



**Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation
Project on U.S. Global Engagement**

**The Role of Regional Organizations in Countering Terrorism:
Lessons for the New U.S. Administration**

12 June 2009

SUMMARY

The Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation hosted a discussion on the role of regional organizations (ROs) in countering terrorism with Raphael Perl, Head of the Action Against Terrorism Unit (ATU), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Pablo Martinez, Deputy Secretary and Programs Coordinator, Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE), Organization of American States. Center Co-Director, Alistair Millar, moderated the discussion.

The panelists began by highlighting some of the added value that ROs bring to counterterrorism efforts taken at the international level (i.e., the United Nations), where norms and global standards are set, and the national level, where efforts to implement those norms and standards are expected. It was noted that ROs serve as bridge or transmission belt between the international and national levels by providing on-the-ground knowledge and helping to ensure an infrastructure is in place to sustain national implementation efforts in a manner that takes local cultural and threat perceptions into account. ROs can supplement bilateral efforts by bringing together partners that share borders and otherwise have more in common than the wider UN membership. As often more homogeneous groupings, ROs can, therefore, play an important role in building trust and consensus among member states and helping to forge common solutions to common challenges. With a light bureaucratic structure, as is the case with the both the OSCE's ATU and the CICTE secretariat, ROs can react relatively quickly to evolving aspects of the terrorist threat and look at problems holistically by working across committees and programs within the structure of their organization dealing with related issues, such as multidimensional security and human rights. In the case of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, for example, it was noted that ROs can help the United Nations and its member states tailor efforts to implement all four of its pillars – preventative measures, law enforcement efforts, capacity building, and human rights – to the local context. Moreover, the point was made that ROs can help to broaden the scope of national counterterrorism efforts

and sustain implementation more effectively than the United Nations can do from a distance in New York or Vienna.

It was also pointed out that ROs can play an important role in building the capacity of their members to combat terrorism. They are often better positioned to identify the needs and priorities of their member states than the relevant bodies at the UN-level and are often more flexible and nimble with the ability to leverage requests for donor assistance. It was also noted that they can assist relevant UN counterterrorism bodies such as the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate in fulfilling their mandates, including by assisting with site visits and offering tailored assistance as follow up. Furthermore, some ROs, by establishing national points of contacts outside of foreign ministries, have succeeded in working directly with practitioners in those government agencies that have day-to-day responsibility for combating and preventing terrorism.

The cost-effectiveness and force multiplying benefits of ROs were also stressed. It was noted that with relatively small budgets of which U.S. contributions are only a fraction, the OSEC and OAS have succeeded in developing practical and effective counterterrorism programs whose benefits for their member states greatly exceed the relatively modest investment on the part of the United States.

The point was also made, however, that CICTE and the OSCE are generally seen as more advanced in the area of counterterrorism than most other regional organizations, which often lack capacity and/or have serious disputes within their own membership that inhibit cooperation on the issue. With that advantage in mind, the discussion turned to whether it is possible for the OSCE and CICTE to assist less capable organizations in other regions. It was noted that the OSCE regularly coordinates with other ROs and often invites them to observe and participate in their workshops. For example, in 2006 and 2007 the OSCE's ATU organized round tables that brought numerous other ROs together to discuss counterterrorism policy and strategy. The OSCE also provides a counterterrorism networking website, which, it was pointed out, has been used as a template for similar initiatives by the OAS and the African Union. It was noted that the OSCE also looks to other organizations to see what they are doing well. For example, the OSCE has sought guidance from the OAS' experience in addressing tourism security as it seeks to develop a program in this area.

It was noted that the fact that many ROs are performing similar activities is not a bad thing and that if programs work well in one region, they should be adopted and adapted to other regions, where appropriate. The point was also made that it is important for ROs to coordinate with each other on these activities as they are implemented and improved over time.

Although acknowledging the many good practices that other ROs could borrow from the OSCE and CICTE experiences, it was pointed out that there are significant obstacles to developing similarly effective counterterrorism mechanisms in some other regions where both a common threat perception and regional cooperation are lacking. Organizations in these regions, it was suggested, may need the support of the United Nations or other outside actors to slowly develop a framework for regional cooperation on counterterrorism matters. It was suggested that subregional fora could do more to help build capacity within these regions as well. Although being conducted by a regional organization, the OAS' maritime security efforts in the Caribbean were cited as an example of the type of cooperation that can often be more effectively pursued at the subregional level because of shared interests.

Participants also considered what regional organizations are doing to help share legal information across borders in the investigation and prosecution of terrorism cases. It was noted that both the OSCE's ATU and CICTE are working with the UN Office of Drugs and Crime to train judges and prosecutors in this field and to help their respective member states to plug any legal gaps.

There was also a question concerning "soft" power programs and whether the OAS' and the OSCE's counterterrorism work, which is heavy on law enforcement issues, gives adequate attention to addressing so-called root causes of terrorism. It was noted that at the OSCE, although travel document security, Internet security, and legal cooperation are key programs in terms of funding, preventing radicalization is also receiving attention. With respect to CICTE, the point was made that other secretariats within the OAS deal with many of the core issues pertaining to addressing conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

It was emphasized that interaction between ROs and civil society is essential. It was pointed out that the OSCE and other ROs are good at promoting partnerships and recognize the importance of civil society especially because they have their 'feet on the ground' and are dealing with these issues first hand. It was noted that CICTE is similarly working to promote public/private counterterrorism partnerships and, for example, is working closely with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) on the protection of vulnerable targets, which necessarily involves the private sector.

Participants offered a number of recommendations for the Obama Administration to consider as it moves forward with its stated goal of enhancing U.S. global engagement. For example, the United States should invest more in diplomacy, prevention and curtailing radicalization, as well pay more attention to cooperative efforts to prevent WMD proliferation and terrorism at the regional level. It was pointed out that it is critical to make long-term investments in diplomacy

and building networks of cooperation including at the regional level, because it is not feasible to build these contacts and networks overnight in the event of a crisis.

It was suggested that ROs are a relatively cost effective way to strengthen international efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and that the United States should devote more funding for such work. One suggested way to increase funding from the U.S. budget for RO activities would be to consider diverting a portion of bilateral funds under programs such as the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program. It was also suggested that the U.S. government do more to persuade practitioners in its own agencies of the importance of ROs and the critical role that they can play in cooperative efforts to combat terrorism.

Finally, the United States was urged to coordinate more with Canada, the only other country that is a member of the OAS, OSCE, and APEC, to help boost training and activities, and further develop initiatives in one region by drawing on good practices in others where they are members.