

Overview: The Securing the Future Initiative (SFI) is the first-ever independent review and assessment of the UN Security Council’s counterterrorism activities. It will be informed by lessons of the past two decades of Security Council action and other relevant counterterrorism practice. The review will take into account the changed nature of the terrorist threat and the increased understanding of how best to address it, as well as the evolution of the multilateral architecture and the Council’s comparative advantages within that ecosystem. The project report, which will be released in September 2022, will identify where the Council can best add value to international counterterrorism efforts nearly 20 years after the attacks which indelibly shaped its work in the field, and feature policy-relevant recommendations for ensuring a more effective and sustainable approach going forward.

Rationale: September 2021 marked the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States, and a global response that transformed the international security landscape, including at the UN Security Council. The Council’s adoption of Resolution 1373 some two weeks after the attacks imposed a range of legal and operational requirements on all member states. This laid the foundation for an international counterterrorism legal and policy framework that has continued to expand over the past two decades. It helped elevate international counterterrorism cooperation as a global priority and served as the cornerstone of the now elaborate post-9/11 global counterterrorism architecture, complementing the counterterrorism sanctions regime that the Council first imposed in the wake of the 1998 attacks on U.S. Embassies in East Africa. The Council’s response now consists of some 40 resolutions, which contain dozens of provisions that all countries are either obligated or expected to implement at a national level. It has also featured the creation of Council institutions, principally the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its expert body, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), structures which were set up to monitor and support implementation of this elaborate framework in addition to bodies monitoring implementation of Council sanctions and weapons of mass destruction regimes.

The Council’s counterterrorism track record over the past two decades is mixed. There has been some progress made in reflecting evolving threats and concerns and efforts to increase transparency and inclusiveness. However, Security Council members have vastly expanded the scope of work for the body with little follow up on assessing capacity and impact. The volume of resolutions adopted seems to reflect the unproven theory or assumption that more Council counterterrorism measures, mandates, and resources equates to less terrorism. This steady drumbeat of Council-led counterterrorism activities continues, despite the lack of an independent assessment of the efficacy of the Council’s work in this field and the rapid expansion of the wider UN counterterrorism program, which was triggered in part by the adoption of the UNGA’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2006, and dramatic growth in the multilateral counterterrorism architecture during this period. Recognizing that Council activities may have political or other non-counterterrorism benefits for member states, the initiative will offer a critical analysis of the outcomes and impacts of these activities.

The Council, including through its subsidiary bodies, has needed not only to adapt to this growth, but to a changed environment. Terrorism is not the global priority it was for much of the past two decades. It has

been displaced by COVID-19—which has claimed exponentially more lives in just one year than terrorism has over two decades—climate change—described by some as an existential threat—and other more pressing challenges, including great power competition (although counterterrorism and great power competition, including when it comes to achieving consensus among the P5 on how the Council should address terrorist threats going forward, are not mutually exclusive).

Moreover, our understanding of how to address the threat continues to evolve. The benefits of taking a more holistic approach that places greater emphasis on addressing the drivers and not just the manifestations of terrorism and involving stakeholders from across government and civil society are becoming more apparent especially when it comes to preventing terrorism. Moreover, there is a growing trend to situate this threat—and responses to it—within a broader approach for addressing political violence that is no longer framed around “counterterrorism” and one that can remain both credible and sustainable in the face of rapidly evolving security and political dynamics. The recent withdrawal of U.S. troops and Western allies from Afghanistan and the Taliban’s return to power after nearly 20 years of a military-led approach to counterterrorism there may underscore this trend.

Process: The initiative will feature a report, which will identify and analyze the critical issues and offer a menu of policy-relevant recommendations. The report will be released in September 2022, with its findings and recommendations presented and discussed in New York, Brussels, and elsewhere. It will be informed by desk and commissioned research, and consultations, including a mix of in-person, virtual, and hybrid convenings, with a diversity of stakeholders. To inform the report and build momentum for the implementation of its recommendations, the project team will organize a series of multi-stakeholder roundtables, which will provide an opportunity for a diversity of experts (including from governments, non-governmental organizations, and the UN and other multilateral organizations) to consider a series of questions that will underpin the project. These include:

- 1) What has been the impact of 20 years of Security Council counterterrorism, including on the ground?
- 2) If and when should the Security Council adopt additional counterterrorism resolutions or more broadly take future action against terrorism? How might these relate to other UN bodies or international actors?
- 3) When Council action is deemed appropriate, what steps can be taken to increase transparency and inclusivity of the process to help ensure an approach more likely to lead to better implementation on the ground?
- 4) What has been the effect of the Council’s counterterrorism actions on the Council itself, and wider UN ability to address other threats to international peace and security and other UN pillars of work, on development and human rights, for example?
- 5) Where do the Security Council’s comparative advantages lie within a multilateral counterterrorism architecture that is significantly more diverse than it was in September 2001?

Additional roundtables will be organized following the completion of the report to raise awareness of its recommendations and build support for their implementation.

Project Team: The initiative represents a partnership between the Fourth Freedom Forum and The Soufan Center, drawing on a core team of experts with more than 50 years of combined experience working on UN and other multilateral counterterrorism and P/CVE issues.

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