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Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism

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Introduction

The Member States of the United Nations are engaged in the ongoing serious debate on international terrorism. But as a body bound by the sovereignty of its 193 Member States and the need for international consensus, its approach to the matter is very distinct. The United Nations typically is not at the forefront of international counterterrorism, but its decisions carry enormous weight, giving measures much greater legitimacy than they can have merely as national policy of a particular country. The UN tends to do less, in other words, but its actions tend to mean more.

The number of terrorist related incidents peaked in 2014, when approximately 17,000 terror incidents took place – largely due to the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. In 2017, the last year for complete data, there were approximately 10,900 terror incidents, in which over 26,400 people lost their lives, and another 25,000 people suffered non-fatal injuries. ¹

A quick and dirty diction definition calls terrorism 'the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.' We quickly see that this definition is unspecific and subjective, and this means that there is no internationally recognised definition of terrorism. Despite considerable discussion, the formation of a comprehensive convention against international terrorism by the United Nations has always been impeded by the lack of consensus on a definition.

In some respect the global terrorism problem is less severe than it was during previous peaks of activity, such as 2001 or 2014. Attacks are down as is human suffering. Some of this is due to the decline of much activity of all types, the result of the Coronavirus pandemic. But in other respects, terrorism is much worse, with massive expansion of non-lethal attacks, the new ability of would-be attackers to network and organize through social media, and rising political polarization and spread of weapons in many countries.²

The role of the General Assembly in counterterror focuses on principles and norms that all Member States can agree to follow. UN Security Council usually focuses on specific actions to deal with specific terrorist problems, while the General Assembly stresses broad principles to guide the international community on these issues. However, there are important exceptions, such as issues relating to Palestine, where the GA also engaged directly in specific issues.

Typical or its normative or principle approach, the UN General Assembly adopted, by consensus, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on 8 September 2006. This consists of four main pillars, namely: (1) Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; (2) Implementing measures to prevent and combat terrorism; (3) Implementing measures to increase different state's capacity to prevent and to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN, in that regard; (4) Implementing measures designed to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law, as the fundamental basis

¹ Hannah Ritchie, Joe Hasell, Cameron Appel and Max Roser, "Terrorism", *OurWoldInData*, November 2019, https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism#all-charts-preview (Graph of Incidence, fatality and injury from terrorist attacks).

² Farah Pandith and Jacob Ware, 'Two decades after 9/11, terror has morphed', *CNN*, 11 September 2020,

https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/11/opinions/terrorism-extremism-9-11-pandith-ware/index.html





for the fight against terrorism.³ These pillars continue to guide UN General Assembly action.

Brief History of Terrorism

While it is impossible to definitively ascertain when it was first used, that which we today call terrorism traces its roots back at least some 2,000 years. Moreover, today's terrorism has, in some respects come full circle, with many of its contemporary practitioners motivated by religious convictions — something which drove many of their earliest predecessors. It has also, in the generally accepted usage of the word, often possessed a political dimension. This has coloured much of the discourse surrounding terrorism - a phenomenon which is, according to Paul R. Pillar, 'a challenge to be managed, not solved'. 4

A group that was active from the seventh to mid-ninetieth centuries, named the Thuggees, were responsible for approximately 1 million murders. They were perhaps the last example of religiously inspired terrorism until the phenomenon remerged a little over 20 years ago. As David Rapport puts it: "Before the 19th century, religion provided the only acceptable justifications for terror".⁵

Long before the outbreak of World War I in Europe in 1914, what would later be termed state-sponsored terrorism had already started to manifest itself. For instance, many officials in the Serbian government and military were involved (albeit unofficially) in supporting, training and arming the various Balkan groups which were active prior to the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28,

1914 in Sarajevo – an act carried out by an activist from one such group, the 'Young Bosnians'. This attack is credited with setting in progress the chain of events which led to World War I itself.⁶

Like their anti-colonialist predecessors of the immediate post World War II era, many terrorist groups of the Cold War era, readily appreciated and adopted methods that would allow them to publicize their goals and accomplishments internationally. Forerunners in this were the Palestinian groups who pioneered the hijacking of a chief symbol and means of the new age of globalization – the jet airliner – as a mode of operation and publicity. One such group, Black September, staged what was (until the attacks on America of Sept. 11, 2001) perhaps the greatest terrorist publicity coup then seen, with the seizure and murder of 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic Games.

Today, terrorism influences events on the international stage to a degree hitherto unachieved. Largely, this is due to the attacks of September 2001. Since then, in the United States at least, terrorism has largely been equated to the threat posed by al Qaeda - a threat inflamed not only by the spectacular and deadly nature of the Sept. 11 attacks themselves, but by the fear that future strikes might be even more deadly and employ weapons of mass destruction.

Whatever global threat may be posed by al Qaeda and its franchisees, the U.S. view of

https://www.google.com/books/edition/Terrorism_and_U_S_Foreign_Policy/6WfRDAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Pillar,+R.,+(2001)+Terrorism+and

+U.S.+Foreign+Policy,+Brookings+Institute+Press :+Washington+DC,+p.+Vii&printsec=frontcover

³ Pillars of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, *UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, New York: United Nations, n.d. https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy

⁴ Paul Pillar, *Terrorism and U.S Foreign Policy*, Brookings Institute Press, p. vii, The complete text is available at

⁵ Mark Rapport, "A Brief History of Terrorism", *Pogo.org*, February 2019, https://www.pogo.org/investigation/2015/02/brief-history-of-terrorism/#:~:

⁶ David Hoffman, "Mediation and UPL", *Dispute Resolution Magazine*, Winter 2000, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?public=true&handle=hein.journals/disput6&div=27&start_page=20&collection=journals&set_as_cursor=66&men_tab=srchresults





terrorism nonetheless remains, to a degree, largely ego-centric – despite the current administration's rhetoric concerning a so-called "Global War Against Terrorism." This is far from unique. Despite the implications that al Qaeda actually intends to wage a global insurgency, the citizens of countries such as Colombia or Northern Ireland (to name but two of those long faced with terrorism) are likely to be more preoccupied with when and where the next FARC or Real Irish Republican Army attack will occur, rather than where the next al Qaeda strike will fall.

As such considerations indicate, terrorism goes beyond al Qaeda, which it not only predates but will also outlive. Given this, if terrorism is to be countered most effectively, any understanding of it must go beyond the threat currently posed by that organization. Without such a broad-based approach, not only be will terrorism be unsolvable (to paraphrase Pillar) but it also risks becoming unmanageable.

Current Global Situation

The attacks of 11 September 2001 changed the world. Not only did the attacks claim the lives of nearly 3000 people, the attacks showed the world that terrorism had morphed into a global phenomenon that could cause massive pain and destruction anywhere across the globe. The magnitude of these attacks meant that no one could stand on the side-lines anymore. The fight was now a global endeavour⁷. In the past decade, the United Nations has built on previous experience and has already been helping states adapt to evolving threats. Although we are heading in the right direction, much progress still needs to be made at the national, regional, and international levels.8 Frankly, preventing terrorist attacks is a challenge for everyone, even for countries that

are richly endowed with resources and skilled personnel. For most nations, realistically, the implementation of the long list of measures envisaged by the Security Council resolutions and the Global Strategy is going to be patchy at best. The task is daunting: securing borders, tightening financial controls, strengthening the role of the police, improving criminal justice systems, and providing mutual legal assistance to other countries trying to convict terrorists in their courts. This is a step-by-step process that might begin with Governments ratifying the relevant conventions and adopting stronger terrorism-related laws. However, they cannot stop there.

Individual countries have made big strides, but success is measured in relative terms and major disparities persist. While some countries can spend billions of dollars on countering terrorism, others struggle to put in place even the basic measures needed to protect their borders and bring terrorists to justice. When a large proportion of a country's population lives in poverty, it is no surprise that they put scarce resources into development rather than counterterrorism. We understand that, and often suggest approaches that have the dual benefit of protecting the country's economic and developmental interests while enhancing its security.¹⁰

There are several leading actors in the collaborative fight against international, and domestic terrorism. At the forefront of the fight against terrorism is governmental security agencies, such as the U.S. CIA & FBI, or the British GCHQ, MI5 and MI6, the German Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), or Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB). These organizations regularly coordinate and collaborate with one another, in locating and arresting potential terrorists.

⁷ Mike Smith, "Securing our Future: A Decade of Counter terrorism Strategies", UN Chronicles, ND, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/securing-our-future-decade-counter-terrorism-strategies
ND, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/securing-our-future-decade-counter-terrorism-strategies

⁹ Mike Smith, "Securing our Future: A Decade of Counter terrorism Strategies", UN Chronicles, ND, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/securingour-future-decade-counter-terrorism-strategies ¹⁰ Mike Smith, "Securing our Future: A Decade of Counter terrorism Strategies", UN Chronicles, ND, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/securingour-future-decade-counter-terrorism-strategies





It is now we must distinguish between the two main types of terrorism, barring state-sponsored terrorism. The most well-known type of terrorist activities is conducted in collaboration with 'cells' of different terrorist groups, however, an equally frightening prospect is the prospect of lone-wolf style attacks.

Lone-wolf attacks are markedly different from terror attacks conducted by terrorist 'cells.' With the exception of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, experts in America say that major terrorists attacks in the United States have been perpetrated mainly by deranged individuals who were sympathetic to a larger cause - from Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh to the Washington area sniper John Allen Muhammad.¹¹

A Lone Wolf is someone who prepares and commits violent acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group. They may be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of an external group and may act in support of such a group. Observers note that lone wolf attacks are a relatively rare type of terrorist attack but have been increasing in number, and that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether an actor has received outside help and what appears to be a lone wolf attack may actually have been carefully orchestrated from outside¹².

These so-called lone wolves are a nightmare for the police and intelligence community as they are extremely difficult to detect and to defend against. Compared to group terrorism or network-sponsored terrorists, lone operators have a critical advantage in avoiding identification and detection before and after their attacks, since most of them do not

communicate with others with regard to their intentions. Although lone wolves might have the disadvantage of lacking the means, skills, and "professional" support of terrorist groups, some of them have been proven to be extremely deadly, such as the 2016 Nice truck attack, which resulted in the deaths of 87 people¹³.

Role of the United Nations on International Terrorism

The problem of international terrorism was inscribed on the agenda of the U.N. General Assembly in 1972 at the request of then U.N. Secretary-General, due to the increasing incidence of acts of violence against innocent civilians, more specifically at the time, the killing of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. But that was not the first time that the international community dealt with terrorist acts. Before that, within the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the problem of hijacking was tackled and all but codified by the three conventions: 1963 Tokyo Convention, 1970 Hague convention and 1971 Montreal Convention. But it was in 1972 that the World Organization confronted the problem if international terrorism politically and legally and, in its entirety, rather than concentrating on any specific acts of terror.

Many seem unaware of the steps the UN has taken to combat terrorism. In fact, the UN Security Council has been at the centre of the international campaign against terrorism. It has made— and it can continue to make—important contributions to this effort. The United Nations can enhance the legitimacy of military actions and increase the effectiveness

https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-deGraaf-EM-Paper-Lone-Wolves.pdf

 $\frac{https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-\\europe/2016-07-26/myth-lone-wolf-terrorism}{}$

 $\frac{https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Bakker-deGraaf-EM-Paper-Lone-Wolves.pdf}{}$

¹¹ Dr. Edwin Bakker, Dr. Beatrice de Graaf, "Lone Wolves How to Prevent This Phenomenon", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, November 2010,

¹² Daveed-Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, "The Myth of Lone-Wolf Terrorism", *Foreign Affairs*, 26 July 2016,

¹³ Dr. Edwin Bakker, Dr. Beatrice de Graaf, "Lone Wolves How to Prevent This Phenomenon", *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*, November 2010,





of economic and political sanctions. The UN can strengthen and sustain multilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and it can be instrumental in establishing and maintaining international standards of accountability. Finally, through its efforts to resolve regional conflicts, foster economic and social development, develop the rule of law and standards of good governance, the UN can improve the political, economic and social conditions that terrorists seek to manipulate to their own advantage. The United Nations, therefore, has critical roles to play in combating terrorism and promoting international security¹⁴.

Firstly, terrorism has been high on the agenda of the UN Security Council for years. Starting in the early 1990s—and guided by the United States—the Security Council started to impose economic sanctions in response to terrorist acts. These sanctions regimes were effective in changing the attitudes of state sponsors of terrorism. They were also important in stigmatizing terrorism as an illegitimate activity that needed to be countered through international action.

Second, after 11 September 2001 the UN Security Council became even more active in counterterrorism. It made the fight against terrorism a global one by ordering every UN Member State to implement a wide array of measures that will help to stop terrorist activities. The Security Council also militarised the response to terrorism by legitimising unilateral military actions by states in response to terrorist threats.

Third, the UN can continue to be an effective force against terrorism if the permanent members of the UN Security Council—particularly the United States—show leadership. This will require political restraint by the United States and a willingness to listen to the concerns of others. The UN's track

record since the end of the Cold War shows that when the United States demonstrates leadership and determination when it frequently convinces other Council members to follow its lead and take effective multilateral action. Others will need to be receptive to such overtures. Only then will the diplomatic standoff in the UN over the 2003 war in Iraq remain an exception.

The UN has a limited but promising track record in dealing with these problems. Its capacities in these areas should be enhanced. Investing in social and development programmes will ultimately have significant payoffs in the campaign against terrorism. Terrorism is not just a military problem: it will require a wide range of policy responses. The United Nations can make important contributions in many of these areas 15.

The United States, as the most powerful state in the world, has a special responsibility—and a special interest—in making the UN Security Council an effective instrument in the fight against terrorism. The UN has great political and operational value in the war against terrorism, and the UN Security Council has been extremely responsive to American concerns since the end of the Cold War. The story of the UN's involvement in the fight against terrorism attests to this. The UN could do more, however. Whether it does will depend to a large degree on the United States¹⁶.

Landmark UN Resolutions, Regarding Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism

Between 1963 and 2004, under the auspices of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, the international community developed 13 international counter-terrorism

Ocan% 20enhance% 20the% 20legitimacy% 20of,in% 20establishing% 20and% 20maintaining% 20international% 20standards% 20of% 20accountability

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴ Chantal Oudrat, "The United Nations and the campaign against terrorism", *UN Disarmament Forum*, n.d..

https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/ebooks/files/UN IDIR pdf-

art2017.pdf#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%2





instruments which are open to participation by all Member States. In 2005, the international community also introduced substantive changes to three of these universal instruments to specifically account for the threat of terrorism; on 8 July 2005, States adopted the Amendments to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, and on 14 October they agreed to both the Protocol of 2005 to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and the Protocol of 2005 to the Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Fixed Platforms Located on the Continental Shelf¹⁷.

Since 1963, the international community has elaborated 19 international legal instruments to prevent terrorist acts. Those instruments were developed under the auspices of the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and are open to participation by all Member States. Below is a link to the 19 legal instruments that help prevent terrorist acts.

In the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1373, which, among its provisions, obliges all States to criminalize assistance for terrorist activities, deny financial support and safe haven to terrorists and share information about groups planning terrorist attacks.

The 15-member Counter-Terrorism Committee was established at the same time to monitor implementation of the resolution. While the ultimate aim of the Committee is to increase the ability of States to fight terrorism, it is not a sanctions body nor does it maintain a list of terrorist groups or individuals.

While the Counter-Terrorism Committee is not a direct capacity provider it does act as a broker between those states or groups that have the relevant capacities and those in the need of assistance.¹⁸

Seeking to revitalize the Committee's work, in 2004 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1535, creating the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to provide the CTC with expert advice on all areas covered by resolution 1373. CTED was established also with the aim of facilitating technical assistance to countries, as well as promoting closer cooperation and coordination both within the UN system of organizations and among regional and intergovernmental bodies.

During the September 2005 World Summit at the UN, the Security Council – meeting at the level of Heads of States or Government for just the third time in its history – adopted Resolution 1624 concerning incitement to commit acts of terrorism. The resolution also stressed the obligations of countries to comply with international human rights laws.¹⁹

Country and Bloc Positions

In the aftermath of major terrorist incidents, any resolution that the UN General Assembly, or UN Security Council considers, will be highly likely to pass. That is unless there is a glaringly obvious flaw with the resolution, or if the resolution clearly violates international norms or violates human rights

For example, Security Resolution 1624 (2005) was approved unanimously. Similarly, Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) and Resolution 1535 (2004), both approved

https://books.google.com/books/about/The UN Security_Council.html?id=iww8h3E8MBMC

¹⁷ "About the Counter-Terrorism Committee", Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, n.d., https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/about-us/

¹⁸ David Malone, *The UN Security Council*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004,

¹⁹ "About the Counter-Terrorism Committee", Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, n.d., https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/about-us/

²⁰ "Security Council Resolution 1624", *United Nations Digital Library*, 2005, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/556904?ln=en





unanimously, established agreed principles for all UN Member States.²¹

Only when states are accused of supporting international terrorism, are there contentious debates at the United Nations. Such examples of these issues include North Korea, and accusations that Pyongyang sponsors and funds international criminal organizations²².

China: From Beijing's perspective, the most important terror threats are domestic. The ruling Chinese Community Party seeks to strengthen its control over Chinese society, suppressing independent political actors and potential threats. After a series of knife attacks, it directed its attention most forcefully against ethnic Uighurs, an Islamic ethnic group most common in China's western provinces. Over a million Uighurs are thought to be imprisoned in large camps throughout the country. While China seeks to strengthen counterterrorism, it also wants to preserve its freedom of action, and hesitates before approving specific international action. It is more comfortable with general or vague but universal principles on the subject of combating international terrorism.

European Union: The EU is a leading force for greater international cooperation to suppress terrorist activity, including measures to stop terrorism-related financial transfers. Working with INETRPOL and central banks, the European Union and its Member States aggressively support international cooperation in this field. Above all, they stress the need for agreement on universal principles to guide all counter-terrorist initiatives, measures that enlist the cooperation of the entire international community. The EU and its Member States will support measures directed at specific terrorist groups, but greatly prefers strengthening normative principles guiding states in any situation.

²¹ "Security Council Resolution 1373", United Nations Digital Library, 2001... https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/449507?ln=en ²² Stephen Mihm, "No Ordinary Counterfeit, New Non-Aligned Movement (NAM): Member States from the UN's largest voting bloc are most interested in consolidating the authority of their governments, especially important since many emerged as independent states in recent decades, and often have only weak influence over much of their territory. They generally support measures to suppress international terrorism and groups that threaten their rule. Many NAM states expect financial assistance to implement United Nations policies. However, some NAM Member States also have governments beholden to particular financial interests and hesitate before supporting measures designed for counterterror, but that also limit the financial freedom of those interests.

Russia: The Kremlin plays a leading role in the Security Council, where China, and sometimes the US, turn to its support against common enemies. Russia, however, is suspicious of cooperation that could be used against its own interests, such as, wealthy businessmen whose transactions often appear to violate international law. Overall, Russia has seemed to take a careful, neutral or sometimes sceptical stance on international cooperation to counter terrorism. It prefers measures that enhance Moscow's national sovereign control, without international guidance or oversight.

United States: President Donald Trump released a National Strategy for Counterterrorism which aims to halt terrorist radicalization and recruitment, as well as sources of support and upgrading counterterrorism tools.²³ The main policy of the Trump Administration policy in this field is building a southern border wall to stop illegal migrants and refugees crossing from Mexico. Another preference of the Trump Administration is focusing major Internet tech firms like Facebook and Google, stressing their responsibility to do more about Islamic

https://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/23/magazine/23 counterfeit.html?pagewanted=4& r=0.

York Times, 23 July 2006,

²³ President Donald J. Trump, "National Strategy for Counterterrorism", The White House, October 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wpcontent/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf





terrorism and left-wing extremism. The Trump Administration believes these companies unfairly target The President's supporters on the political right, under the guise of controlling hate speech. President Trump is especially focused on Islamic terrorism, which he regards as a major national security threat. He is less concerned with domestic terrorism, such as white nationalists.

Proposals for Action:

There is plenty of UN precedent in place on the issue of international terrorism, with countless resolutions having been adopted by the United Nations, the notable ones have been mentioned above in the brief. The UN is already doing a huge amount to address the issues, including adopting measures to eliminate and disrupt the international terrorist supply network. However, with over 26,400 people sadly perishing in 2017, as a direct result of terrorist attacks, there is still more than the UN can do in an attempt to eliminate international terrorism²⁴.

Listed below are several steps that the UN could take to further fight against, and try to mitigate, acts of international terrorism.

- Require social media companies to monitor and report on all activity involving individuals who might pose a threat of terrorist attack. This would require an agreed list of social media companies. It also would require Member States to report to social media companies the individuals they are watching. This approach might conflict privacy and personal rights in many states.
- 2) Require social media companies prohibit on all activity involving individuals who might pose a threat of terrorist attack. This would require Member States to report to social media companies the individuals their watching. This approach might conflict privacy and personal rights in many states.

- 3) The First Committee could require the UN Secretariat to assist developing nations with more advanced methods of tracking terrorists, such as helping to fund I.T. initiatives on the Africa continent. This would require developing a suitable new institutional structure and funding from Member States.
- 4) The First Committee could require UN specialized bodies to coordinate formally with regional security organisations, such as ASEAN, the African Union, NATO or the OSCE, to foster further cooperation on the issue of international terrorism.
- 5) Further sanctions could be placed on states suspected of supporting international terrorist organisations or have helped to foster the conditions that allow terrorist groups to gain influence. The greatest difficulty might be agreeing on which states to target. While the United States and Europe might stress Iran, North Korea, or Syria, China and Russia might stress the United States as a sponsor or terrorism.
- 6) The UN could be supported to directly help in the fight against international terrorism by establishing its own Counter Terrorism Taskforce, that would be a permanent task force that would directly aid nations in their fight against international terrorism. This would require developing a suitable new institutional structure and funding from Member States.
- 7) The First Committee could strengthen international principles, passing a resolution to underscore the importance of strengthening multilateralism and international cooperation, and further developing on the UN Global Compact, which is 'a dynamic platform' to enhance coordination in delivering UN technical assistance to Member States.²⁵

https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism#all-charts-preview.

²⁴ Hannah Ritchie, Joe Hasell, Cameron Appel and Max Roser, 'Terrorism', *OurWoldInData*, November 2019,

²⁵ "Strengthen multilateralism" to combat global terrorism", *UN News*, 10 July 2020, https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/07/1068171





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