on Countering the Use of New and Emerging Technologies for Terrorist Purposes,” 29 October 2022, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil.ctc/files/outcome_document_ctc_special_mtg_final_e.pdf.

35 UN Security Council, “Letter Dated 23 July 2021 From the Ombudsperson Addressed to the President of the Security Council,” S/2021/676, 23 July 2021 (containing *Report of the Ombudsperson Submitted Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2368 (2017)* at paras. 19, 40, and 53).

the Monitoring Team to consult with civil society, as well as member states, regional organizations, and the private sector, in relation to asset freezing measures. It remains to be seen whether and how the Monitoring Team will realize engagement with civil society. Staffing and resource constraints present a continued challenge, and the Monitoring Team may lack the necessary relationships and networks at the national level. Given the sensitive nature of the Monitoring Team's work, grassroots civil society organizations that have direct experience with sanctions measures may also be reluctant to share information. Further, there is uncertainty around the process for collating and qualifying information, specifically how the Monitoring Team will reconcile information from a more diversified source base.

HUMANITARIAN PROTECTIONS

With the adoption of Resolution 2664, the Security Council made a landmark change to safeguard humanitarian action in the context of all its sanctions regimes. As a result of dedicated advocacy by civil society and humanitarian organizations, the resolution clearly states that the provision, processing, or payment of funds and the “provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance or to support other activities that support basic human needs” are not a violation of asset freezing measures imposed under any UN sanctions regime.³⁶ Described as a humanitarian “carve-out,” the protections are applicable to specific actors, namely those within the UN system or those implementing humanitarian programs that are funded by the United Nations or coordinated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The carve-out applies to all current and future asset freezing measures imposed by the Security Council, but there is a sunset clause for counterterrorism-related sanctions. Unless the council explicitly decides to renew the carve-out, it will expire for the al-Qaida and Daesh global regime in two years. Resolution 2664 indicates that a similar humanitarian carve-out



UN Photo

Security Council members vote in favor of Resolution 2664 on UN sanctions regimes.

secured in late 2021 specific to the Taliban-related sanctions regime in Afghanistan remains in effect.³⁷

Renewal may hinge on the ability of humanitarian actors to demonstrate the value of the carve-out and that it did not result in the meaningful subjugation of sanctions obligations. Resolution 2664 requests that any provider relying on the carve-out “use reasonable efforts to minimize the accrual of benefits prohibited by sanctions.”³⁸ UN Emergency Relief Coordinators are to give annual briefings to each sanctions committee on the delivery of humanitarian assistance provided consistent with Resolution 2664, including any obstacles to its provision of the assistance or implementation of the resolution, as well as available information regarding the provision or diversion of funds to or for the benefit of designated individuals or entities and on risk management and due diligence processes in place. The Secretary-General is requested to issue a written report on unintended adverse humanitarian consequences of sanctions measures by September 2023.³⁹

It will take time for Resolution 2664 to have a meaningful impact on the ground because it must be operationalized and sensitized across a diversity of governmental, private sector, and nonprofit actors. Banks have proven reluctant to provide timely financial services in high-risks contexts, and it is unclear how much comfort the carve-out will offer in the face of strict liability offenses for sanctions violations

36 UN Security Council, S/RES/2664, 9 December 2022.

37 For the Taliban in Afghanistan, the humanitarian carve-out was first introduced in December 2021. UN Security Council, S/RES/2615, 22 December 2021, para. 1. Resolution 2664 states that its prescribed carve-out measures supersede previous resolutions, but that paragraph 1 of Resolution 2615 remains in effect. UN Security Council, S/RES/2664, para. 4.

38 UN Security Council, S/RES/2664, para. 3.

39 Ibid., para. 7.

in domestic laws. Regardless, the critical signaling moment provided by the United Nations in Resolution 2664 should not go uncelebrated because it represents an important step in reducing the impact of sanctions measures on communities in crisis situations.

'NEW AGENDA FOR PEACE'

In 2021 the Secretary-General published *Our Common Agenda*, which articulated his vision on the future of global cooperation. He described his central message as concerning the prevention of war and strengthening global peace and security and proposed the “New Agenda for Peace,” which would update the 1992 Agenda for Peace and provide a comprehensive, holistic view of global security, with human rights at its core.⁴⁰ The Secretary-General called for the New Agenda for Peace to include efforts to mitigate existential risks, strengthen foresight of future risks, boost investment in prevention and peace-building by addressing the root causes of conflict, and put women and girls at the center of security.⁴¹

During thematic consultations on *Our Common Agenda*, the Secretary-General was requested to elaborate on several aspects, which he is doing through the issuance of 11 policy briefs.⁴² One brief will focus on the New Agenda for Peace and is expected to “offer proposals that address all forms and domains of threats, articulating a vision of our work on peace and security for a world in transition and a new era of geopolitical competition.”⁴³ This brief is planned for release in June 2023. The briefs will help inform

member state deliberations on the Pact for the Future to be considered during the 2024 Summit of the Future.

The Secretary-General requested the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPPA), with the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Office of Disarmament Affairs, and UNOCT, to lead the work on developing the New Agenda for Peace, in collaboration with relevant UN entities. The Secretary-General’s request for four departments to develop the New Agenda for Peace suggests that the peace and security architecture reforms of 2019 were insufficient to overcome the segmentation in that architecture.⁴⁴ The appointment of UNOCT surprised many because terrorism and counterterrorism are mentioned only once in *Our Common Agenda*. As UN counterterrorism and PVE frameworks, obligations, actors, and programs have largely developed separately from the activities of other UN entities working on peace and security, development, and human rights, some view the inclusion of UNOCT as an opportunity for the United Nations and its member states to reconcile overlapping and conflicting mandates and approaches. Others express considerable concern that the focus on counterterrorism issues and the involvement of counterterrorism actors will lead to overemphasis on the terrorism threat, the further securitization of peace and development efforts, and potential conflicts with international law, including international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law.⁴⁵ The New Agenda for Peace should be developed with substantive input from civil society and should center local ownership of it.

40 United Nations, “Secretary-General, Addressing Peacebuilding Commission, Says New Agenda for Peace ‘Is Our Platform to Update Promise’ of Saving Future Generations From War,” SG/SM/200985, 22 October 2021, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sgsm20985.doc.htm>.

41 UN General Assembly, *Our Common Agenda*.

42 “Secretary-General Launches ‘Our Common Agenda’ Policy Briefs on Delivering 2030 Agenda Promises, Strengthening Responses to Global Shocks,” SG/SM/21718, 9 March 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21718.doc.htm>.

43 United Nations, “Today We Must Begin ‘Moving Recommendations in Our Common Agenda From Ideas to Action - From Abstract to Concrete,’ Secretary-General Tells General Assembly,” SG/SM/21686, 13 February 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21686.doc.htm>.

44 Eugene Chen et al., “Managing Opportunities, Challenges, and Expectations for the New Agenda for Peace,” NYU Center on International Cooperation, May 2023, https://s42831.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CIC_Managing-Opportunities-Challenges-and-Expectations-for-the-New-Agenda-for-Peace-May-2023-Web.pdf.

45 UN General Assembly, “Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-General,” A/77/345, 16 September 2022 (containing *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin: Impact of Counter-terrorism on Peacemaking, Peacebuilding, Sustaining Peace, Conflict Prevention and Resolution*).



A view of the sun rising behind Long Island City and the sculpture "Good Defeats Evil" by Zurab Tsereteli in the north garden area of UN Headquarters.

CORE ISSUES FOR THE EIGHTH REVIEW

The General Assembly resolution that emerges from the review of the Strategy guides member states in their efforts to prevent and counter terrorism while directing the normative role of the United Nations, assessing its complex counterterrorism architecture, and focusing its counterterrorism efforts. Although nonbinding on member states, it can provide binding instructions to the Secretariat.

The resolution of the seventh review requested that the Secretary-General study terrorist attacks on the basis of xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance and assess UNOCT finances and grant-making mechanisms, the need to further enhance rule of law and gender as cross-cutting elements of the Strategy, and methodologies and tools to develop a results framework to monitor balanced implementation of the Strategy.⁴⁶ Drawing on extensive consultations with member states and nongovernmental stakeholders, this section reflects on the outcomes of these requests and outlines some of the key issues and debates that are expected to feature in the eighth review.

THE ROLE OF UNOCT

UNOCT's structure has been slowly crystalizing since the seventh review. As described earlier, key developments since the seventh review include the conversion of 25 positions from extrabudgetary funding to regular budget funding, the establishment of the Human Rights and Gender Section, and the continued expansion of UNOCT's field presence through program and liaison offices.

Institutional changes come at a critical moment for UNOCT because its current spending rate points to a financial cliff by the middle of 2025, barring major reinvestments. The potential further conversion of 24 more posts from extrabudgetary to regular budget funding in 2024 may help offset reliance on voluntary funds but is unlikely to recalibrate UNOCT's project-based funding model and its emphasis on program delivery completely. A final decision on whether

UNOCT will acquire a grant-making mandate is still pending, which may further influence the need, form, and scope of future UNOCT fundraising efforts.

Member states have a critical responsibility to assess and leverage future financial contributions responsibly and in accordance with the principles endorsed in the Strategy, especially to uphold and promote human rights and the rule of law, expand civil society engagement, and mainstream gender-responsive programming, and to consider whether counterterrorism efforts, and by extension UNOCT, are the correct prism through which to approach diverse peace and security challenges facing the world. The eighth review presents an opportunity for member states to guide the long-term operations of UNOCT toward realization of its core functions and comparative advantages.

The Trust Fund, Financial Stability, and Independence

UNOCT principally relies on donor contributions through the UN Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism.⁴⁷ Unearmarked contributions to the trust fund are used to implement UNOCT's mandate, provide seed funding to projects of Compact working groups, and support UNOCT activities that are delivered jointly with other Compact members.

The majority of trust fund contributions are earmarked and disbursed for specific UNOCT programs, projects, or activities in accordance with UNOCT's mandate and the donor's intentions. In instances when UNOCT is partnering with another UN entity to deliver a joint program, it can enter into a financial agreement that enables disbursement of resources from the trust fund to its implementing partner. To date, UNOCT reports having distributed \$16.3 million to other UN entities.

The UNOCT Project Review Board assists the Under-Secretary-General in selecting projects and programs to be funded by the trust fund to ensure alignment with the Strategy and trust fund objectives. The board is an internal project governance and oversight mechanism, chaired by the Deputy to the

⁴⁶ Seventh review resolution, paras. 36, 85–87, 93.

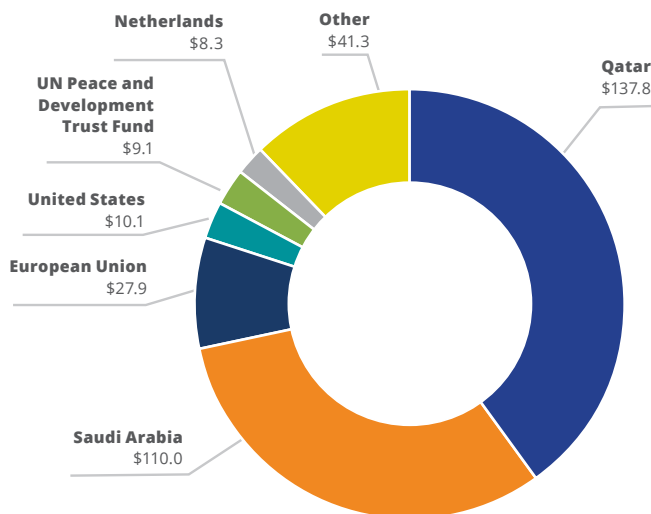
⁴⁷ The trust fund was created by the Secretary-General in 2009 under the UN Department of Political Affairs and transferred to UNOCT in June 2017, when UNOCT was established.

Under-Secretary-General, that advises the Under-Secretary-General and provides quality review, control, and assurance on all project concepts and proposals.

From 2009 to 2022, the trust fund has received pledges and allocations totaling \$347.3 million from 36 donors.⁴⁸ Despite some recent diversification, Qatar and Saudi Arabia remain the two largest sources of funding during this period, accounting for 71 percent of the total contributions (fig. 4). A February 2023 audit of the trust fund by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) identified the lack of donor diversity as a serious risk.⁴⁹

Figure 4. Sources of Pledges to the UN Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism, 2009–2022

(in millions)



Source: UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, “Funding,” <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/funding-and-donors>.

Extrabudgetary resources from the trust fund accounted for about 97 percent of UNOCT’s operating budget during this period.⁵⁰ The fifth report in the Blue Sky series underscored that such heavy reliance on voluntary funding profoundly impacts UNOCT’s work, fueling a focus on training and capacity development

programming over policy coordination, raising questions around sustainability, creating a “pay to play” culture for influencing policy priorities, and negatively affecting balanced implementation of the Strategy.⁵¹

UNOCT’s annual budget has grown considerably over the last several years, reaching an estimated \$67.6 million in 2023, of which \$61.6 million are extrabudgetary funds drawn from the trust fund (table 3). If spending continues at this level and absent substantial replenishment, there will be very few resources left in the trust fund by the middle of 2025.

Important questions must be answered if member states are to justify continued investment in UNOCT and the trust fund at the scale seen to date. The first question concerns UNOCT’s core responsibilities. As the prior Blue Sky report already highlighted, despite UNOCT’s critical leadership and coordination functions, the majority of its budget and staffing is focused on technical assistance and capacity building. The conversion of 25 positions previously funded through voluntary contributions into posts funded from the regular budget does not necessarily change this equation.⁵² In practice, it makes available \$4 million in the trust fund annually that UNOCT seems eager to invest in additional programming. Two UNOCT units undertake program delivery: UNCCT and SPIB. Currently, 48 percent of total trust fund contributions is allocated to UNCCT.⁵³ A substantial portion of the remainder is earmarked to support UNOCT programming led by SPIB, including its Countering Terrorist Travel, Sports and Security, and Engaging Parliamentarians Programs.⁵⁴ This continued emphasis on programming keeps UNOCT in competition with other UN entities, such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNDP, and OCHA, which have well-established field presences, strong local connections, and a deep understanding of stakeholder priorities and needs. Some of these UN entities are more vulnerable to financial influences than others as budgets constrict in light of declining multilateralism and

48 UNOCT, “Funding,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/funding-and-donors> (accessed 16 April 2023).

49 Internal Audit Division, UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), “Audit of Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism,” no. 2023/004, 13 February 2023, <https://oios.un.org/file/9705/download?token=1AHxBLqY> (hereinafter OIOS trust fund audit).

50 UNOCT, “Funding.”

51 Global Center, “Blue Sky V.”

52 UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023*, p. 130.

53 UNOCT, “Funding.”

54 UNOCT, “What We Do,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/what-we-do> (accessed 31 March 2023).

Table 3. UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Expenditures, 2019–2021, and Budget Figures, 2022–2023 (million \$)

	2019 Expenditures	2020 Expenditures	2021 Expenditures	2022 Appropriated Budget	2023 Projected Budget
Regular Budget	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.7	6.0
Extrabudgetary	33.1	33.7	54.4	66.0	61.6
Total	34.7	35.4	55.8	67.8	67.6
Expenditure/Budget Growth (percent)	n/a	2.0	57.6	21.5	-0.3

Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Sources: UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2023: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/77/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2022, pp. 127–128; UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2022: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/76/6* (Sect. 3), 3 May 2021, p. 148; UN General Assembly, *Proposed Programme Budget for 2021: Part II, Political Affairs; Section 3, Political Affairs; Programme 2, Political Affairs, A/75/6* (Sect. 3), 23 April 2020, p. 122.

the diversion of peace and development resources to respond to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵

A second question relates to the extent to which voluntary contributions may leave UNOCT vulnerable to inadvertently skewing implementation of the Strategy. The current pay-to-play culture enables member states to pick and choose which aspects of the Strategy receive greater attention by earmarking funds thematically and geographically. Although donor priorities influence the actions of various UN entities, the consequences of this influence can have ripple effects across the UN counterterrorism architecture, including a continued lack of investment in Pillar IV. In its role as the Compact secretariat, UNOCT has been a driving force behind mobilizing funds and coordinating among UN entities in the design and implementation of counterterrorism and PVE projects while serving as an implementing partner for many programs. Stakeholders have described instances in which UNOCT “forum-shops” its funded programs until it finds willing collaborators to fulfill donor requirements, even when Compact entities have raised concerns about the intended project or program.

Third, member states should carefully assess the need for the additional 24 posts the Secretary-General intends to include in the 2024 program budget. This conversion has long-term resourcing implications, and

it is not clear from the Secretary-General’s vision if and why counterterrorism matters should be prioritized over other issues. Once regular budget posts are established, they are rarely abolished because the General Assembly generally does not review existing posts unless they have been vacant for an extended period of time. If UNOCT receives the second conversion of posts, it would have twice as many regular budget posts as the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), which supports the Peacebuilding Commission and manages the Peacebuilding Fund. Member states may wish to seek further clarity on where these posts will be situated and why they are deemed critical over other requirements.

Grant-Making Mandate

The seventh review of the Strategy requested the Secretary-General to undertake “a review to determine the most cost-effective mechanism for the provision of grants and payments to the implementing partners” of UNOCT.⁵⁶ UNOCT developed a report arguing in favor of a grant-making mandate, which was expected to be included in the Secretary-General’s 2023 report on the implementation of the Strategy. Instead, however, it has been forwarded to the Fifth Committee for its consideration.

Critically, clarification is needed regarding “implementing partners,” specifically, to whom UNOCT

55 Pauline Veron and Andrew Sherriff, “International Peacebuilding Financing and Changing Politics in Europe,” NYU Center on International Cooperation, October 2022, https://s42831.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/international_peacebuilding_financing_and_changing_politics_in_europe-2022.pdf.

56 Seventh review resolution, para. 87.

can disburse funds—other UN entities, civil society organizations, non-UN entities—and under what conditions. References to UNOCT grant-making capacity appear in its 2020 civil society strategy and the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the Strategy. The 2020 civil society strategy included as an output the provision of a grant-making authority to UNOCT to help facilitate civil society engagement in UNOCT work.⁵⁷ The 2021 report suggested that member states provide UNOCT with “the same mandate that other UN entities have to provide grants in support of projects related to preventing and countering terrorism.”⁵⁸ The report did not reference the other UN entities’ grant-making mandates specifically, leaving uncertain the model that UNOCT would like to emulate.

The UN Office of Legal Affairs has advised that Secretariat offices and departments do not have authority to give grants to outside entities to support the implementation of the outside entities’ projects unless an express authorization has been provided by the General Assembly.⁵⁹ Secretariat entities generally do not require an express authorization to provide funds to other UN entities serving as implementing partners for programmatic activities, and indeed several Secretariat entities oversee large trust funds whose programs are entirely implemented by other UN entities.⁶⁰ Examples include OCHA, which oversees the UN Central Emergency Response Fund; the PBSO, which oversees the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund; and the Development Coordination Office, which oversees the Joint SDG Fund.

Some stakeholders, including from within the UN system, have underscored that Secretariat bodies typically do not have the accountability and management mechanisms to be good grant-making organizations. To date, the Secretariat lacks formal regulations and rules governing the management of grants and implementing partners, leaving each entity to develop its

own arrangements. The UN Board of Auditors drew attention to inconsistencies and some key gaps in administrative and accountability arrangements in 2016, and although amendments were proposed to the Secretariat’s Financial Regulations and Rules in 2019, no action ultimately was taken by the General Assembly.⁶¹ For these reasons, the abovementioned Joint SDG Fund and the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund are managed by Secretariat bodies but administered by UNDP’s Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, which serves as the fiduciary agent.⁶²

There is active debate on whether UNOCT should have a grant-making mandate allowing it to provide funds directly to non-UN entities, especially civil society organizations. Proponents argue that the current process of funding civil society actors is complex, time intensive, and costly. Grant-making would be a more direct process that could expand UNOCT’s engagement with civil society. Such mandates already exist in the UN system—UN Women, for example, administers the Fund for Gender Equality and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, each of which supports civil society organizations—but are less common within the Secretariat. Without such an explicit grant-making mandate, Secretariat entities can disburse funds to outside actors only via a complex procurement process or by paying a fee to another UN entity that possesses such as mandate and can act as the grantor.

Many, however, feel that more structural, institutional, and cultural changes are necessary to realize meaningful civil society engagement that is inclusive, most notably of human rights defenders, and does not instrumentalize civil society or limit its role to project implementation. UNOCT must do more to safeguard and promote human rights, implement UN guidelines on civic space, and provide protections against reprisals. Substantial, demonstrable progress on all these fronts must be made before entertaining the provision

57 UNOCT, *Civil Society Engagement Strategy*, 17 January 2020, p. 5, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/civil_society_engagement_strategy_website_mai_2020.pdf.

58 UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/75/729, 29 January 2021, para. 78.

59 UN General Assembly, *Financial Report and Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2015 and Report of the Board of Auditors*, A/71/5 (Vol. I), 28 September 2016, para. 254.

60 Chen, “Expanded Regular Budget Funding and a Grant-Making Mandate for UNOCT,” p. 4.

61 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

62 See generally *ibid.*

of a grant-making mandate. Some also fear that a grant-making mandate will hand even more power and control to UNOCT, allowing it to serve simultaneously as coordinator, implementer, and paymaster and increasingly bypass the Compact, against a backdrop of existing concerns regarding the lack of transparency and inclusiveness in decision-making and program design and delivery.⁶³ This debate also places resource competition within the Compact on full display.

OPTIMIZING COMPACT OPERATIONS

The Compact has been described as the “primary institutional vehicle for the coordination and coherence of UN counter-terrorism efforts.”⁶⁴ As a comparatively nascent framework, albeit the largest one of its kind, the Compact is still finding its footing. The effectiveness of individual working groups is described as highly contingent on the ambitions, commitment, and personalities of their respective chairs, co-chairs, and vice chairs. Although a core selling point of the Compact was its potential to mobilize joint resources for coordinated UN efforts, some say it has resulted in intensified resource competition among its entities. Opportunities for civil society and UN country staff to participate in working group meetings are emerging but remain limited and ad hoc. Consultations for this report have highlighted two primary themes of discussion related to the Compact: interpreting and applying its coordination function and standardizing approaches to ensuring coherence of UN counterterrorism efforts.

Coordination

Diverse membership is part of the Compact’s strength, but it introduces some tension as to how it and UNOCT as its secretariat can and should realize their coordination function. The Compact includes entities with specific counterterrorism mandates and those without. It also includes entities within the Secretariat and Security Council and those entirely outside of the

UN system. The expansive nature of the Compact gives rise to the questions, Who can and should be coordinated, on what, and how?

At its most basic level, coordination is the exchange of information on work plans and activities to ensure proper deconfliction. Coordination often bleeds into collaboration, referring to a range of more integrated actions among parties. For example, collaboration can involve joint articulation of shared priorities, cross-integration of knowledge, joint fundraising, codesign and implementation of projects, and codevelopment of research products and guidance materials.

Compact working groups and entities each seem to adhere to different interpretations of coordination and appear to have different appetites for collaboration. Opportunities for the exchange of information seem largely welcome, with Compact working groups having met more than 160 times since 2019.⁶⁵ Yet, some question the return on investment for participation in these meetings, noting the heavy focus on programmatic updates rather than strategic orientation and alignment on the activities of Compact entities.

Some argue the Compact would be most effective if used as a platform to foster coordinated actions in the field. This can refer to ensuring adequate deconfliction between ongoing and planned technical assistance programming delivered by Compact entities or sharing information about other known capacity development programming in a certain country or region. A further step would involve cross-integration of knowledge between Compact-led programs, including identifying Compact partners to reinforce or expand programmatic impact with complementary knowledge, human, or financial resources. Consultations for this report also highlighted the need to retain historical and institutional knowledge about past programs by Compact entities to avoid repetition that results in resource inefficiencies and can create mixed messages for practitioners and beneficiaries.

The depth of coordination described above likely would be relevant only to a subset of Compact entities

63 For additional information, see Larry Attree, “Function Before Form: Optimising the UN’s Counter-Terrorism Architecture,” Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, September 2022, p. 28, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/19574.pdf>.

64 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, “The Largest UN Counter-Terrorism Framework Explained,” 2022, p. 3, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/230418_global_compact_brochure2022_web.pdf.

65 Ibid., p. 7.

who have complementary mandates. Many of these entities are already collaborating on programs and projects within and outside of the Compact structure. The thematic nature of the working groups helps to channel members toward discussions most relevant to their mandates, but the sheer volume, geographic spread, and diversity of topics addressed under the counterterrorism and PVE umbrella mean not every working group conversation is relevant to every entity. Coupled with resource competition and workloads, this is described as a discouraging factor for Compact members to sustain active participation in working group meetings and to exchange information openly and in a timely fashion.

There are justifiable reasons to be cautious about the scope and reach of the Compact's coordination function. For example, the operating practices of a humanitarian actor should not be coordinated by a counterterrorism one, nor should all programming be viewed through a counterterrorism lens or brand. The dual role of UNOCT as coordinator and implementer also warrants scrutiny, especially when considered in the context of UNOCT's substantial funding and program portfolio.

It is important to recognize that Compact entities have different motivations for seeking coordination and collaboration. Some entities are seen to be engaging with the Compact in the hopes of accessing substantive resources afforded to the counterterrorism and PVE agendas, while others describe "playing defense" to protect their respective mandates from creeping securitization. Understanding the perceived and desired value of the Compact to its members will be crucial to identifying strategies that optimize Compact coordination to advance balanced implementation of the Strategy.

Coherence

During consultations for this report, there was notable discussion on how the Compact can and should realize its comparative advantages in ensuring coherence across counterterrorism and PVE efforts. Coherence can be viewed through two lenses: one of knowledge and one of policy and programming.

The first refers to integrating knowledge from within the UN system to set operational priorities and establish an evidence base for the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects and programs. This is often interpreted to mean utilizing CTED assessments and analysis to inform working group work plans and Compact entity programming. UNOCT highlights that 24 country assessments and more than 700 technical assistance recommendations are available on the Compact's digital coordination platform.⁶⁶ In practice, CTED assessment reports are not fully public, and the versions available to Compact entities usually are heavily redacted. Consultations for this report indicate that some feel CTED recommendations are cherry-picked to justify predeveloped programs and projects, reducing the analysis of a key UN entity to a simple box ticking exercise and raising questions about the optimization of the system as it was designed to function.

In addition, the focus on assessment findings undervalues other forms of knowledge generated by the UN system. CTED produces a wide range of trend alerts and analysis, including through its Global Research Network of academics and civil society actors. The Monitoring Team produces biannual reports on the global threat posed by al-Qaida, ISIL, and affiliated entities and the implementation of counterterrorism sanctions measures by member states. Equally important reports exist outside of the UN counterterrorism architecture, including from human rights mechanisms and reporting on progress against the Sustainable Development Goals. There is also a wealth of data and research developed by entities outside of the United Nations, including academia, think tanks, and civil society. How this knowledge is utilized to inform priorities and programming is unclear.

The second lens through which to consider the Compact's coherence function is in relation to the development of programs, policies, and guidance materials that shape the efforts of UN entities and member states. Annex II of the 2023 Secretary-General's report provides an example of one such project currently seeking funding: development of benchmarks on human rights and gender equality for the activities of the Compact by the Working Group on Adopting a Gender Sensitive Approach to PVE and the

66 "United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in Review 2022," p. 1.

Working Group on Protecting and Promoting Human Rights, the Rule of Law and Supporting Victims of Terrorism.

A strength of the Compact is its ability to draw on the diverse expertise of its members to produce consensus guidance that assists member states in implementing counterterrorism and PVE policies and practices in a manner consistent with their obligations under international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. Leveraging the Compact framework to expand and diversify expert contributions would result in stronger, clearer guidance to member states. It also embodies an all-of-UN approach by signaling unified agreement on desirable practices and approaches. Development of Compact-branded guidance must not replicate or displace the normative mandates of existing UN entities, such as UN Women and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Instead, it should result in better integration of the existing normative functions across the full scope of Compact operations.

At the operational level, the Compact could advance coherence by facilitating opportunities for its members to provide feedback on proposed program designs and guidance development. The timing of these reviews is important because it must occur early enough that it is still possible to meaningfully refine approaches or adjust the scope. There seems to be some appetite among Compact entities to peer-review program designs and developed guidance, but limited staffing resources will likely be a factor for whether a process for such reviews is effective or becomes a bureaucratic hurdle. Structural resource inequalities in the UN architecture impact the ability of Compact members to contribute. Entities with more staff and core funding are better positioned to respond to requests for input on Compact activities in which they are not directly involved and therefore funded. The effect is especially felt by entities whose staffing and funds are already stretched thin, such as OCHA and OHCHR, as well as those that operate without core funding, such as the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. The chronic, systemic underfunding of human rights efforts means that the entities that are called on the most to contribute

in cross-cutting ways (e.g., OCHA, OHCHR, UN Women) are the least well positioned to do so. Member states have an opportunity to offset these resource imbalances but often opt to finance specific projects at the expense of properly resourcing these critical but less visible operational needs.

Advancing coherence in the ways described above would require the Compact to create formalized procedures to govern the selection, development, review, and adoption of Compact-branded projects and outputs. Currently, no universal procedures exist, so practices vary among working groups and across projects. Customary practice has been to seek consensus, but this had not held true in all cases and is at the discretion of the lead UN actors or working group leads. Critically, there is no procedure for Compact entities to indicate institutional redlines. Absent an established process for reconciling feedback, some questioned how different contributions were being prioritized, respected, and meaningfully integrated. Development of procedures to govern the selection and adoption of Compact products would need to be done at the request of and with financing from member states that determine it a priority for optimizing Compact operations.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Previous sections have noted UNOCT's continued expansion and emphasis on program delivery, the rapid depletion of the Trust Fund for Counterterrorism, and the resource competition experienced by other Compact entities. It is thus unsurprising that resource mobilization is a key priority for the UN counterterrorism architecture.

UNOCT, CTED, and UNODC serve as co-chairs of the Compact Working Group on Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation. In this capacity, they jointly led the second iteration of the Multi-Year Appeal for counterterrorism efforts, which ran from July 2021 through December 2022, seeking \$179 million to support 52 projects in 2021–2022.

The appeal is described as “a coordinated approach to resource mobilization to secure funding for the UN to support counter-terrorism efforts of Member States

upon their request.”⁶⁷ Notably absent from this framing is the role of the appeal in resourcing Compact operations, financing projects delivered under the Compact umbrella, or supporting development of Compact-branded guidance. Theoretically, the appeal offers a valuable opportunity to secure needed resources to realize the Compact’s coordination and coherence functions, including to support participation of key entities, such as UN Women and OHCHR, that have cross-cutting and critical responsibilities.

The triality of UNOCT’s role as Compact coordinator, chief resource mobilizer, and program implementer is clearly evidenced in the appeal. Of the \$179 million in funding sought, UNOCT requested \$73 million for 19 projects (six of which are in partnership with other UN entities) versus, for example, \$51 million requested for 15 projects by UNODC (three of which are in partnership with UNOCT and four with other UN entities) and \$44 million requested for 10 projects by UNDP (one of which is in partnership with UNOCT and two with other UN entities).⁶⁸ In contrast, in the 2019–2020 appeal, UNODC and UNDP were leading the majority of proposed projects, with UNOCT the proposed implementer of 13 out of 60.

The working group compiled a set of lessons learned from the appeal, drawing on feedback gathered from Compact entities, project managers, and donors. Among the successes identified in its report were raising the visibility of collective and individual contributions of UN entities toward implementation of the Strategy, increasing transparency of the UN system’s work on counterterrorism and PVE issues, and promoting a spirit of collaboration. The report notes the appeal was successful in securing support from 18 funding partners, but fell short of its goal to realize sustainable and predictable funding.⁶⁹ In consultations, there was a perception that this shortcoming generated dissatisfaction among Compact entities, especially for those in situations where anticipated UNOCT seed funding for joint Compact initiatives also did not

materialize. There appears to have been a lack of clarity regarding who was responsible for fundraising for programs included in the appeal, with some expecting UNOCT to play a lead fundraising role.

The report found that the appeal lacked a theory of change and that the substantive value proposition of the appeal lacked clear definition and articulation.⁷⁰ In consultations, stakeholders described the appeal as a compilation of member state priorities and concept notes submitted by Compact entities. Although UNOCT vetted the 52 projects to ensure alignment with CTED assessments and mainstream human rights and gender aspects, there remains some uncertainty about why certain projects were selected. Many felt it lacked strategic orientation or logical coherence that united the individual programs toward implementation of the Strategy and around priorities resulting from the most recent review of the Strategy. Monitoring and evaluating the appeal are also difficult because funds are allocated to Compact entities leading the project, which each have differing methodologies for reporting.⁷¹

Planning is underway for a more targeted 2023 appeal focused on technical assistance provision for member states in Africa, with its launch timed for UN Counter-Terrorism Week and preceding the summit on counterterrorism organized by UNOCT and the Government of Nigeria planned for early 2024. Taking onboard some of the lessons from the prior appeal, the 2023 appeal intends to focus on fewer initiatives that will be implemented jointly by Compact entities. It remains unclear if this is merely a one-off change in scope and how the 2023 appeal will correlate to a theory of change and demonstrate its impact in driving forward balanced implementation of the Strategy by member states.

Further, the release of the next iteration of the multiyear appeal may predate decisions that affect its effective utilization. For example, the working group report advises the establishment of a pooled fund to support

67 UNOCT, “2021-2022 United Nations Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/MYA-2021-2022> (accessed 16 April 2023).

68 Ibid.

69 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, “2021-2022 United Nations Multi-Year Appeal for Counter-Terrorism Lessons Learned,” n.d., pp. 8–9, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/multi-year_lessonslearned_2021-2022.pdf.

70 Ibid., p. 10.

71 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

strategic joint initiatives by two or more Compact entities. Such a pooled fund would focus on securing sustainable, predictable resources by leveraging annual funding rounds with the aim of long-term commitments for these initiatives in support of the Strategy. This differs from prior iterations of the appeal, in which donor contributions were directed to specific UN entities to implement specific projects.

There are valid questions regarding the necessity of a second counterterrorism fund, especially given pending discussions on whether UNOCT should receive a grant-making mandate. If established, a pooled fund will require professional administration; independent oversight; explicit human rights, gender, and civil society engagement guidelines; and clear procedures for proposing, selecting, and allocating projects. Simply making UNOCT responsible for reviewing proposals and allocating pooled funding while its own UNCCT and SPIB are also implementers would be very problematic.

INTEGRATING THE RULE OF LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GENDER COMMITMENTS

Although protecting and promoting human rights in counterterrorism and PVE efforts is discursively embraced by the General Assembly, measures to counter terrorism and its financing play a substantial role in practice in the worldwide deterioration of civic space and perpetuation of serious, systematic human rights violations.

Under the guise of the fight against terrorism, member states employ arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, systematic use of torture against people suspected of terrorism, detention in unofficial facilities, violation of fair trial guarantees, admission of confessions obtained under duress, and violations of the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association. There is a growing tendency for states to declare an endless terrorism-related state of emergency, which ostensibly allows them to derogate from certain rights. At the operational level, nonprofit and humanitarian actors are impeded by overregulation, undue scrutiny, invasive monitoring, and inadequate due process protections, which limit the timely and efficient delivery



UN Photo

Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, provides an intervention during the Global Center on Cooperative Security's event "Civil Society Reflections on the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy."

of their critical operations. Modern technologies are increasingly employed in these efforts (box 3).

The lack of global political will, leadership, and robust accountability mechanisms to uphold human rights and the rule of law as the foundation of counterterrorism activities means that communities are suffering, particularly marginalized populations, human rights defenders, indigenous communities, journalists, justice activists, women's groups, and political opponents. The United Nations lacks an effective system to monitor and hold member states accountable for human rights abuses carried out in the name of countering terrorism. Even efforts to improve the frequency and consistency of public reporting on abuses have floundered absent adequate mandates, independence, and political and financial investment. For instance, the release of OHCHR's assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China occurred just before midnight in Geneva on 31 August 2022, minutes before outgoing High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet officially left her post, with no follow-up since then.

There are barriers to meaningfully tracking positive efforts of member states and the United Nations in promoting and protecting human rights and the rule of law while countering terrorism. For example, Pillar IV of the Strategy stresses the need to promote and protect human rights and specifies the rights of victims of terrorism. Reports on progress therefore fail to

Box 3. New Technologies

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) and modern technologies for terrorism purposes has received increased attention in the last several years, especially because the COVID-19 pandemic caused much of the world's population to spend more time online and artificial intelligence and unmanned aerial systems advancements are becoming ever more accessible. Entities of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact provide a range of technical assistance programs on the misuse of ICT, the monitoring and countering of online terrorist content, and the prevention of terrorist use of drones and other autonomous and remotely operated systems, often in partnership with entities such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and Tech Against Terrorism. The Security Council and prior reviews of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy* have also increasingly focused on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorism purposes, including adoption of a series of resolutions focused on using biometrics, Advance Passenger Information, and Passenger Name Records for counterterrorism purposes. The Counter-Terrorism Committee's special meeting in Delhi and resulting declaration further increased this attention, with a specific focus on unmanned aerial systems, terrorism financing, and ICT.

Many have voiced concerns about this further expansion of the UN counterterrorism agenda with a focus on limiting terrorist operations but little attention to the misuse and abuse of new technologies by governments.^a In her statement addressing Security Council members in India, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of

human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism stated that

the focus is how the United Nations and member states, in seeking to respond to terrorist threats in the new and emerging technology space, must avoid infringing human rights protections by virtue of arbitrary, unnecessary and/or disproportionate impacts on innocent users of new technologies. But at the same time, it is important to consider the degree to which the UN and member states' own deployment of new and emerging technologies for counterterrorist purposes affects human rights protection and interacts with terrorists' use of those technologies. ... [I]nclusive multilateral regulation of the development, use, storage and transfer of new technologies is essential. Such regulation must be human rights compliant not only because with such inherently high-risk technologies, protecting the dignity of the human person is indispensable, but also because our failure to regulate has had profound consequences for the reproduction of the conditions that produce violence itself.^b

Furthermore, it is questionable whether a counterterrorism focus and thus the review of the Strategy are the appropriate lenses through which to address the misuse and abuse of modern technologies, especially given the ongoing negotiations of a UN cybercrime convention. The inclusion of ambiguous or contradictory language in different UN processes and a further overemphasis of counterterrorism efforts over other concerns and policy areas are likely.

a Tomaso Falchetta and Anna Oosterlinck, "UN Counterterrorism and Technology: What Role for Human Rights in Security?" Just Security, 23 November 2022, <https://www.justsecurity.org/84246/un-counterterrorism-and-technology-what-role-for-human-rights-in-security/>.

b Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, remarks at the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee special meeting, Delhi, 25 October 2022, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/sr/statements/2022-11-09/Ni_Aolain_2022_10_25_UNSRCT_CTC_Remarks.pdf.

disaggregate efforts specific to the rights of victims of terrorism from those that protect the rights of victims of counterterrorism. For less critical observers, this obfuscation may lead to a misperception concerning

the scale of activities that meaningfully promote and protect human rights and the rule of law in counterterrorism and PVE policies and practices.

The prior Blue Sky report argued that, for human rights to inform Strategy implementation, more than incremental, project-based, or piecemeal approaches are required. Structural reforms, strong leadership, and accountability to support a more fundamental shift are necessary. Although the global record on protecting human rights has continued to deteriorate, important advancements were made in the resolution of the seventh review, including strengthened language on human rights, rule of law, and gender and advancing women's roles, specifically on preventing the instrumentalization of women. Importantly, it also recognized the negative impacts of counterterrorism efforts on development, peace-building, impartial humanitarian action, and civil society. Gender-responsive counterterrorism interventions must be grounded in rights-based approaches, accounting for the principles of nondiscrimination and equality and underpinned by the “do no harm” principle and gender and conflict sensitivity.⁷² The deficits in implementing Pillar IV of the Strategy initiated critical discussions during the seventh review regarding internal, independent oversight of the work of the United Nations in counterterrorism and PVE matters, although the final resolution did not include this proposal.⁷³

The integration of rule of law–based, gender-responsive, and rights-based counterterrorism and PVE policies and programs requires a commitment to robust systems of oversight, due diligence, risk analysis, and mitigation, monitoring, and evaluation. At the national level, adherence to the rule of law also means there must be accountability—a system for receiving, assessing, and meaningfully redressing complaints and violations that provides a fair opportunity to be heard by credible, independent decision-makers who are committed to human rights and the rule of law. These

decision-makers themselves must be accountable for their actions as well through transparency in their proceedings and decision-making and through other institutional mechanisms.

At the UN level, an independent oversight and accountability mechanism has been proposed to help ensure that UN efforts to counter terrorism and its financing and prevent violent extremism comply with international law, including international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. An independent, impartial, and adequately resourced internal oversight mechanism can support the United Nations in identifying, tracking, reporting, and responding to the misuse, abuse, or misapplication of counterterrorism efforts that unduly impact civic space, humanitarian action, and the ability of nonprofit organizations to operate and access financing services. Although there is a clear need for such oversight, some are concerned about the operational, financial, and mandate challenges such a mechanism would potentially create, including in relation to the roles of OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism. They raise questions about how information will be collected and shared and query whether an additional mechanism would reduce rather than improve efficiency in integrating the rule of law and human rights across policies and programs.

The Secretary-General's call to action for human rights called on UN entities to ensure that the implementation of their mandates is “informed by human rights risk and opportunity analysis, including gender[-] specific analysis” and that rigorous due diligence is conducted to avoid real or perceived harms, including through the human rights due diligence policy.⁷⁴ Across UNOCT and the Compact, these systems are

72 Global Counterterrorism Forum, *Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Policy Toolkit*, September 2022, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Links/Meetings/2022/CC20/Documents/Gender%20PCVE%20Toolkit/GCTFGenderPCVEToolkit_EN.pdf?ver=gJQcxR6Q5HEd1A_Yko2MVA%3d%3d.

73 Elco Kessels and Melissa Lefas, “What the Review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Tells Us About How Far We Have Come Since 9/11,” *Just Security*, 27 July 2021, <https://www.justsecurity.org/77580/what-the-review-of-the-un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy-tells-us-about-how-far-we-have-come-since-9-11/>.

74 António Guterres, “The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action for Human Rights,” 2020, p. 6, https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf. The human rights due diligence policy requires all UN entities to be diligent in ensuring that support to non-UN security forces is provided in a manner that is consistent with the purposes and principles as set out in the UN Charter and is compliant with and promotes respect for international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. See UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, “Identical Letters Dated 25 February 2013 From the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council,” A/67/775-S/2013/110, 5 March 2013, annex (containing the human rights due diligence policy on UN support to non-UN security forces).

fragmented and woefully underdeveloped considering the serious consequences of the counterterrorism agenda on human rights and member states' commitment to counterterrorism measures that are complementary and mutually reinforcing with human rights in accord with the Strategy.

Necessary Preconditions

In his 2023 report, the Secretary-General described appropriate internal technical capacity on rule of law, human rights, and gender issues as a “necessary precondition” for the integration of human rights and gender perspectives in UN counterterrorism efforts.⁷⁵ Dedicated capacities, however, are scant. At OHCHR, two staff members are dedicated to counterterrorism and human rights issues, one of which has earmarked funding concluding at the end of 2023. At UN Women, two staff members are currently covering gender and counterterrorism issues under UN Women's core mandate. At OCHA, one staff member covers the counterterrorism file. At CTED, there are two human rights officers, including one in a senior position, and one gender officer. One Special Rapporteur is dedicated exclusively and explicitly to human rights and counterterrorism (box 4). The newly created Human Rights and Gender Section at UNOCT has seen the sharpest increase in capacities, with three staff leading on human rights efforts and two on gender issues, led by a newly recruited chief of section.

Even still, measured against the task at hand, this personnel cannot cover the breadth of issues, projects, and policy work for the necessary systems of risk and due diligence to be developed and managed and to achieve system-wide mainstreaming objectives that go beyond the necessary albeit baseline efforts planned for Compact efforts to have human rights and gender benchmarks by the victims and human rights and gender working groups. Additional personnel with adequate authority, including through regular budget allocations, supported by strong mandates and structural mechanisms must be considered to account for

the gap. The Secretary-General called for the allocation of a minimum of 15 percent of all funds for counterterrorism and PVE efforts to incorporate human rights and gender equality considerations.⁷⁶ If endorsed by member states in the eighth review of the Strategy, applying this allocation across all extrabudgetary contributions could provide the support costs needed for stable, non-project-specific extrabudgetary positions as a complement to the regular budget posts. This would allow the system to scale its human rights and gender experts up and down as project needs warrant.

Program and Project Conception and Design

The process of UN counterterrorism program and project conception is the natural starting point for the proper integration of human rights and gender equality issues. The design of programs and projects should be informed by CTED analysis and assessments to ensure programs promote and protect human rights and properly account for context, but programs also must consider relevant analysis, reports, and recommendations that draw on UN human rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review, UN human rights treaty bodies, and independent special procedures of the Human Rights Council, as well as OHCHR, as encouraged in the seventh review of the Strategy.⁷⁷ UN regional and country teams, including Resident Coordinators, Humanitarian Coordinators, and UNDP's Peace and Development Advisors, are valuable partners in framing context-sensitive, needs-responsive programs. The 2023 iteration of UNDP's extremism report crystallizes why understanding context through a broad human rights lens is imperative to designing effective programs. As with UNDP's 2017 report, which provides a comprehensive overview of drivers of extremism on the African continent, the 2023 report found that, “in most cases, state action, accompanied by a sharp escalation of human rights abuses, appears to be the prominent factor finally pushing individuals into (violent extremist) groups in Africa,” with 71 percent of respondents citing governmental action, including the arrest or killing

75 UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/77/718, 2 February 2023, para. 42 (hereinafter 2023 UN Strategy implementation report).

76 Ibid.

77 Seventh review resolution, para. 98.

Box 4. The Role of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism

The position of Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, which is part-time and unpaid, remains the principal UN post explicitly and exclusively dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights in relation to counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism efforts. Since the most recent review of the *United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, Special Rapporteur Fionnuala Ní Aoláin has released reports on the development, use, and transfer of new technologies;^a on peacemaking,

peace-building, sustaining peace, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution;^b on secret detentions;^c and on mainstreaming human rights in capacity-building and technical assistance at the national, regional, and global levels^d and a position paper on the human rights and rule of law implications of countering the financing of terrorism.^e She seeks to produce a global study based on wide-ranging consultations on the negative impact of counterterrorism measures on civil society and civic space before the end of her term this summer.

- a UN General Assembly, *Human Rights Implications of the Development, Use and Transfer of New Technologies in the Context of Counter-terrorism and Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, A/HRC/52/39, 1 March 2023 (advance edited version).
- b UN General Assembly, "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-General," A/77/345, 16 September 2022 (containing *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin: *Impact of Counter-terrorism on Peacemaking, Peacebuilding, Sustaining Peace, Conflict Prevention and Resolution*).
- c UN General Assembly, *Follow-up Report to the Joint Study on Global Practices in Relation to Secret Detention in the Context of Countering Terrorism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, A/HRC/49/45, 25 March 2022.
- d UN General Assembly, "Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-General," A/76/261, 3 August 2021 (containing *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin: *Advancing Human Rights Through the Mainstreaming of Human Rights in Counter-terrorism Capacity-Building and Technical Assistance at the National, Regional and Global Levels*).
- e Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "The Human Rights and Rule of Law Implications of Countering the Financing of Terrorism Measures," Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, June 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2022-06-13-SRCT-HR-CFT-Position-Paper.pdf>.

of family or friends, as the event that impelled them to join a violent extremist group.⁷⁸

Member states should support the implementation of existing language in the Strategy resolution. In 2021, Compact working groups revised their terms of reference to strengthen human rights commitments, including by initiating an effort to take into account the work of human rights mechanisms.⁷⁹ Although an important first step, much needs to be done to ensure that this and other efforts to implement the resolution of the seventh review are systematically employed in program design and implementation and that staff are trained to access and leverage the information. For

example, in furtherance of these ends, OHCHR provided in-focus briefings on the implementation of the human rights due diligence policy.⁸⁰ Again, consistent, regular application by program and project managers is required, with efforts to develop internal standard operating procedures to support the policy's implementation commended, albeit overdue.

The complexity, underfunding, and limited political support of and lagging progress in implementing Pillar IV within the United Nations in many ways mirrors the realities of the pillar's implementation by member states. Without due attention to Pillar IV, there will continue to be violations of human rights

78 UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement*, 2023, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-02/JOURNEY%20TO%20EXTREMISM%20IN%20AFRICA%20PATHWAYS%20TO%20RECRUITMENT%20AND%20DISENGAGEMENT_2023.pdf.

79 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, "2021 Annual Report to the Secretary-General," pp. 3, 26.

80 Ibid.

and fundamental freedoms perpetrated by terrorist organizations and through counterterrorism efforts. Concrete, actionable proposals for UN human rights oversight mechanisms, although difficult to operationalize, are urgently needed to strengthen the UN system while providing a model for member states to follow.

In the eighth review of the Strategy, it is incumbent on member states to demand the full and effective implementation of the resolution of the seventh review within the UN system, including through adequate personnel and program funding, leadership that supports the development and consistent application of clear standard operating procedures that promote the integration of human rights across UNOCT and Compact members, and internal independent oversight.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSE CIVIL SOCIETY

Despite some recent improvements, civil society participation in UN counterterrorism efforts remains ad hoc, opaque, and reliant on the priorities and interests of individual member states. When engagement does occur, it is limited, generally involving a select group of international organizations and few local actors. Civil society has proactively self-organized itself to increase advocacy on important issues; examples include the Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism and more institutionalized forms of engagement such as the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and the Global NPO Coalition on FATF.

The Strategy and its review resolutions underscore the critical importance of civil society partnerships in countering terrorism, highlighting its diverse contributions and trusted relationships with communities. Civil society plays important roles in ensuring accountable, transparent, and rights-based counterterrorism policies and practices. These roles remain particularly essential because the abuse and misuse of



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Participants during the Global Center on Cooperative Security's event "Civil Society Reflections on the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy."

counterterrorism measures has had dire consequences for human rights, civic space, and the operations of humanitarian and nongovernmental actors globally. Although civic space is often constricted under the guise of national security, research cited by the Human Rights Council has found no evidence that such measures reduce the number of terrorist attacks.⁸¹

As they did in the seventh review of the Strategy, member states are expected to continue debating language relevant to civic space and UN–civil society engagement. Member states have strong differences of opinion on the extent, structure, and goals of civil society participation in the counterterrorism agenda. Some seek to weaken existing language, minimize the extent of civil society contributions, assert control over the selection of participating actors, or reverse progress on opening counterterrorism efforts to nonstate actors altogether. These member states tend to argue that counterterrorism matters should remain the sole responsibility of governments, in particular intelligence and security services and law enforcement. A growing coalition of member states deemed “friendly” to civil society provides a bulwark against these pressures. They point to civil society’s important contributions in ensuring that counterterrorism measures are localized and contextualized, promote and protect human rights,

81 UN General Assembly, *Impact of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Civic Space and the Rights of Civil Society Actors and Human Rights Defenders: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism*, A/HRC/40/52, 1 March 2019, para. 10 (citing Jeong-Woo Koo and Amanda Murdie, “Liberty or Security: Do Civil Society Restrictions Limit Terrorism?” Center for Strategic & International Studies, 4 June 2018, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/liberty-or-security-do-civil-society>).

and do not negatively impact civic space. Simply put, they make certain that these efforts are just, appropriate, and ultimately more effective and hold governmental actors accountable when their efforts are not.

In line with the foundational principles of the Strategy and the UN Charter, all UN entities have a responsibility to protect, promote, and sustain civil society participation. UNOCT, including as secretariat of the Compact, must take a lead in these efforts. This includes updating UNOCT's civil society engagement strategy in partnership with diverse civil society, particularly those organizations most impacted by terrorism and counterterrorism measures, and making it publicly available in full. The revised engagement strategy should follow the UN guidance note on protection and promotion of civic space by ensuring meaningful civil society participation, protecting those organizations at risk of persecution and retaliation as a precondition for a vibrant civic space, and promoting inclusive participation channels and fundamental freedoms.⁸² Meaningful engagement with civil society requires UN entities to regularly assess the effectiveness of channels for participation and access to information and enable feedback loops for diverse civil society.

In the seventh review and for the first time since the Strategy's adoption in 2006, negative impacts of counterterrorism measures were mentioned in the preambular language of the resolution. The eighth review provides an opportunity for the United Nations to fulfill its norm-setting role by further strengthening existing language to acknowledge the risks of targeted reprisals against civil society when engaging and associating with the United Nations, especially on sensitive topics such as human rights and counterterrorism. In his annual report on reprisals against those seeking to cooperate or having cooperated with the United Nations, the Secretary-General found that, of the

nearly 350 individual cases of intimidation and reprisal, 60 percent involved women victims and human rights defenders.⁸³ Thus, the United Nations must ensure that adequate preconditions for engagement are in place for civil society to partner safely. A set of recommendations put forward by more than 90 civil society organizations from 43 countries convened by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism makes this clear: "The United Nations must hold itself to greater levels of accountability to civil society, many of whom assume great risk, including threats of reprisal, to share their expertise and recommendations."⁸⁴

In addition to furthering progressive, positive language, member states must hold the UN system accountable for implementing existing requirements and guidance. This requires procedural and cultural shifts to create sustained opportunities for the meaningful engagement of civil society in policy discussions, meetings, programs, and evaluation efforts. The High-Level International Conference on Human Rights, Civil Society, and Counter-Terrorism in Malaga, Spain, is one example of a UNOCT effort that consulted civil society throughout the process. The collaborative, participatory approach to the design and implementation of the conference stands as a model that should be replicated and expanded for future conferences, including the upcoming summit planned by UNOCT and the Government of Nigeria.⁸⁵ It included a number of preparatory meetings and consultations on the agenda, the moderation with civil society of all thematic sessions, and a consultative review of the outcome document. Another example is the hybrid high-level event on 9 March 2023 at UN Headquarters in New York, organized by the Global Center and the co-facilitators of the eighth review of the Strategy, which provided diverse civil society reflections on the 2023 report of the Secretary-General.⁸⁶

82 "Protection and Promotion of Civic Space," *United Nations Guidance Note*, September 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf.

83 UN General Assembly, *Cooperation With the United Nations, Its Representatives and Mechanisms in the Field of Human Rights: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/HRC/51/47, 14 September 2022, para. 123.

84 "2022 Civil Society Workshop Outcome Document," n.d., <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/sr/civilsocietyworkshop-malaga/2022-08-16/Civil-Society-Workshop-Outcome-Document-Malaga-Spain.pdf>.

85 2023 UN Strategy implementation report, p. 11.

86 UN Web TV, "Civil Society Reflections on the 2023 Report of the Secretary-General on Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," 9 March 2023, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k18/k18h8jrcps>.

Multiple, important civil society consultation processes are taking place in 2023, including the Special Rapporteur's global study on the negative impact of counterterrorism measures on civic space, which provides an important opportunity to hear from civil society most impacted by terrorism and counterterrorism measures. The outcomes should inform Strategy negotiations regarding meaningful, diverse, and safe participation of civil society. Another relevant process is a scoping project assessing civil society needs and interests, as well as obstacles and practical requirements for establishing more regularized, sustained engagement with the UN counterterrorism architecture, organized by the Global Center in partnership with Rights & Security International. The resulting report will explore avenues for diversifying civil society engagement with the UN counterterrorism architecture and preconditions for sustained, safe engagement of civil society with the UN system. The process draws from existing civil society engagement processes, including the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security and the Global NPO Coalition on FATE.

MEASURING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Previous reports in the Blue Sky series have highlighted extensively the need for a comprehensive UN framework to assess implementation of the Strategy across three levels of analysis: global, institutional, and programmatic.⁸⁷ The need for evaluation remains urgent but is often stymied by a lack of nuanced conversation about what needs to be evaluated, by whom, and for what purpose. The ability to realize meaningful evaluation of the Strategy requires member states' financial and political support to key UN agencies so that these agencies have adequate time, capacities, resources, and channels to civil society. Clear theories of change, baselines, targets, and indicators are also needed to allow for consolidation of data across

programs and to facilitate analysis on outcomes and impacts. To address some elements of this, consideration has been given to extending the review cycle to every four years, providing more time to implement activities and more meaningfully monitor and evaluate progress between review cycles. Opponents of this proposal argue that too much institutional memory, particularly of rotating member state focal points, will be lost and that the dynamic nature of terrorism will outpace the Strategy.

At the global level, evaluation efforts should focus on the efficacy of the Strategy in orienting human rights-based counterterrorism and PVE measures, while accounting for their negative consequences on human security, human rights, and civic space. Currently, the Secretary-General's report serves as the principal mechanism for taking stock of and communicating progress made in the implementation of the Strategy, most prominently by the UN system. The report attempts to do this by presenting progress made against the Strategy's four pillars and elaborating activities undertaken across priority themes. This approach is heavily reliant on self-reporting by member states, regional organizations, UN entities, and civil society.⁸⁸ It is unclear how these data are verified and how differing inputs are prioritized for inclusion, if at all, and what methodologies are employed to assess the veracity of the provided information. Although useful for taking stock of some of the diverse actions being undertaken, the report falls short in comprehensively and objectively assessing progress made in the balanced implementation of the Strategy.

The prior Blue Sky report argued that due consideration should be given to other types of frameworks to achieve a global review, such as the establishment of an independent review body or the creation of a peer review mechanism to assess Strategy implementation, taking inspiration from the UNODC Implementation Review Mechanism⁸⁹ and those mechanisms employed

87 See Alistair Millar, "Blue Sky IV: Clouds Dispersing?" Global Center, May 2018, pp. 17–18, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/GC_2018-May_Blue-Sky-1.pdf; Global Center, "Blue Sky V," pp. 35–37.

88 The 2023 report received input from 42 member states, five regional organizations, 23 civil society organizations, and 19 Compact entities. 2023 UN Strategy implementation report, annex I.

89 Global Center, "Blue Sky V," p. 36.

by the Peacebuilding Commission,⁹⁰ FATF, and the Human Rights Council. The establishment of such a framework will allow for results to feed into the Secretary-General's biennial report prior to the Strategy review to better inform the negotiation process and priority-setting. For example, the Peacebuilding Strategy Review offers a model for an inclusive, deliberate process that includes an independent assessment by eminent persons and regional and thematic consultations with member states, UN entities, and civil society.⁹¹ The findings of these informal engagements, which are principally led by a core group of UN entities,⁹² are compiled and submitted to the Secretary-General for their report on peace-building and sustaining peace. Another proposal is to establish a standing committee for the Secretary-General's report, inspired by UN Women's model for the annual report on women, peace, and security.⁹³ Here, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and UNOCT, with meaningful participation from civil society, would establish a standing committee of UN entities and include early, transparent consultation and integration of inputs.

Evaluating progress at the institutional level may be more realistic. That involves examining whether the structure, resourcing, and collective efforts of the UN counterterrorism architecture are advancing balanced implementation of the Strategy. The intent is to learn whether the United Nations is realizing its comparative advantages to support human rights-based counterterrorism and PVE policies and practices. Focusing the evaluation on the UN counterterrorism architecture instead of on global counterterrorism efforts writ large can enable development of a tailored theory of change

that aligns with priorities set by member states in the review of the Strategy. To do this would require greater examination of the results of UN activities and their relationship to priorities in the Strategy.

The ability to conduct institutional analysis is contingent on coordinated, consistent, and comprehensive deployment of monitoring and evaluation frameworks across UN entities and their respective programs. The intent is to determine whether the significant financial resources invested in individual programs, regional and high-level conferences, and other initiatives have contributed to improvements in reducing the threat of terrorism without generating harms.

Calls for this institutional-level analysis are not new. In the resolution of the sixth review of the Strategy, member states requested that the Secretary-General propose concrete recommendations and options on ways to assess the impact and progress made by UN entities in the implementation of the Strategy.⁹⁴ In his corresponding report, the Secretary-General suggests that member states may wish to ask the United Nations to develop a comprehensive, human rights-based results framework for the Strategy that includes “anticipated outputs, outcomes and impact in delivering the four pillars of the Strategy” with results “defined by key performance indicators, which would need to be quantifiable and measurable using data from verified sources.”⁹⁵ He also indicated that member states may wish to encourage greater standardization and alignment of monitoring and evaluation frameworks used by the Compact to assess the impact of their counterterrorism and PVE efforts.⁹⁶

90 The Peacebuilding Commission agreed to a three-part informal phase for the review of the peace-building agenda: an independent assessment from eminent persons selected by the Secretary-General, broad member state consultations, and regional and thematic consultations. Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, “A Roadmap for the 2020 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Chair’s Summary,” n.d., https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/psc_retreat_2019_chairs_summary.pdf.

91 Twin 2016 resolutions called for a “comprehensive review” of UN peace-building. UN General Assembly, A/RES/70/262, 12 May 2016; UN Security Council, S/RES/2282, 27 April 2016. The Peacebuilding Strategy Review includes a robust, informal phase prior to the co-facilitator-led process comprising (1) consultations with member states on various aspects of peace-building and sustaining peace; (2) an independent assessment from eminent persons, selected by the Secretary-General; and (3) regional and thematic consultations organized by member states and UN entities with civil society. “2020 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture: Proposal for Suggested Terms of Reference,” n.d., https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/suggested_tors_for_the_2020_review_-_final1.pdf.

92 These are the UNDP/UN Women and the Policy and Mediation Division; the DPO Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training; the UN Development Coordination Office; UNDP; UN Women; and OHCHR. United Nations, “2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture,” n.d., <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/2020-review-un-peacebuilding-architecture> (accessed 16 April 2023).

93 “2022 Civil Society Workshop Outcome Document,” rec. 2.

94 UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/72/284, 2 July 2018, para. 83.

95 UN General Assembly, *Options on Ways to Assess the Impact and Progress Made in the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the United Nations System: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/73/866, 8 May 2019, para. 55.

96 *Ibid.*, para. 61.

In the resolution of the seventh review of the Strategy, member states noted the Secretary-General's report, conveying neither approval nor disapproval, and requested that UNOCT "assess, as appropriate, methodologies and tools for a results framework to ensure comprehensive, balanced and integrated implementation of the Strategy by the entities subordinate to the General Assembly."⁹⁷ The focus of the seventh review asking UNOCT merely to assess methodologies and tools, rather than to develop a standardized framework for measuring comprehensive, human rights-based results as initially proposed by the Secretary-General, signals the membership's inability to reach agreement on fully investing in the process. The resulting assessment that was conducted suffered from a low response rate from Compact entities, with contributions from only nine of the 46. Analysis of the data received found that several Compact entities had their own specific results framework as a prerequisite for approving programs. Although most had at least some standards for monitoring and evaluation, there appeared to be different priorities, normative frameworks, and operational contexts that have led different entities to come up with different solutions to seemingly similar challenges.⁹⁸

Some Compact entities have invested in monitoring and evaluation, including through external audits and evaluations, the development of internal policies and tool kits, or hiring in-house specialists. The lack of a common framework, however, undermines efforts to conduct institutional-level analysis on the overall impact of UN efforts.

Although a comprehensive institutional assessment has not been achieved, several evaluations and audits have endeavored to improve more narrow components of the architecture and system. A December 2018 audit of UNCT by OIOS highlighted 12 recommendations for improvement, including updating the UNCT

five-year plan, reviewing roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Board, enhancing reporting mechanisms, and clarifying staff duties.⁹⁹ The Secretary-General announced in early 2020 that 90 percent of the report's recommendations have since been enacted or are on target for implementation. Nonetheless, on the request of the UNCT Advisory Board chair, KPMG was contracted to undertake an external evaluation of UNCT, which was released in September 2020 and contained further recommendations.¹⁰⁰

In 2021 the Compact Working Group on Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation commissioned a so-called meta-synthesis that aggregated and analyzed all available program evaluations, project reports, audits, strategic reviews, and other assessment materials and relevant oversight and assessment reports produced by 18 Compact entities since 2018, which comprised 118 documents.¹⁰¹ To conduct the analysis, a theory of change was developed in relation to the UN role in advancing the Strategy. The synthesis found "adequate qualitative evidence" to suggest progress in achieving outcomes that advance Pillars I–III of the Strategy, with not enough information available pertaining to Pillar IV. More generally, it was evident to the authors that "most of the available evidence was inadequate to assess (not to mention quantify) the extent to which these outcomes were being achieved," leading to the conclusion that a comprehensive, independent evaluation of UN efforts in support of the Strategy is required.¹⁰² It recommends better data gathering and information sharing among Compact entities, investments in evaluation capacities and a common monitoring and evaluation framework, and specific attention to human rights.

A 2023 OIOS audit of the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism recommended to explore with donors "the possibility of preparing annual aggregated reports on the activities of the UNOCT and its [t]rust [f]und,

97 Ibid., para. 93.

98 Ibid., para. 8.

99 Internal Audit Division, OIOS, "Audit of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre," no. 2018/121, 6 December 2018, rec. 3, <https://oios.un.org/file/7319/download?token=5wahhcgj>.

100 KPMG, "Evaluation of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre: Final Report," 30 September 2020, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/20201009_evaluation_of_the_unct_5_year_programme_final_kpmg_report.pdf.

101 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, "Learn Better, Together: Independent Meta-Synthesis Under the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," December 2021, pp. xiv, 6, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/methasynthesis_gcts_report_dec2021.pdf.

102 See generally *ibid.*

instead of individual project reports, to improve operational efficiency and expand visibility of trust fund activities.”¹⁰³ Critically, it also urges the implementation of recommendations of the previously mentioned KPMG evaluation, of which 13 of the 16 are apparently still in progress.¹⁰⁴

Each of the mentioned evaluations and audits offers valuable recommendations that apply to the scope of their purview, but this piecemeal approach fails to capture a broader view of interrelated systems and assess the coordination function of UNOCT or the UN counterterrorism architecture more broadly. It also calls attention to the need, particularly as it relates to Pillar IV, for improved monitoring and evaluation systems to allow for institutional trends to be tracked. Compact working groups are putting forward two concurrent proposals that endeavor to do this. The first is a joint proposal by the working groups on human rights and victims and gender that seeks to develop benchmarks on human rights and gender equality for activities of the Compact, to be proposed to the Compact secretariat for approval and promulgation. The second is put forward by the Working Group on Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation to undertake an independent evaluation of all Compact entities’ monitoring and evaluation approaches for supporting

member state implementation of the Strategy, including on human rights and gender issues.

Given the continued growth in programmatic investment and mounting negative impacts of counterterrorism activities, the UN inability to capture data and assess impact is seriously concerning. It is the responsibility of UN counterterrorism entities to implement inclusive, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems to measure the effects of their work. As the secretariat of the Compact, UNOCT is in a position to operationalize the Secretary-General’s proposals and address recommendations of the various evaluations and audits. To realize effective monitoring and evaluation, member states will need to demand it, resource it, and hold UN entities, their programs, and the UN counterterrorism architecture as a whole accountable for evaluating its work. Such actions must sit alongside parallel efforts to promote accountability and transparency in member state actions to address terrorism issues and advance balanced implementation of the Strategy at the national and global levels. Doing so will provide a critical evidence base to inform negotiations on the Strategy to ensure that the review process results in meaningful recalibration that addresses emerging threats and remains true to the core principles enshrined in the Strategy.

103 OIOS trust fund audit, exec. summ.

104 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.



The sculpture "Consciousness" in the garden at UN Headquarters, with the Secretariat building in the background.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The normative role of the United Nations has been a fundamental feature of its ability to act on behalf of all peoples, as derived from the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. The United Nations faces growing challenges to its leadership in a changing world, one in which hard-won normative gains are confronted with the stark realities of skyrocketing socioeconomic inequality, the many effects of climate change, a rising tide of nationalism, and the shrinking space for human rights and humanitarian action. The interconnectedness of global economies and the complex peace and security landscape require principled, coordinated international responses.

The process for the eighth review of the Strategy underscores the need to implement existing language and resolve open questions. Six years into its operation, UNOCT is still wrestling with several critical issues related to its funding, sustainability, impact, and prioritization of core functions. The Compact has undertaken a notable suite of activities, demonstrating the benefits of robust intra-UN collaboration. The rapid pace of delivery, however, coupled with a lack of standardized procedures has challenged the informally consensus-based nature of Compact operations. To seize its comparative advantage in counterterrorism and PVE efforts, the United Nations needs the support of member states to invest in policy leadership and coordination that systemically account for human rights and gender mainstreaming and civil society engagement to benefit human security. This report makes the following recommendations to improve UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts, building on the United Nations' comparative advantages as a norm-setter, convener, provider and facilitator of capacity development assistance, and global monitor assessing priorities, trends, and needs in the field.

OPTIMIZING THE UN ARCHITECTURE

1. Prioritize UNOCT leadership and coordination responsibilities as its most critical mandated functions to realize human rights and

gender mainstreaming obligations across all UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.

UNOCT is uniquely positioned to leverage the Compact framework to expand and diversify expert contributions and work with normative bodies to ensure that UN counterterrorism and PVE policies and practices are implemented in accordance with the Strategy and in a manner consistent with state obligations under international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. UNOCT should limit its programmatic efforts to larger, more complex programs that benefit from its unique mandate to coordinate among multiple Compact entities.

- 2. Assess carefully the need for and selection of the additional 24 regular budget post conversions the Secretary-General intends to include in the 2024 UN program budget for UNOCT.** Member states should assess if and why additional UNOCT posts are deemed critical versus other important investments in different parts of the UN system, notably human rights and gender-mainstreaming mandate holders, given that counterterrorism activities are not highlighted among the commitment areas or key proposals in the Secretary-General's 2021 report *Our Common Agenda*. The selection of converted positions, if any, must reflect key leadership and coordination priorities and should reinforce the balanced implementation of the Strategy, including by providing the Human Rights and Gender Section with adequate authority and capacity.
- 3. Resource Compact entities that have normative and cross-cutting functions to support their participation and contributions to Compact efforts.** Normative entities can support working groups, joint projects, and product development to ensure integrated human rights, rule of law, and gender-responsive approaches. This requires resourcing the working groups dedicated to human rights and gender issues to establish relevant benchmarks for all Compact activities. Such efforts would be bolstered by memorandums

of understanding between these entities and UNOCT, particularly to ensure close coordination with the Human Rights and Gender Section.

- 4. Develop written procedures collaboratively to guide Compact operations.** Introducing standard operating procedures would ensure that the comparative advantages and diverse expertise of Compact entities are brought to bear. The procedures should provide for consensus-based adoption of guidance material and selection of Compact projects, review and comment procedures for draft workplans and risk assessments, feedback mechanisms to ensure integration and alignment with current and historical programming, and monitoring and evaluation standards that integrate gender and human rights issues.
- 5. Strengthen and regularize engagement with civil society and UN country staff in the Compact.** The Compact should systematically invite civil society to contribute to its Coordination Committee meetings, engage with Resident Coordinators on relevant efforts, and add standing agenda items in working group meetings for discussions with in-country staff. Civil society should be provided with access to the Compact's digital platform to improve transparency and accountability while fostering a safe mutual exchange of information between UN entities and local actors to inform each party's work.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

- 6. Consider and address the sustainability of UNOCT operations carefully.** This can be done by (1) investing extrabudgetary resources in its core coordination and leadership mandates rather than programming, (2) scaling back program and project support offices and liaison and coordination offices in favor of working with and through other Compact entities and UN country teams in priority locations, and (3) actively pushing for truly unearmarked contributions to the Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism to minimize the pay-to-play culture and prioritization of donor interests over priorities articulated in the Strategy and

needs identified through CTED assessments and analysis.

- 7. Improve the Multi-Year Appeal by ensuring a theory of change that prioritizes achieving impact for communities affected by terrorism and counterterrorism efforts and establishing a consultative and collaborative internal and external process to map interests and inputs.** The appeal and its individual programs should establish a clear value proposition, have a strong strategic orientation realized through a limited set of high-impact programs and investments, require joint implementation by several Compact entities, secure sustainable and largely unearmarked funding, and include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework that helps to demonstrate impact in support of the balanced implementation of the Strategy.
- 8. Interrogate the need for a second counterterrorism fund critically.** If the United Nations wishes to establish a separate, pooled counterterrorism fund to support strategic joint initiatives under the Multi-Year Appeal, it must clarify this fund's relation to and difference from the trust fund, including the types of programs and entities it seeks to support and how financial allocation decisions are made, and indicate how it will be professionally administered.

INTEGRATING THE RULE OF LAW, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GENDER COMMITMENTS

- 9. Limit the introduction of new, undefined terms and concepts and avoid inclusion of substantive matters better addressed through a noncounterterrorism lens.** Member states should be cautious in introducing language in the resolution of the eighth review of the Strategy related to "new threats." Before exploring policy and programmatic work in new domains, UN entities need to undertake a comprehensive analysis of empirical evidence, terminologies, policies, and practice, informed by experts

from member states, the United Nations, civil society, and the private sector, to determine the suitability of counterterrorism and PVE approaches.

- 10. Ensure integration of rule of law, human rights, and gender by establishing an adequately resourced, sufficiently authorized independent oversight mechanism of all UN counterterrorism efforts.** Member states must ensure that their collective political and financial contributions to the United Nations realize their intended aims by improving accountability and transparency. This mechanism should ensure the consistent application of due diligence, risk analysis and mitigation, and UN human rights resources, including through rigorous monitoring and evaluation. It could leverage a supervisory or advisory board composed of members and observers, including civil society representatives, who will require timely and regular access to the necessary information to support these efforts.
- 11. Realize the implementation of the resolution of the seventh review and standard UN policies, including incorporation of relevant analysis, reports, and recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms across all UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts.** The resolution of the seventh review includes important language that has yet to be fully implemented. To advance implementation, member states should provide necessary resources and demand routine progress updates on these key components of the Strategy. UN programs managers should consistently and rigorously account for UN human rights mechanism outputs, including through the development, dissemination, and consistent application of internal standard operating procedures.
- 12. Increase the number of dedicated positions that cover human rights, gender, terrorism, and counterterrorism issues, including within OHCHR, UN Women, the UNOCT Human Rights and Gender Section, and CTED.** Existing personnel and expertise cannot meet the need to fully integrate rule of law, human rights, and gender priorities into UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts. Regular budget-funded

positions with sufficient authority should be prioritized for normative entities that play critical roles across the UN system and within the UNOCT Human Rights and Gender Section. Regularized allocations of project support costs, proposed at 15 percent, can allow UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts to ensure the necessary human rights and gender capacities to cover unique programmatic contexts and needs to a greater extent.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSE CIVIL SOCIETY

- 13. Prioritize civil society engagement by ensuring UN leaders and entities take a more proactive role in protecting against retaliation, repression, and abuse by states.** The United Nations must ensure that adequate preconditions for safe, accountable civil society engagement are met and that member states dedicate funds and political capital to reinforce and uphold those preconditions so that civil society can safely engage with the UN counterterrorism architecture. To do this, UN counterterrorism efforts will need to adopt and prioritize meaningful, transparent, and effective accountability and protection measures.
- 14. Implement existing civil society requirements and guidance, most importantly the UN guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space.** Procedural and cultural shifts are necessary to create sustained opportunities for the meaningful engagement of diverse civil society in policy discussions, meetings, program design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The collaborative, participatory approach to the design and implementation of the international conference co-hosted by UNOCT and the Government of Spain, which included preparatory meetings and consultations on the agenda, the moderation with civil society representatives of all sessions, and a consultative review of the outcome document, stands as a model that should be replicated and expanded. Compact entities should regularly assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for civil society participation,

engagement, and access to information and enable feedback loops for civil society.

- 15. Update the UNOCT civil society engagement strategy in partnership with diverse civil society and publish it in full.** Engagement with civil society most impacted by terrorism and counterterrorism measures must be prioritized. The strategy should be a living document, regularly reviewed in collaboration with diverse civil society and benchmarked against UN standards, including the guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space.
- 16. Commit long-term funding to support self-organizational efforts by diverse civil society actors to engage with the United Nations and other multilateral organizations and generally invest in civil society-led efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism.** Member states should support such efforts with funds delivered in a way that preserves and protects the independence of civil society and dispensed in partnership with and under the leadership of civil society.
- 17. Assess the need for UNOCT to acquire a grant-making mandate cautiously, including examining the necessary governance structure and working methods.** Concerns regarding a grant-making function underscore the critical need first to address structural, institutional, and operational conditions within UNOCT. Prior to considering a grant-making mandate, it is necessary to create a conducive, safe environment for civil society to access, support, and engage with the United Nations with the necessary governing policies, procedures, and protections in place.

MEASURING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

- 18. Consider extending the Strategy review cycle to every four years.** Member states should explore the opportunities and challenges, noting that a four-year review cycle would provide more time to implement UN counterterrorism and PVE efforts and more meaningfully monitor and evaluate progress between review cycles.
- 19. Establish and resource a framework for the global review of implementation of the Strategy in advance of its 20th anniversary, in 2026.** Such a global review could be realized through the establishment of an independent review body or commissioning of an independent external reviewer, mandated and resourced to engage with government, civil society, academia, and private sector experts to develop a methodology, collate data, and produce an independent analysis. The results of this assessment should feed into the Secretary-General's biennial report prior to the next review of the Strategy to better inform the negotiation process and priority-setting.
- 20. Standardize monitoring and evaluation approaches across all Compact entities and establish a comprehensive, human rights-based results framework to ensure balanced, integrated implementation of the Strategy.** The ability to conduct institutional analysis is contingent on coordinated, consistent, and comprehensive deployment of monitoring and evaluation frameworks across UN entities and their respective programs. Building on existing UN practices and external expertise, the Compact Working Group on Resource Mobilization, Monitoring and Evaluation should lead on the development of a standardized human rights-based monitoring and evaluation approach, promote its adoption and implementation across Compact entities, and ensure the resulting data feed into an overarching results framework that enables detailed assessment of UN efforts to support implementation of the Strategy.



The Global Center works to achieve lasting security by advancing inclusive, human rights–based policies, partnerships, and practices to address the root causes of violent extremism. We focus on four mutually reinforcing objectives:

- Supporting communities in addressing the drivers of conflict and violent extremism.
- Advancing human rights and the rule of law to prevent and respond to violent extremism.
- Combating illicit finance that enables criminal and violent extremist organizations.
- Promoting multilateral cooperation and rights-based standards in counterterrorism.

Our global team and network of experts, trainers, fellows, and policy professionals work to conduct research and deliver programming in these areas across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and South, Central, and Southeast Asia.