



Building Stronger Partnerships to Prevent Terrorism

Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation Conference

8 October 2009

SUMMARY

On 8 October 2009, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation hosted a conference on “Building Stronger Partnerships to Prevent Terrorism,” which focused on cooperative counterterrorism efforts and steps the United States can take to strengthen those efforts at the international and regional levels. The event included panels on the role of international and regional organizations as well as two case study panels focused on South Asia and the Horn of Africa. Participants in the full-day event included current and former, senior government officials, senior representatives from the United Nations and regional organizations, and academic and other non-governmental experts.

The conference highlighted the comparative advantages of multilateral bodies in general and specifically as they relate to efforts to strengthen cooperation in two priority regions for U.S. counterterrorism efforts, South Asia and the Horn of Africa. The conference was designed to elicit concrete recommendations aimed at enhancing U.S. multilateral counterterrorism engagement, as well as making these international and regional actors more effective.

In his keynote remarks Brian Jenkins, Senior Advisor at RAND Corporation, highlighted the critical role that international cooperation has played in combating terrorism from the early 1960s to today and how the nature and basis of that cooperation has changed and adapted with the evolution of the terrorist phenomenon.

Jenkins recalled his role in advising incoming administrations and said that his most recent advice to the Obama administration focused on the role of the U.S. State Department, in particular the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Jenkins also recalled a series of track two discussions he held with the Soviet Union in the late 1980s on terrorism, which he described as remarkable both in their prescience in highlighting two key issues that haunt us today – the spread of violent Islamist extremism across Central Asia, including Afghanistan, and the Caucasus and the potential threat of nuclear terrorism – and the possibilities those consultations suggested for cooperation among states, even adversaries, on combating terrorism.

The core of Jenkins’ remarks focused on how the nature of international cooperation has changed over the years as the terrorist threat has evolved. Jenkins described the terrorism of the 1960s and 70s as primarily a national and local concern that only periodically spilled over into the international arena. According to Jenkins, the primary international efforts during that time were focused on delegitimizing terrorism and establishing it as a criminal offense under international law. During the 1960s and 70s, Jenkins pointed out that the cliché, “one man’s terrorism is another man’s freedom fighter,” held great sway for a number of reasons, including

widespread sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people and large numbers of newly independent states that were reluctant to condemn many of the same tactics they had employed during their struggles for national liberation. For those reasons a comprehensive definition of terrorism has and continues to elude the international community. Despite those obstacles, however, states negotiating under the auspices of the United Nations were able to reach agreement on a series of conventions beginning in the 1960s that defined discrete acts as terrorist offenses (e.g. kidnapping, hijacking, bombings, etc.). The instruments, which now number 16, compose a body of international law that essentially defines terrorism and provides a basis on which the international community can take collective action against terrorism.

By the 1980s and 90's, Jenkins argued that the international community had been relatively successful in delegitimizing terrorism as a tactic. At the same time, however, the nature and scale of terrorist violence was changing, increasingly motivated by ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism and becoming more violent and global in its reach. This shift was epitomized by 9/11 which fundamentally changed the nature of international cooperation according to Jenkins. Cooperation shifted from focusing on attacking the phenomenon of terrorism to targeting terrorists themselves.

Jenkins credited the unprecedented unanimity of focus and high levels of cooperation among intelligence and law enforcement agencies that emerged after 9/11 with significantly degrading al Qaeda's capabilities. While commending the success of those efforts, Jenkins cautioned that the military response and the U.S.' open-ended nation-building missions in Iraq and Afghanistan may not be sustainable.

In assessing where we stand today, Jenkins described a solid moral and legal framework for combating terrorism and unprecedented levels of international cooperation, particularly between intelligence agencies that transcends traditional alliances. The challenge, he said, now is to sustain this level of cooperation in spite of past excesses in the "war on terror," countries becoming increasingly complacent about the threat, and the reassertion of traditional big power rivalries.

Jenkins concluded that international cooperation is not an end in and of itself, but a means to an end and cautioned that one should not confuse diplomatic progress and/or progress in building multilateral structures for actual progress in combating terrorism on the ground.

Session I: The role of the United Nations

The first session examined the role of the United Nations, its contributions to date, and U.S. engagement with the organization since 9/11. It highlighted how the United Nations can help to further U.S. counterterrorism goals and what steps the United States can take to maximize the UN's counterterrorism contributions and enhance its strategic engagement with the world body. Panelists included Jean-Paul Laborde, Special Adviser to the Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Political Affairs; Peter Yeo, Executive Director, Better World Campaign; Christian Mahr, Legal Officer, UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate; and Brian Wilson, Legal Expert, UN Security Council's Al-Qaida/Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team.

Jean-Paul Laborde highlighted the important role that the United Nations has played in establishing norms against terrorism, however he emphasized that establishing norms is not sufficient in and of itself and that the world body has a critical role to play in promoting and assisting countries in implementing the various counterterrorism frameworks that have been adopted under its authority, including the 16 instruments, a variety of UN Security Council resolutions, and most notably the 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Laborde emphasized in particular the important role that the United Nations has to played in addressing what the UN Strategy refers to as “conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism,” such as prolonged unresolved conflicts and economic, social, and political marginalization. He also emphasized the need for the establishment of a forum between countries and agencies engaged in capacity building work so that capacity building assistance in these and other counterterrorism-related areas is better coordinated, more coherent, and more effective.

Peter Yeo described the mission and activities of the Better World Campaign and its efforts to strengthen U.S.-UN relations. Yeo praised the substantive changes introduced by the Obama administration, which have led to increased U.S. openness to UN bodies working on counterterrorism issues. He mentioned that although the U.S. Congress may still perceive counterterrorism as a primarily unilateral or bilateral undertaking, the Executive Branch has a better appreciation and understanding for the added value of multilateral organizations in furthering U.S. counterterrorism goals and wider national security objectives. Overall, Yeo proposed that the United States has largely recognized the added value of strengthened U.S.-UN relations on counterterrorism issues. Beyond the contributions of the UN’s traditional counterterrorism actors, Yeo also highlighted the benefits derived from its other specialized bodies such as United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that are helping to address longer-term root causes of terrorism.

Brian Wilson spoke to one of the United Nations’ most widely publicized contributions to global counterterrorism efforts, the Security Council’s Al Qaida/Taliban sanctions regime. Wilson focused in particular on the Consolidated List of individuals and entities subject to financial, travel, and arms sanctions under the regime. He described how the Security Council committee charged with overseeing the regime and the Monitoring Team have worked with states to build international cooperation from the ground up to implement the sanctions through site visits to countries, meetings with intelligence chiefs and other officials, and partnerships with other multilateral organizations such as Interpol. Wilson suggested that as a UN body, the committee and its group of experts are able to promote these sanctions, and counterterrorism financing standards more generally, in many places where actors like the United States lack influence. Wilson also suggested that the United States and other UN member states, including those on the Security Council, could help maximize the effectiveness of the sanctions regime by ensuring the list is actually utilized, contributing additional names and information to it, and not being afraid to remove individuals from it who may no longer pose a threat.

Christian Mahr described the work of the United Nations’ Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), another operational UN body, which is charged principally with monitoring and assisting states to implement the obligations imposed by Security Council Resolution 1373. Mahr also described CTED’s role in identifying gaps in implementation of those obligations and in facilitating the provision of technical assistance to help countries fill those gaps. He said that CTED’s mission is increasingly turning towards the task of assistance facilitation and discussed in particular some of the CTEDs efforts in South Asia. Mahr suggested that the United Nations

oftentimes has access to and legitimacy in countries and regions where the United States may not and can help disinclined states get involved in combating terrorism. Mahr spoke of enhanced cooperation between the United States and CTED and invited deeper engagement by the United States government not only through its mission in New York but with experts in Washington. He was also hopeful that the United States would be helpful in reinvigorating the G8's Counterterrorism Action Group to help mobilize resources to build the capacity of countries to combat terrorism.

Session II: The role of regional organizations and mechanisms

This session focused on the role of regional organizations and emphasized their strengths and comparative advantages in combating terrorism. Panelists included, Raphael Perl, Head of the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Gonzalo Gallegos, Secretary of the Organization of American States' (OAS') Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE), and Ambassador Boubacar Diarra, Director of the African Union's African Centre for Studies and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

The panelists discussed how regional organizations are well-suited to, among other things, develop approaches to counterterrorism that take into account cultural and other contextual issues; lend political support for counterterrorism; serve as transmission belts for global norms and implementation on the ground; and develop frameworks of regional or subregional cooperation on counterterrorism.

Ambassador Diarra discussed the African Union's efforts to combat terrorism noting that it was engaged on the issue and had concluded its regional convention on the suppression of terrorism long before 9/11. Ambassador Diarra noted that the African Union recognizes terrorism as a serious threat to the continent's security and development, which prompted it to establish the ACSRT in Algiers under the auspices of the AU Peace and Security Commission. He emphasized that regional organizations in general, and the African Union and its ACSRT in particular, are well suited to provide political support for counterterrorism efforts; place global counterterrorism norms and standards in a regional context; identify gaps in their members capacities; provide and facilitate capacity building assistance and technical cooperation to fill those gaps; and exchange information and best practices. Ambassador Diarra emphasized that lack of capacity, both in terms of resources and knowhow, is the most urgent and fundamental challenge facing the AU's 53 member states. He recommended convening a meeting of donor governments and agencies to discuss how to augment and better coordinate capacity building assistance across the continent.

Raphael Perl discussed the work of the OSCE's Action against Terrorism Unit, which he heads, and its active role in information sharing, capacity building, and promoting regional cooperation. Perl argued that regional organizations offer a number of comparative advantages as forums for counterterrorism cooperation, including their often smaller, more homogeneous membership and their local substantive expertise. He described regional organizations as "force multipliers" and suggested that they can serve as "transmission belts" between the global and local level, but also in the opposite direction, conveying local issues to the global level. Perl noted that while regional organizations are doing a lot of good work on their own on counterterrorism, horizontal cooperation among different ones can arguably still be enhanced. He proposed that regional organizations could deliver on these issues collectively and better share experiences by

uniting into some sort of “alliance” of regional organizations. Perl concluded by emphasizing the important role these organizations can play in building political will, identifying gaps in counterterrorism capacities, and helping facilitate tailored assistance to fill those gaps. These bodies, he argued, can deliver a tremendous return on a relatively small investment and urged the United States to devote more resources to pursuing counterterrorism cooperation through regional organizations.

Gonzalo Gallegos described CICTE’s activities and its goal to continue and expand counterterrorism efforts through capacity-building initiatives with its member states. He discussed CICTE’s need to move from tactically-focused efforts towards more strategic responses and emphasized creative joint initiatives with civil society and the private sector.

It was evident from the discussion that there is a great deal of cross fertilization between the different regional organizations in the design of their counterterrorism efforts and a good deal of sharing of information particularly between those with overlapping membership. A common refrain, however, was the need for more resources both for the regional programs themselves and to build the capacity of their member states.

Session III: Improving counterterrorism cooperation in the Horn of Africa

The third session considered how multilateral counterterrorism efforts relate to one of the most troubling regions for U.S. counterterrorism efforts, the Horn of Africa. With its interlocking inter- and intra-state conflicts, failing and failed states, and ongoing civil war and festering insurgency in Somalia, the Horn of Africa is perhaps the most conflict ridden region in the world. This session sought to reevaluate U.S. counterterrorism policy in the region and examine prospects for deepened cooperation against terrorism in this troubled part of Africa. Panel members included Abebe Muluneh, Senior Training Coordinator at the Intergovernmental Authority on Development’s (IGAD’s) Capacity Building Programme Against Terrorism (ICPAT); Captain Jean Vite, Liaison Officer for the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa at the U.S. Mission to the African Union; and Anneli Botha, a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in South Africa.

Adebe Muluneh outlined the principal vulnerabilities in the Horn and the ways in which states in the region have come together under the auspices of IGAD to address these issues. Muluneh highlighted in particular the challenges posed by intra- and inter-state conflict, the spillover of conflict across porous borders, huge expanses of insufficiently controlled territory, competition over resources, poor governance, mutual suspicion between states, and the presence of generally weak or failed states. Despite this challenging environment, IGAD was able to devise an innovative and relatively effective regional counterterrorism mechanism in the form of ICPAT. Muluneh described a number of characteristics that have enabled ICPAT to succeed in improving regional counterterrorism cooperation and capacities in the Horn, including the fact that it is funded largely by external donors, administered by an independent nongovernmental organization (the ISS), and overseen by a steering committee made up of IGAD member states. With the lack of trust among countries in the region, it was decided that ICPAT would be primarily a capacity-building effort working at the national and regional levels focused on law enforcement and judicial cooperation and would not be involved in the much more sensitive fields of intelligence sharing and/or operational planning. Muluneh outlined the program’s five main components: enhancing judicial measures; optimizing interdepartmental cooperation;

enhancing border control; training and sharing best practices; and promoting strategic cooperation among countries in the region.

Captain John Vite from CJTF – HOA discussed the activities of the U.S. military's only presence on the African continent and how through an "indirect approach" the United States has sought to counter violent extremism in the Horn. The main objectives of CJTF – HOA, according to Vite, are to foster regional security cooperation, strengthen partner nation security capacity; and promote leadership development. He highlighted the work of CJTF – HOA and mentioned examples of U.S. partnerships with local communities, military to military engagement, and efforts to dig wells, build schools, and provide other basic infrastructure. He also discussed leadership development examples, such as local and regional centers of excellence, skills training programs, and trust-building measures with the military. Vite referred to the Task Force's 3-D approach: defense, diplomacy, and development and emphasized engagement and coordination with civilian officials in the U.S. State Department and in particular with local embassies. He concluded by stating the importance of enabling African solutions for African problems and stressed the challenge of building the long-term relationships necessary to accomplish CJTF- HOA's mission with the high turnover of military personnel.

Anneli Botha from the Pretoria-based ISS built on Captain Vite's remarks on U.S. counterterrorism strategy in the Horn and offered a number of suggestions for recalibrating those efforts. She characterized U.S. strategy in the region as focused on winning hearts and minds through addressing humanitarian needs while simultaneously pursuing aggressive military action against terrorists and those associated with acts of terrorism. Botha argued that the unfortunate and unintended consequence of assassinating terrorists is the further violent radicalization of vulnerable elements in the Horn. She acknowledged that the new U.S. administration did appear to have recalibrated its approach by abandoning cruise missile strikes in favor of tactics that hopefully further limit civilian casualties. However, Botha argued that the United States should go further and abandon its strategy of targeted assassinations in the region in favor of a stronger "criminal justice" approach to counterterrorism that focuses on arresting and trying suspected terrorists within the context of the rule of law. She acknowledged the obvious challenges to such an approach, but suggested it would help to prevent further violent radicalization and might help to bolster criminal justice capacities in the region more broadly.

Session IV: Improving counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia

The final session focused on improving counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia. The circumstances surrounding the horrific November 2008 attacks in Mumbai and the many other terrorist acts before and after it across South Asia have underscored both the regional nature of the terrorist threat and the need for greater cooperation within the region to address it. This session explored ways to strengthen such cooperation, in particular the possibility of creating a mechanism in the region to stimulate more technical cooperation among counterterrorism practitioners.

The panelists included Ambassador Farooq Sobhan, President of the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute and former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh; General Ved Prakash Malik, President of the Observer Research Foundation's Institute of Security Studies and former Chief of Staff of the Indian Army; Amal Jayawardane, Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies;

and Christine Fair, a Senior Political Scientist at Georgetown University's Center for Peace and Security Studies.

Ambassador Sobhan's remarks focused on the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its potential as a mechanism for facilitating cooperation on counterterrorism and other related issues in the region. Sobhan noted that SAARC's original priorities were food security, the environment, and managing population growth and employment but that in recent years terrorism has risen to the top of the SAARC agenda. Sobhan emphasized that SAARC members recognize the advantages and necessity of a collective regional response to terrorism yet continue to face many operational and functional challenges to realizing that in practice. Sobhan suggested that a first step was to facilitate greater cooperation among technical counterterrorism practitioners, which he argued could be accomplished within the SAARC context. In this context, he highlighted a meeting of regional law enforcement officials his organization is planning to host in November 2009 in conjunction with the UN's CTED. He argued that more could be done within the SAARC to increase cooperation on training and capacity building, sharing of information, and to develop a regional research database. He also emphasized the importance of engaging civil society and the private sector.

General Ved Prakash Malik's remarks similarly focused on the need for an improved collective regional response to terrorism in South Asia. Despite the numerous counterterrorism-related statements and conventions by SAARC, Malik expressed frustration with the lack of implementation, which he attributed to a lack of political will and consensus among states in the region and a persistent notion among some that turning a blind eye to or even actively supporting certain terrorist groups can serve their foreign policy objectives. Malik warned that those who seek somehow to harness violent extremism for external goals or to sow instability in neighboring states risk themselves becoming a victim of that same violence. To overcome the lack of trust in the region, Malik urged renewed confidence building measures between key regional partners on counterterrorism issues and recommended in its absence that civil society and the private sector work to engage to help build regional cooperation from the grassroots. Malik emphasized that regional institutions such as SAARC have an important political role to play and in bestowing legitimacy on counterterrorism efforts. He offered a number of structural recommendations to improve SAARC's ability to respond and manage counterterrorism efforts, including the establishment of a regional counterterrorism database and a center with experts from different countries to provide professional guidance and secretarial support to SAARC's political leadership. In concluding with a few lessons from India's experience dealing with various manifestations of terrorism, Malik emphasized that counterterrorism should always be guided by three imperatives: 1) winning hearts and minds; 2) use of minimum force; and 3) respect for human rights.

Amal Jayawardane was less sanguine about the prospect of realizing practical counterterrorism cooperation within the SAARC context recalling that the counterterrorism desk within the SAARC secretariat and other important initiatives have largely languished because of a lack of resources and continuing regional political rivalries. Jayawardane identified three possible models for improving counterterrorism cooperation in the region. The first two involved reforming SAARC to allow it to address terrorism more effectively either by incorporating counterterrorism into sideline discussions on the margins of SAARC summits or through the creation of a formal regional security mechanism along the lines of the ASEAN Regional Forum. The third option, which he endorsed, proposed the creation of a regional, technically focused

counterterrorism mechanism complimentary to but not formally related to SAARC. He argued that given SAARC's track record on the issue, the third option was perhaps the most realistic in the short term but emphasized that it at some point in the future such a mechanism could be endorsed by or incorporated into the SAARC secretariat.

Christine Fair focused her remarks on U.S. counterterrorism engagement in South Asia, in particular between the United States and India, which she described as the most promising of the U.S.' various bilateral counterterrorism relationships in the region. Despite obviously shared strategic interests between the two, Fair noted that the two governments have proven incapable of devising a common approach to Pakistan. Pakistan, for its part, Fair noted, has had little incentive to acquiesce to Indian demands and half-hearted U.S. appeals for it to roll up its Kashmir and related insurgent networks which she argued are still seen as state assets. Fair was also critical of the capacity of governments in the region to deal with terrorism at the most basic levels citing a general lack of resources, insufficient law enforcement and judicial capacity, corruption, and patronage-based government structures. Complicating matters for the United States, according to Fair, is its lack of understanding of the region, which she argues has undermined U.S. counterterrorism and development efforts particularly in Pakistan.