**The UN Security Council: Assessing Twenty Years of Counterterrorism**
**Summary of Virtual Roundtable**
**January 13, 2022**

On January 13, 2022, the Securing the Future Initiative (SFI), in cooperation with the RESOLVE Network, hosted a virtual roundtable that gathered nearly 40 researchers from across the globe to consider the role and impact of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in addressing terrorist threats over the past two decades and how to best position its work in this area moving forward. Participants focused on the successes and shortcomings, as well as the impacts, of Security Council counterterrorism efforts since its adoption of Resolution 1373 in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks. The meeting was one of a series of roundtable discussions that will inform the project's ongoing research and analysis. The exchange was part of a wider effort to ensure that the SFI's findings, which it will deliver in Fall 2022, benefit from a diversity of views and current research.

*Below is a summary of the key discussion points*

Roundtable participants reflected on the impact of UNSC counterterrorism efforts at the community, national, regional, and global levels, and on thematic issues, including the "foreign terrorist fighter" (FTF) phenomenon, human rights, humanitarian action, gender, and legal frameworks.

Participants acknowledged the Council's contributions in elaborating an international counterterrorism framework in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks that was grounded in the UN Charter, filled important international law gaps, and emphasized a criminal justice, rule of law-focused response to the terrorist threat. Participants underscored the importance of measuring the impact of two decades of Council counterterrorism practice, although the challenges in doing so were also highlighted. Beyond impact, participants stressed the need to improve accountability and oversight of countries' efforts to implement the Council's counterterrorism framework, including for the purpose of ensuring countries' national implementation measures are appropriately targeted.

Speakers highlighted some of the consequences of the Council's tendency to treat terrorism as an "exceptional" issue. In particular, they argued that this has contributed to the elaboration of a distinct UNSC "counterterrorism" architecture, as reflected in the proliferation of UNSC counterterrorism obligations and measures, and institutional resources. Participants suggested this has also created more space for countries to adopt their own "exceptional" responses to the threat, responses which have sometimes done more harm than good.

Participants also noted how this "exceptional" approach has led to the creation of a security paradigm that mainly serves state (as opposed to human) security. They pointed to the resulting challenges that non-security stakeholders – including civil society, peacebuilders, humanitarian actors, and human rights

advocates – have being heard in, let alone accessing, Council-led counterterrorism discussions and initiatives. They argued this has resulted in non-security stakeholders having to "speak the language of security" to participate in Council counterterrorism discussions and risk having their work instrumentalized and/or undermined as a result. Participants also highlighted that by continuing to use a security paradigm, the Council has undermined the ability to scale up development and other non-security programs that can help address the underlying drivers of terrorism and adhere to the "Do No Harm" principle.

Participants reflected on UNSC efforts to make progress on issues related to transparency and inclusion, and to ensure that a wide range of issues is reflected in UNSC counterterrorism resolutions, but also questioned the intended, unintended, and actual impacts of these processes. For example, participants noted that many non-Council members and non-governmental stakeholders continue to find it difficult to access information about the UNSC's counterterrorism work and have limited opportunities to help shape or guide these agendas.

Participants discussed the evolution of the terrorist threat since Resolution 1373's adoption and its ever-changing nature, including how it has moved from more centralized transnational organizations to more diffusely organized groups focused on localized threats, and discussed this change's impact on the Council's ability to address the threat. They highlighted the UNSC's ability to move quickly and decisively in comparison to other UN bodies as an advantage. However, they were critical of the repercussions caused by previous rapid responses, which have contributed to creating conditions that increase radicalization and grievances, challenges for humanitarian actors, humanitarian concerns, and risk compromising the legitimacy of the Council and of international counterterrorism efforts. Participants questioned whether the Council's unprecedented use of its Chapter VII authority to impose multiple binding counterterrorism obligations on all countries, without any geographic or time limitations and a universal definition of terrorism, would be appropriate going forward. Rather, as terrorism has changed from being an exceptional and pressing threat to international peace and security, to a more persistent and low-intensity issue that requires a tailored, locally driven response, it was argued that the Council should adjust its approach accordingly.

Participants also pointed to trends that risk complicating international counterterrorism cooperation and which the Council should bear in mind as it looks to the future. The first trend is the tendency to apply Council counterterrorism tools developed to address a particular context and threat to other situations – without making any adjustment – for which they may be unsuited. The example of the application of the term FTF (and by implication Security Council Resolution 2178) to the conflicts in the Ukraine and the Caucuses – and thus outside of the context for which it was intended (i.e., Iraq and Syria) – was offered. Such usage, it was pointed out, may cause more harm than good. The second trend is the movement to address right-wing violent extremism and terrorism and to apply the Council's and wider multilateral counterterrorism framework and tools to this complicated threat for which the existing framework and tools may be inappropriate.

Additionally, participants expressed concern about the risks of the Council's terrorist designation tool being used beyond the original scope for which it was intended. For example, this includes applying designations to local groups involved in local conflicts and which may have a loose connection to al-Qaeda or ISIS. There may be a reasonable disagreement about whether such groups are "terrorists" or "combatants" and designating them may unwittingly complicate efforts to resolve such conflicts.

Finally, participants highlighted the legitimacy crisis facing the UNSC's counterterrorism program. They pointed to the fact that the Council has on numerous occasions over the past 20 years used its Chapter VII (UN Charter) authority to impose binding counterterrorism requirements on all countries (without their consent), that it continues to rely on processes that are exclusive and opaque, and that it increasingly engages (including through its subsidiary bodies) on issues and with partners that many member states and other stakeholders believe go beyond the Council's role.

**About the Securing the Future Initiative**

The Soufan Center and The Fourth Freedom Forum are developing the first-ever independent review and assessment of the UNSC's counterterrorism activities. The project will assess the Council's efforts since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as lessons learned in addressing the evolving terrorist threat. Drawing on wide ranging research, analysis, and consultations with a diverse group of stakeholders, the project will offer policy-relevant recommendations for ensuring that the UNSC's approach to addressing terrorist threats is both effective and sustainable. These recommendations will be included in the report that the SFI team will release in September 2022. The SFI project is being co-led by TSC Senior Visiting Fellow Eric Rosand, President of the Fourth Freedom Forum Alistair Millar, and TSC Executive Director Naureen Chowdhury Fink. The project is being funded by the European Union and the Governments of Switzerland and The Netherlands.

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**About The RESOLVE Network**

The RESOLVE Network is a global consortium of researchers, research organizations, policymakers, and practitioners committed to empirically driven, locally defined research on the drivers of violent extremism and sources of community resilience. For more information about RESOLVE, visit www.resolvenet.org.