Not More Than the Sum of the Parts

An Assessment of Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum

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The Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) was launched in New York in September 2011 as the first global platform dedicated to nonmilitary counterterrorism cooperation. It emerged at a time when the general perception was that the United Nations was too rigid, political, and bureaucratic to respond effectively to terrorism threats considered urgent, imminent, and dynamic. Since its launch, the GCTF has steadfastly indicated a desire to collaborate with the United Nations, but the purpose and nature of that relationship has been amorphous.

The GCTF's founding statement articulates its objectives vis-à-vis the United Nations as "support[ing] practical initiatives aimed at building the political will and capacity to implement the [United Nations Global Counterterrorism] Strategy" and "serv[ing] as an incubator for ideas and initiatives that can be further developed and implemented by the United Nations."[1] The first formulation positions the GCTF as a technical body, in contrast to and taking the lead from the normative function of the United Nations. It affirms that the United Nations provides a global legal framework for counterterrorism activities and overarching international norms, which the GCTF takes as a basis for the development of its own products and activities. To date, the GCTF has developed 41 nonbinding framework documents (e.g., good practices and recommendations), six policy tool kits, and two training manuals and hosted numerous workshops to share global expertise and mobilize and coordinate resources.

The second formulation of the GCTF as an "incubator" hints at a more agenda-setting function for the organization. In principle, few have objected to the role of the GCTF as an action-oriented body that tracks emerging trends and supports coordinated global responses, although many have criticized its capacities to do so in practice. What has been and remains controversial is the way the GCTF positions itself vis-à-vis the normative mandate of the United Nations, specifically, whether and what the relationship should be between GCTF products and UN legal frameworks. Significant concerns have been raised about the bleeding of GCTF "soft law" standards into binding UN frameworks.[2]

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1   GCTF, "Political Declaration," 22 September 2011, p. 5, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Foundational%20Documents/GCTF-Political
    -Declaration_ENG.pdf.
2   UN General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms While Countering Terrorism: Note by the Secretary-
    General*, A/74/335, 22 August 2019 (containing the Special Rapporteur's report). See also Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "'Soft Law,' Informal Lawmaking and
    'New Institutions' in the Global Counter-Terrorism Architecture," *European Journal of International Law* 32, no. 3 (August 2021): 919–941.

This inherent tension between the technical and agenda-setting aspirations of the GCTF remains today. In the decade since the GCTF was founded, the UN counterterrorism architecture has expanded and undergone significant changes intended to solve many of the same issues troubling the GCTF's founding members. In 2017 the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) was established to provide leadership and coordination across UN counterterrorism efforts. Shortly thereafter, the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force was reborn as the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, the largest coordination framework at the United Nations.[3] The UN Security Council adopted dozens of resolutions, vastly expanding the scope and reach of binding international frameworks beyond the global counterterrorism sanctions regime that was in place when the GCTF was created.

Although the United Nations' approach to counterterrorism is still evolving and it continues to wrestle with its own challenges and deficiencies, the changes to the UN architecture resurface critical questions about the value, structure, and scope of the GCTF-UN relationship. These questions come in a time when terrorism is increasingly overlapping with other complex conflict dynamics, calling into question the need to silo terrorism from other forms of violence and to have a meaningful reckoning with the harms caused by counterterrorism practices to date.

This brief examines collaboration between the United Nations and GCTF and reflects on the objectives, modalities, and effectiveness of that collaboration in today's counterterrorism landscape. This brief is based on analysis of relevant documents that articulate the objectives and shape the mechanisms of cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF, including documents produced independently by either organization and jointly. A small number of initiatives delivered via different cooperation modalities between the United Nations and GCTF were also examined. The examples provide supplementary information on how the frameworks of cooperation are realized in practice. This brief is informed by a survey distributed to key stakeholders and interviews and small group consultations with stakeholders from states, international organizations, and civil society organizations.[4] Based on the feedback of key stakeholders, it offers recommendations to optimize existing practices but raises larger questions about the value, structure, and scope of that relationship in the longer term that will need to be answered.

RELEVANT UN AND GCTF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The United Nations and GCTF are not monolithic organizations. The nature, type, and success of interactions vary across different parts of the UN and GCTF systems. When referring to the GCTF generally, this brief includes GCTF members, the UN Counter-Terrorism Compact Coordination Committee, co-chairs, working groups, working group co-chairs, and initiatives and their respective co-leads.[5] The UN counterterrorism architecture can loosely be characterized as member states and UN entities that participate in the Compact.

The Compact currently comprises 40 members and six observers from within and outside the UN system. The Compact, through its eight thematic working groups, describes itself as the "primary institutional vehicle for the coordination and coherence of

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3   For more information on the counterterrorism efforts of the United Nations and the mandates of relevant bodies, see Global Center on Cooperative Security, "Blue Sky VI: An Independent Analysis of UN Counterterrorism Efforts," June 2023, https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Global-Center_Blue-Sky-VI-Report_June-2023.pdf.

4   Thirty-seven responses to the survey were received, from 12 government representatives, five UN entities, 12 civil society organizations, and eight implementing partners for GCTF initiatives. Interviews and virtual small group discussions were held with 20 stakeholders from states, international organizations, and civil society.

5   For more information on the structure of the GCTF, see GCTF, "Who We Are," n.d., https://www.thegctf.org/Who-we-are/Structure (accessed 18 November 2023).

UN counter-terrorism efforts."[6] The Coordination Committee provides oversight and strategic guidance, while UNOCT serves as the secretariat of the Compact. UNOCT's mandate includes providing leadership on the UN General Assembly's counterterrorism efforts; enhancing coordination and coherence of the Compact; strengthening the delivery of UN capacity-building assistance to member states to ensure balanced implementation of the Strategy; improving visibility, advocacy, and resource mobilization for UN counterterrorism efforts; and ensuring due emphasis of counterterrorism efforts across the UN system.

The GCTF comprises 31 member states and the European Union. It is overseen and receives strategic guidance from its Coordinating Committee, which consists of senior counterterrorism officials from its member states. Two rotating GCTF co-chairs provide the strategic direction and management of GCTF activities. Activities are conducted through five working groups, each with their own set of co-chairs, or through thematic initiatives stewarded by GCTF co-leads with technical support of implementing partners.

FRAMEWORKS FOR COLLABORATION

In the GCTF's early years, the relationship between it and the United Nations existed primarily on paper.[7] There was a high-level commitment on the part of the GCTF to collaboration and some cross-participation in meetings, but there was little strategic direction as to the intended objectives or systems for collaboration.

The establishment of UNOCT seems to have reinvigorated the relationship, in part by providing the GCTF a focal point for its engagement with the sprawling UN counterterrorism architecture.

Since 2017, an annual coordination meeting has been held between the United Nations and GCTF on the margins of the General Assembly session. The meeting typically includes the GCTF co-chairs and the Administrative Unit,[8] UNOCT, and the co-chairs of the GCTF and Compact working groups. After the first such meeting, the United Nations and GCTF issued a joint ministerial statement that welcomed and committed to further strengthening the close cooperation and mutually reinforcing partnership between the United Nations and GCTF.[9] These statements were reinforced by the GCTF in its 2020 ministerial statement.[10] Yet, the statements stopped short of spelling out how cooperation would take shape in practice or what its expected outcomes would be.

Instead, the GCTF co-chairs tasked the Administrative Unit with preparing an analytical report on the best ways to operationalize cooperation with the United Nations in 2018. The report noted consensus between the GCTF and United Nations on three types of cooperation: (1) development of GCTF good practices and capacity-building programs to support global implementation of the UN legal frameworks on counterterrorism, (2) convening capacities of the GCTF on new and emerging issues, and (3) complementarity of efforts through cross-promotion of GCTF and UN outputs and the coordination and implementation of capacity-building activities.[11] It identified thematic areas for collaboration in 2018–2019 and offered

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6   UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, "The Largest UN Counter-Terrorism Framework Explained," 2022, p. 3, https://www.un.org /counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/230418_global_compact_brochure2022_web.pdf.

7   Amy-Jane Gielen and Zsófia Baumann, "The First Decade of the Global Counterterrorism Forum: Monitoring, Evaluating and Looking Forward," 10 September 2021, p. 55, https://www.thegctf.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=1jR8P8e1njE%3D&portalid=1&language=en-US.

8   The Administrative Unit provides administrative and logistical support to the GCTF Coordinating Committee and the co-chairs of the working groups and facilitates the development of the activities and initiatives of the working groups. It is also responsible, under the guidance of the co-chairs, for the content on the GCTF website.

9   GCTF, "Joint UN-GCTF Ministerial Statement," 26 September 2018, paras. 3, 7, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Links /Meetings/2018/14th%20Coordinating%20Committee/GCTF%20Ministerial%20Plenary%20Meeting_Joint%20UN-GCTF%20Ministerial %20Statement.pdf?ver=2018-09-26-184858-417.

10   GCTF, "GCTF Ministerial Declaration," 29 September 2020, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/GCTF%20Ministerial%20Declaration%202020.pdf.

11   GCTF Analytical Report, "From Working Relations to Structural Partnership: UN-GCTF Cooperation Beyond 2018," August 2018 (copy on file with author).

recommendations to improve structural cooperation between the organizations. The recommendations included practical measures such as cross-participation in meetings and sharing calendars, activities, and meeting notes, as well as more operational measures such as closer partnerships between UN entities and GCTF-inspired institutions.[12]

Practical cooperation began to intensify in the years that followed, including cross-participation in meetings, expanded roles for UN entities in GCTF initiatives (box 1), the hiring by the GCTF of a part-time liaison to the United Nations, and the United Nations' inclusion of the GCTF in its digital coordination platform for the Compact.

BOX 1. UN Involvement in Framework Documents and Initiatives of the Global Counterterrorism Forum

The United Nations or, more commonly, specific UN entities have played a leadership role in the development of three framework documents of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF).

- The 2016 *Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context,* development of which was led by the GCTF Criminal Justice Working Group and the International Institute for Justice (a GCTF-inspired institution) together with the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI).[a]

- The 2016 *Good Practices in the Area of Border Security and Management in the Context of Counterterrorism and Stemming the Flow of "Foreign Terrorist Fighters,"* which is a collaboration between GCTF members the United States and Morocco with the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT).[b]

- The 2021 *Good Practice Memorandum on Ensuring Implementation of Countering the Financing of Terrorism Measures While Safeguarding Civic Space,* which is a collaboration among the Netherlands, Morocco, and the United Nations facilitated by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).[c]

The United Nations has also had a formal role in three other initiatives that resulted in tool kits and guidance manuals.

- The Border Security Initiative, which was launched as a joint initiative of the GCTF and UNCCT in 2015.[d] The still-active initiative was initially sponsored by Morocco and the United States and included a series of workshops over the course of three years that resulted in development of a training-of-trainers curriculum. The initiative produced the 2016 GCTF border security good practices framework document.

- In 2017 the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism Initiative was launched by the Netherlands and UNICRI. It resulted in the development of a policy tool kit on operationalizing the GCTF document titled *The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism.*[e]

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12 GCTF-inspired institutions include the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, Hedayah, and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law. They were established under distinct mandates but with a privileged relationship with the GCTF to support the dissemination of good practices and provide training and capacity support.

- In 2020 the United States and United Nations launched the Watchlisting Guidance Manual Initiative, which developed a technical tool kit intended to enhance implementation of paragraph 13 of UN Security Council Resolution 2396.[f]

- A final joint program is ongoing between Canada and UNOCT and UNCCT to develop the Gender and Identity Factors Digital Platform for UN entities, civil society, researchers, and member states on gender and intersectionality in counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism.[g]

[a]   GCTF, "Initiative to Address the Life Cycle of Radicalization to Violence: Neuchâtel Memorandum on Good Practices for Juvenile Justice in a Counterterrorism Context," n.d., https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2016%20and%20before/Neuchâtel%20Memorandum%20on%20Juvenile%20Justice%20ENG.pdf?ver=2020-01-13-153528-460.

[b]   GCTF, "Good Practices in the Area of Border Security and Management in the Context of Counterterrorism and Stemming the Flow of 'Foreign Terrorist Fighters,'" n.d., https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2016%20and%20before/GCTF-Good-Practices%20-BSM-ENG.pdf?ver=2016-09-13-124953-540.

[c]   GCTF, "Good Practices Memorandum for the Implementation of Countering the Financing of Terrorism Measures While Safeguarding Civic Space," September 2021, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Links/Meetings/2021/19CC11MM/CFT%20GP%20Memo/CFT%20Memo_ENG.pdf?ver=fahs72ucLyyYOTj7WDwBkQ%3d%3d.

[d]   GCTF, "GCTF Border Security and Management (BSM) Initiative - First BSM Exploratory Dialogue: Integrating and Promoting Human Rights and Gender-Sensitive Approaches," 14 November 2023, https://www.thegctf.org/What-we-do/Initiative-Activities/Detail/ArtMID/842/ArticleID/260/GCTF-Border-Security-and-Management-BSM-Initiative-First-BSM-Exploratory-Dialogue-Integrating-and-Promoting-Human-Rights-and-Gender-Sensitive-Approaches.

[e]   GCTF, "First Regional Meeting on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism Initiative," 25 October 2017, https://www.thegctf.org/What-we-do/Initiative-Activities/Detail/ArtMID/842/ArticleID/53/First-Regional-Meeting-on-the-Nexus-between-Transnational-Organized-Crime-and-Terrorism-Initiative.

[f]   GCTF, "Counterterrorism Watchlisting Toolkit," October 2021, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Links/Meetings/2021/19CC11MM/WatchlistingToolkit/WatchlistingToolkit.pdf?ver=eKJfi0XK8shisXg81ugekg%3d%3d.

[g]   UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, "Gender and Identity Factors," n.d., https://learn.unoct-connectandlearn.org/course/index.php?categoryid=33 (accessed 4 January 2024).

In September 2018, the GCTF and United Nations issued a ministerial statement that highlighted the importance of strengthened cooperation in the fields of prevention, accountability and evidence gathering, and border control.[13] For prevention, the focus was on the cooperation among the GCTF Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Working Group, Hedayah, and the UN Development Programme in furthering the UN Secretary-General's 2015 plan of action to prevent violent extremism, assisting governments in the development of national plans of action. On accountability and evidence gathering, the United Nations and GCTF were developing guidance documents and good practices. On border control, synergies were found to work on watchlisting, travel security, and returning children. The rationale behind the cooperation was (1) supporting the operationalization and impact of relevant UN frameworks in national laws and policies, (2) encouraging discussion regarding new terrorism threats and challenges, and (3) complementing the mutual approaches to implementation of counterterrorism and CVE policies.

The intention was to strengthen the relationship by regularly organizing meetings between the GCTF co-chairs and UN entities to exchange work plans and identify potential joint priorities, but the specific role of various UN entities and the GCTF co-chairs in the cooperation was not detailed, nor were the expected outcomes or impact.

In relation to the third objective, this raises concerns because the differences in representativeness,

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13   GCTF, "Joint UN-GCTF Ministerial Statement."

transparency of working methods, and legal status (binding or nonbinding) of the documents that each organization produces should be carefully considered if the objective is that they influence each other. In particular, the GCTF has been criticized for lacking legitimacy and accountability because of the way it works outside of a legitimate framework and pushes for new policies without ensuring full accountability for a rule of law–compliant approach.

In 2021 the Compact and the GCTF released a joint options paper on further strengthening collaboration.

> This multifaceted partnership contributes to international, regional, and sub-regional counterterrorism and [preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE)] conducive to terrorism efforts in a variety of ways, including through: (i) systematic consultations and regular working-level interactions; (ii) practical cooperation between the GCTF Administrative Unit and the … Compact Secretariat to facilitate and drive this relationship; (iii) GCTF Initiatives supported by … Compact entities; and (iv) awareness-raising and capacity-building coordination efforts, in cooperation with all GCTF Working Groups, particularly the GCTF East and West Africa Working Groups, as well as through the implementation of GCTF Initiatives. In addition, GCTF and … Compact Working Groups collaborate independently with the GCTF Inspired Institutions … including to support the promotion and practical use of GCTF outputs and … Compact resources.[14]

One can infer that the GCTF and United Nations have agreed on five objectives for cooperation: expert consultation, practical working-level cooperation, joint initiatives, coordination of efforts, and cross-promotion of materials. The paper proposes six options to enhance cooperation. Two options provide practical, but not new, suggestions that correlate with the objectives identified, propose more participation in respective meetings, develop and coordinate joint activities, draw on the expertise of GCTF-inspired institutions and UN entities, and promote and utilize GCTF and UN resources.[15]

The four other options in the paper are more ambiguous. One provides a list of thematic areas on which to "pursue discussions"[16] while another calls for putting cross-cutting issues of human rights, gender, and youth "front and center in collaboration efforts."[17] The two other options encourage the United Nations and GCTF to increasingly engage civil society and regional organizations in joint meetings and briefings.[18] These options could be described as cross-cutting and underpinning all of the identified objectives, but the paper is less rigid in its structure. Although the inclusion of options related to human rights, gender inclusivity, and civil society engagement are critical, ultimately the options paper falls far short of clearly articulating actionable measures to realize these commitments through UN-GCTF collaboration. The result is more a menu for inspiration than a guide for GCTF-UN actions moving forward.

STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

Drawing on the stakeholder survey, interviews, small group consultations, and case studies, this section reflects on the objectives, modalities, and perceived

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14 GCTF and UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, "Strengthening Cooperation Between the Working Groups of the Global Counterterrorism Forum and the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact: Options Paper," n.d., p. 1 (copy on file with author).

15 Ibid., paras. 1, 3.

16 Ibid., para. 2. Topics listed include climate security and P/CVE, mainstreaming gender-informed approaches to addressing terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, border management and law enforcement, emergence of new technologies and terrorist exploitation of new technologies, factors of resilience to terrorist radicalization, and upgrading technological awareness, capabilities, and preparedness to counter terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

17 Ibid., para. 5.

18 Ibid., paras. 4, 6.

effectiveness of cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF. It finds notable differences in how different actors view UN-GCTF collaboration, which gives rise to important questions about whether the current nature, scope, and practice of collaboration is yielding a net positive for global counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts.

Some stakeholders praised the GCTF for advancing multilateral collaboration on issues to which the United Nations was unable or slow to respond while others described the GCTF as nothing more than "an expert management group" and an ad hoc attempt to work together in a way that is certainly not optimal and likely leads to many missed opportunities. One indicated that "[c]ollaboration should be more strategic and focused in areas that take advantage of GCTF and UN entities respective strengths. In that way, collaboration can be a force multiplier rather than an add-on."

OBJECTIVES OF COOPERATION

The options paper stated that the "main objective and central commitment of the GCTF is to support UN counterterrorism efforts, including to reinforce and complement the implementation of the [Strategy] and relevant UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions pertaining to P/CVE." This view of the GCTF's role vis-à-vis the United Nations emphasizes its role as a practitioner-oriented gathering of member states and providers of bilateral assistance and donors committed to advancing implementation of the Strategy.[19] A GCTF-centric view, however, might hold that the GCTF is particularly good at developing good practices related to emerging or priority issues and that the United Nations should make an effort to implement the GCTF good practice documents by adopting those good practices into binding UN frameworks or by providing assistance to countries to facilitate implementation.

There are some consequences to the view that the GCTF should be the driving force in good practice development. Those in favor of the role of the GCTF in this regard mostly point out that the GCTF functions as an apolitical, informal platform that allows it to elaborate and propagate good practices much more quickly than the United Nations and on topics on which the United Nations may be slow or unable to act. Furthermore, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council are also members of the GCTF; because all GCTF framework documents are endorsed based on consensus, these documents can inform the development of policies within the United Nations. If put on the agenda of the Security Council, the support by the five permanent members can be expected for the adoption of binding resolutions. Yet, as discussed below, many human rights advocates and others are extremely critical of this norm creation and agenda-setting role, which the GCTF, an informal, self-selecting set of countries, has ascribed itself.

Strictly speaking, a set of good practices is significantly different from a document that aims at norm-setting. Good practices represent a set of effective examples of policy implementation in a particular context. Often, however, the lines between good practice documents and policy recommendations are blurry, meaning that a suggestion of norm-setting might be implied in good practice documents as well. Those promoting the role of the GCTF as a developer of good practices do not necessarily dispute the United Nations' legal and moral supremacy in norm creation, but they are perhaps less concerned about the potential negative consequences of this role by the GCTF.

During the virtual small group consultations, participants reflected this lack of consensus and understanding. The survey asked respondents to rank in order of importance a list of potential objectives, including norm development, identification of good practices, trend tracking, awareness raising, multi-stakeholder engagement, contextualization of policies, exploration of new policy fields, and resource coordination (table 1). Respondents were provided an opportunity to offer and rank other objectives, but no responses were received.

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19   UNOCT, "Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism," 7 October 2021, p. 2, https://www.thegctf.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=qy1udQzWegs%3d&portalid=1&language=en-US.

Table 1. Ranking of Objectives for Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum

	Government Representatives	UN Entities	GCTF Implementing Partners	Civil Society Organizations	Overall
1	Good practice identification	Good practice identification	Norm development	Good practice identification	Good practice identification (7.03)
2	Norm development	Multi-stakeholder consultation	Good practice identification	Multi-stakeholder consultation	Multi-stakeholder consultation (5.76)
3	Contextualization of policy	Awareness raising	Awareness raising	Security trend tracking	Contextualization of policy (5.73)
4	Security trend tracking	Security trend tracking	Multi-stakeholder consultation	Contextualization of policy	Norm development (5.49)
5	Multi-stakeholder consultation	Contextualization of policy	Contextualization of policy	Resource coordination	Awareness raising (5.43)
6	Awareness raising	Exploring new policy	Resource coordination	Awareness raising	Security trend tracking (5.38)
7	Resource coordination	Resource coordination	Security trend tracking	Norm development	Resource coordination (4.68)
8	Exploring new policy	Norm development	Exploring new policy	Exploring new policy	Exploring new policy (4.08)
9	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other

Source: Survey responses.

Respondents ranked "Good practices development" one or two. Governments and GCTF implementing partners ranked "Norm development" one or two, whereas UN entities and civil society organizations ranked this objective rather low. This can be explained by the close relationship between governments and implementing partners assisting in the drafting of norm development documents. On the other hand, the UN entities have a different view on the role of the cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF, and civil society organizations have often criticized the lack of legitimacy in norm development by the GCTF in general, which relates to norm development in the cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF. On the other hand, representatives of UN entities have indicated that they see a role for the GCTF and for cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF in exploring new policies, certainly if they would otherwise be considered too sensitive within the UN context. This would explain why UN entities have

scored "Exploring new policies" much higher than the other stakeholders.

UN entities and civil society organizations each ranked "Multi-stakeholder consultations" second. This is potentially related to the historical advocacy of civil society organizations to the United Nations and the fact that certainly since the adoption of the Strategy, the emphasis has been on multi-stakeholders or whole-of-society approaches to P/CVE.

"Security trend tracking" is ranked third or fourth by most, except by implementing partners. The narratives accompanying the survey score offered no explanation, but implementing partners have not been contracted to conduct, for instance, future foresight studies or trend mapping in order to identify new emerging threats.

Regarding the contextualization as an objective for cooperation, participants in the consultations

suggested that this would be a great opportunity for the two organizations to join forces in translating universal norms and policies into the regional and local context in general. Participants did not suggest that the GCTF should focus particularly on the contextualization of UN policies. They underlined, however, that this effort should go hand in hand with coordination on resource allocation.

The overall ranking of "Resource coordination" in seventh place stands out, considering that both organizations have difficulties securing financial support. There is also notable resource competition between the two organizations, which have similar sets of donors. During the small group consultations, several participants agreed that resource coordination should be at the top of the list given the importance of deconfliction to effective use of limited resources. Yet, resource coordination is contingent on a politically supported strategic vision for collaboration that is seen as beneficial for both organizations.

Overall, participants urged more public discussion regarding the precise objectives for UN-GCTF cooperation. As one government representative stated,

> Collaboration should be more strategic and focused in areas that take advantage of GCTF and UN entities respective strengths. In that way, collaboration can be a force multiplier rather than an add-on. For example, UN entities have considerable knowledge and experience that could be drawn upon by the GCTF and GCTF members in the development of new initiatives and ongoing work streams. This is more than just inviting the United Nations to GCTF events but does not necessarily mean that the UN entities should have a de facto leadership role in all GCTF work.

MODALITIES OF COOPERATION

Together with the objectives for cooperation, clearly articulated modalities shape the cooperation and form the backbone of effective cooperation. To understand what form of collaboration stakeholders viewed as most valuable, survey respondents were asked to rank a number of modalities in order of perceived importance. Survey options were mutual attendance at meetings, joint development of good practice documents, joint development of tool kits, joint implementation of capacity-building activities, cross-referencing respective materials, niche specialization, and strategic agenda setting (table 2). Respondents were provided an opportunity to provide and rank other modalities, but no responses were received. Overall, "Strategic agenda setting" is considered the most important modality for cooperation.

There are already routine exchanges between the co-chairs of the GCTF and UNOCT, as well as between co-chairs of the working groups in the GCTF and the Compact, as reflected in the ranking of "Mutual meeting attendance." Yet, stakeholders report that these meetings result in little more than the exchange of agendas, rather than serving as a forum for shaping cooperation at the strategic level. According to several interviewees, the meetings became even more pro forma when they were held online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because in-person meetings are possible again, the expectation of stakeholders is that annual meetings are becoming more meaningful compared to the prepandemic period. It is also possible that GCTF access to the Compact's digital platform can further facilitate ongoing coordination at the activity level, creating space for more strategic discussions during joint meetings.

Some stakeholders noted difficulties in "selling" GCTF products for use in UN programming, due in part to the limited membership of the GCTF and because many UN entities have their own mandates to develop tool kits, guidance, and other capacity development programming. Donors also would need to encourage and invest in strategic agenda setting between the two institutions, including by actively participating in resource coordination efforts, financing joint initiatives, and avoiding "forum shopping," whereby states chose to fund programs led by organizations or entities they feel are most advantageous to advancing domestic positions.

"Mutual meeting attendance" was viewed as relatively important by all stakeholders, rated third overall.

Table 2. Ranking of Modalities of Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum

	Government Representatives	UN Entities	GCTF Implementing Partners	Civil Society Organizations	Overall
1	Strategic agenda setting	Niche specialization	Strategic agenda setting	Strategic agenda setting	Strategic agenda setting (6.27)
2	Mutual meeting attendance	Strategic agenda setting	Mutual meeting attendance	Joint good practices	Joint good practices (5.59)
3	Joint good practices	Mutual meeting attendance	Joint good practices	Joint tool kits	Mutual meeting attendance (5.57)
4	Joint tool kits	Joint good practices	Joint tool kits	Mutual meeting attendance	Joint tool kits (5.08)
5	Cross-referencing materials	Cross-referencing materials	Niche specialization	Cross-referencing materials	Cross-referencing materials (4.41)
6	Joint implementation	Joint tool kits	Cross-referencing materials	Joint implementation	Joint implementation (3.88)
7	Niche specialization	Joint implementation	Joint implementation	Niche specialization	Niche specialization (3.86)
8	Other	Other	Other	Other	Other (1.38)

Source: Survey responses.

Various UN entities routinely participate in GCTF meetings, most commonly UNOCT, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, and the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. The participation of different UN entities has historically been contingent on the working group's co-chairs extending the relevant invitations directly to each entity, although it is assumed UNOCT will play a more central role in facilitating UN engagement with GCTF forums moving forward. GCTF representation in UN meetings has not been as consistent, in part because it is not clear who can or should represent the GCTF in different UN meetings. In March 2018, GCTF co-chairs briefed the Counter-Terrorism Committee; in 2022, for the first time, the GCTF officially participated in a Compact meeting. Although most stakeholders value the mutual meeting attendance, civil society organizations rank this modality lower, which corresponds with their concern that these meetings are "little more than rotating talk shops."

Additionally, the sheer volume of meetings does warrant some scrutiny. Respondents to the survey spoke of "echo chambers" where the same topics are discussed over and over and where the same "in-crowd" of entities and experts come to the table every time, becoming a "global traveling circus." Another respondent characterized meetings as "box-checking engagement with one another rather than real and meaningful engagement, replicating more of the same and status quo ways of operating, rather than pushing each other to create change and be creative and innovative in thinking and approach."

The ranking for "Cross-referencing materials" shows overall consensus on its importance, with government representatives, the United Nations, and civil society organizations scoring it in fifth place and "Joint implementation" in sixth. "Niche specialization" was ranked as the least important modality overall but had notable differences in opinion across the different categories of stakeholders. UN entities ranked it as the most important and efficient, while government and civil society ranked it lowest. GCTF implementing partners ranked it in the low-middle, at number five. Consultations for

the report indicate there is no common understanding of what the niche specialization of either organization particularly entails and, consequently, how they could thus complement each other. What is interesting is how "Niche specialization" ranks according to UN entities in comparison to how they rank "Joint good practices" and "Joint tool kits." This can be explained by the general perception among UN entities that the GCTF does not have much of an added value except when contextualizing UN policies. They also do not see the added value in promoting GCTF framework documents.

"Joint implementation" of initiatives was also rated low, sixth overall. This ranking is inconsistent with the perception of joint implementation in small group consultations, where it was described as an important, meaningful mechanism of cooperation for the United Nations and GCTF. Consultations did emphasize that strategic agenda setting and resource coordination was a prerequisite for effective joint implementation.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF COOPERATION

To gather information regarding the perceptions of different stakeholders on the effectiveness of current cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF, the survey asked respondents to assign a score between 0 (least effective) and 10 (most effective). The average was 7.4, but there were stark differences between different categories of stakeholders (fig. 1).

Government representatives and UN entities have the most positive perception of collaboration, rating it an average of 8.6 and 8.5, respectively. Civil society has a less rosy perception, with an average rating of 6.8. GCTF implementing partners have the lowest average rating at 5.4.

The partners in the best position to witness how collaboration occurred, at least from a procedural perspective, namely government representatives and implementing partners, score the partnership quite differently. Government representatives score the collaboration as very good, whereas implementing partners score it as sufficient. It seems that government representatives and UN entities have overall scored the cooperation high, which likely reflects the vague objectives of strengthening the cooperation as laid down in the joint ministerial statement. It can be argued that GCTF implementing partners and civil society organizations are not involved in the joint meetings between the United Nations and GCTF and therefore have less visibility into and appreciation for cooperation in those forums. The exclusion of civil society from these meetings stands in stark contrast to both organizations' commitments to a whole-of-society approach and individual and joint commitments to meaningful collaboration with civil society.

Figure 1. Rating of Perceived Effectiveness of Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum, by Respondent
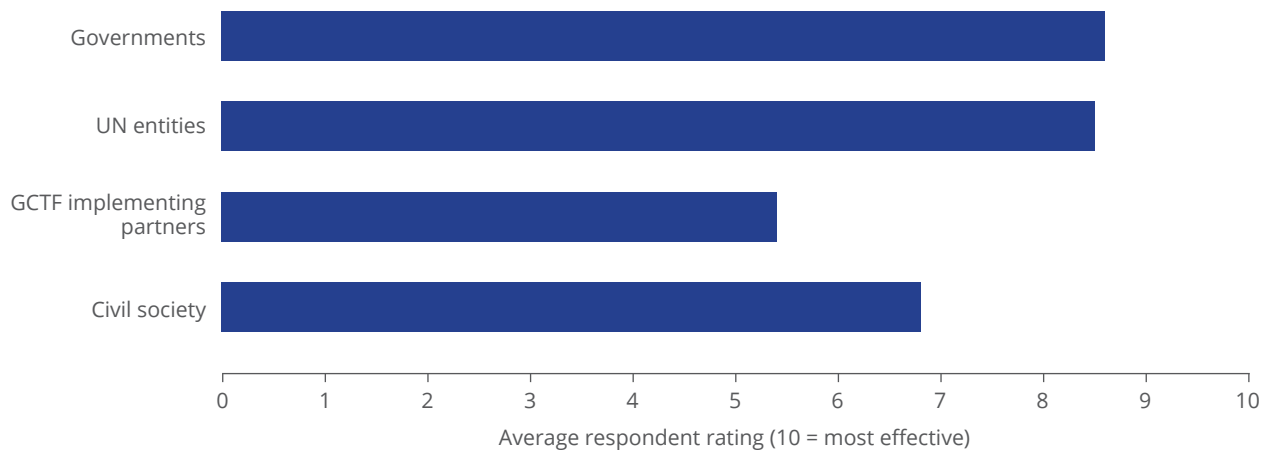
Source: Survey responses.

The survey asked participants to describe UN-GCTF cooperation in their own words (fig. 2). Respondents predominantly used words such as "relevant," "mutually reinforcing opportunity," "high level," and "progress" as positive terms to describe the cooperation. They also referred to the cooperation as a "top-down approach," "superficial," "jargony," and "limited." The positive and negative terms were used across all four stakeholder groups, which highlights notable difference of opinion even within similar sets of actors. When asked to reflect on these findings during small group consultations, stakeholders emphasized the positive, concluding that there is room to optimize collaboration but that ultimately it is needed and valuable.

Figure 2. Description of Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum

Source: Survey responses.

In consultations, stakeholders described challenges related to the difference in scale, skills, and capacities between the United Nations and GCTF. The GCTF relies on external implementing partners to provide technical skill and implementation capacity for its initiatives, and UN entities are seen as bringing more in-house expertise to the table. The ability of the GCTF to make substantive contributions to joint programs is contingent on its co-leads and members engaging domestic subject-matter experts, which comes with staffing and resource limitations. The result is often an unbalanced representation between the United Nations and GCTF that limits fruitful discussion, meaningful expertise sharing, and effective cooperation between the two organizations.

The joint programs are often lauded as an example of successful, practical collaboration between the GCTF and United Nations. Among the participants and intended beneficiaries of joint programs, however, there is a strong belief that resources are often wasted on the wrong activities, a sentiment particularly felt by grassroots organizations. They perceive the GCTF-UN initiatives as mainly high-level talks that do not translate into any concrete actions in which they would be included, yet alone from which they would benefit. They voice frustration that the significant resources spent on convening experts often lead to repetitive discussions rather than local contextualization of policies and meaningful implementation. Stakeholders also lament a lack of strategic resource coordination between the GCTF and United Nations.

As one respondent stated,

> The reality of most UN-GCTF collaboration is that it is rooted in the engagement of various UN entities with varied mandates participating in GCTF events and initiatives. These collaborations—absent prior coordination within the UN system—would not be joint work but rather multi-stakeholder projects. There may be specific areas where a specific UN body has knowledge and experience that can contribute to a GCTF initiative, and there may be GCTF products that the UN can draw upon in its work. The key principle should not necessarily be joint work but rather right-sizing partnerships to address specific objectives.

Stakeholders also expressed concerns regarding the nature of fundraising for joint programs. They considered it most unsatisfying to conclude that the organizations either compete directly for state sponsorship of the same kind of projects or occasionally receive funds for the same kind of activities, without as much as a desire to ensure there is complementarity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The different views regarding role division between the United Nations and GCTF and the lack of a well-developed strategic vision supported by political leadership and political will have stood in the way of successful cooperation so far. This becomes clear in the uneven cross-referencing of documents and the lack of clarity on who is representing the United Nations that might confuse the various partners involved in developing a joint initiative. Finally, the absence of alignment efforts focused on resource allocation not only is considered one of the key challenges for cooperation, but also impacts the lack of contextualization and implementation of policies.

Some careful first steps have been taken to change the ambition for closer cooperation into actionable attempts to strengthen cooperation. The fact that in-person meetings are once again possible, after the prevalence of virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to stimulate a more fruitful exchange.

Survey respondents shared a variety of ideas for optimizing collaboration (fig. 3).

Figure 3. Responses on Optimizing Collaboration Between the United Nations and the Global Counterterrorism Forum

Source: Survey responses.

As one respondent stated,

> A mismatch in scale and capacity needs to be taken into consideration when shaping proposals and recommendations about the

relationship between the GCTF and the various UN entities. It is too easy to frame the relationship as UN-GCTF cooperation. There is a real risk that continuing to do so will miss the opportunity that the UN and the GCTF have in framing a forward-looking mutually beneficial set of partnerships. There is a clear difference between the political UN world of resolutions and member states, which was at the root of the reason the GCTF was established, and the role that UN entities can play with regard to GCTF activities and the role that GCTF, as a collection of UN member states, can play in work led by UN entities and not member states. These differences need to be acknowledged in any analysis of UN-GCTF partnerships.

CLARIFY THE OBJECTIVES OF COOPERATION

1. More leadership is needed to clarify the objectives of the cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF and to specify how each will play a role in optimizing the cooperation. Co-chairs of the GCTF and Coordination Committee are recommended to jointly develop shared objectives and articulate areas of comparative advantage to orient collective and individual efforts.

2. To ensure shared objectives are actionable, an implementation strategy should be developed, specifying who is responsible for which actions and how funding is going to be secured.

3. To ensure that implementation of joint actions continue beyond the co-chairmanship of GCTF working groups, incoming co-chairs should assume responsibility for the *acquis* of the working groups and oversee the continued contextualization and implementation of these joint actions, including securing funding for these actions.

4. To ensure more awareness and support among a broader constituency, the GCTF and United Nations should share a public brief on the outcomes of joint meetings to communicate on the joint objectives.

IMPROVE THE MODALITIES OF COOPERATION

5. To improve the modalities of cooperation between the GCTF and the United Nations, the United Nations and relevant Compact members should continue to be represented in GCTF working group meetings, but the GCTF and its working groups should be represented in Compact working groups as well. A possibility could be a mandate that GCTF working group co-chairs, depending on the focus area, represent the GCTF in UN meetings. It might be an option to create observer status for the GCTF in specific Compact working groups.

6. Beyond mutual meeting attendance, liaison officers should be appointed by the United Nations at the GCTF Administrative Unit and on behalf of the Administrative Unit at UNOCT to facilitate a good exchange of information and to spot potential synergies or overlap.

7. To ensure there is clarity on who is contributing on behalf of the United Nations to GCTF working group meetings and text negotiations, the UN entity with the most expertise on the topic and that, for instance, acts as the co-chair of a Compact working group should fulfill a coordinating role to streamline UN input. This coordination should not imply that there is no longer room for the expertise of other UN entities during GCTF meetings or in providing feedback on draft documents. For instance, the contributions of specialized agencies such as UN Women or OHCHR, considering the importance of mainstreaming gender issues and human rights compliance, should be included across all GCTF initiatives. Furthermore, the strengthening of mutual meeting attendance should contribute to more consistent cross-referencing to UN and GCTF documents.

OPTIMIZE THE IMPACT OF COOPERATION

8. Grow the cooperation intensity gradually by deepening the commitment on one issue, taking joint responsibility for the process from development of policy recommendations or good practices documents to the regional contextualization, followed by capacity-building activities.

9. To optimize the cooperation on joint initiatives, the two organizations need a joint understanding of the working methods that take the specific dynamics of each organization into account.

10. Joint initiatives should include a shared vetting mechanism to allow nongovernmental organizations to participate in the working groups, where the discussions prior to the development of framework documents or tool kits take place, and should be transparent on these procedures.

QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF COLLABORATION

The recommendations above represent practical, actional steps that can be taken in the short term to improve the objectives, modalities, and effectiveness of UN-GCTF cooperation. More fundamental issues regarding the role and structure of the GCTF itself, however, need to be confronted for these two organizations to achieve a fully rationale, effective division of labor.

The GCTF was founded in part to create a forum to spur global action on counterterrorism issues in the face of a bureaucratic, slow-moving United Nations. Supporters of this approach argue that the technical, apolitical, and nonbinding nature of the GCTF enables lower-stakes negotiations that can foster consensus on new and sensitive issues, thereby testing the waters and paving the way for the United Nations. Such aspirations are evident in the GCTF membership: permanent members of the Security Council, Western states perceived to have the counterterrorism experience and financial resources to support GCTF activities, and a smaller number of countries with firsthand experience with terrorism. Supporters of the GCTF's agenda-setting function are not necessarily indicating that the GCTF should replace or hold the same space as the United Nations in norm creation, but instead are less concerned about the negative consequences of it fulfilling this function.

Criticism of the GCTF's role in agenda-setting focus on three main concerns. First, the GTCF is not a representative international body due to its limited membership and therefore cannot credibly fulfill a normative function. The privileged relationship between the GCTF and United Nations, however, gives space for the GCTF to influence UN normative practices intentionally and unintentionally. These concerns are not unfounded. The GCTF *Hague-Marrakesh Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the FTF Phenomenon* was endorsed in September 2014 and contributed to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2178 on the foreign terrorist fighter phenomenon. Security Council Resolution 2482 follows the GCTF's endorsement of *The Hague Good Practices on the Nexus Between Transnational Organized Crime and Terrorism*, and Resolution 2396 follows the example of the GCTF *Antalya Memorandum on the Protection of Soft Targets in a Counterterrorism Context*.

Second, the GCTF is not adequately transparent in the development of its framework documents. GCTF products are developed through specialized initiatives, co-led by members and delivered with the support of technical experts known as implementing partners. Nonmembers, including governments, may participate in activities that inform the development of GCTF products at the discretion of initiative co-leads

and with approval from GCTF members. Although improving, these forums often lack adequate civil society and human rights expertise and fail to include local communities most impacted by terrorism and counterterrorism measures. Ultimately, only GCTF members are afford the opportunity to review and negotiate final GCTF products under a silence procedure. This operating practice has strained GCTF-UN collaboration because the United Nations' ability to shape and guide products is constrained even in contexts where it may serve as the co-lead of the initiative.

Finally, the GCTF lacks a consistent, actionable human rights, rule of law, and gender-sensitive framework to guide its own good practices development or to ensure that its good practices help realize human rights and the rule of law principles in the implementation of norms and policies. Similar criticisms apply to the UN counterterrorism architecture, suggesting that even more effective collaboration between the two organizations will still fall short of stated UN commitments to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while preventing and combating terrorism. Addressing these larger concerns is critical to improving collaboration and cooperation between the United Nations and GCTF and to ensuring the GCTF's continued relevance and effectiveness in the years ahead.

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