Implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in South Asia
13-14 November 2008
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Workshop Summary

1. On 13-14 November 2008, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCTC) and the International Peace Institute (IPI) convened a workshop on the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in South Asia. The workshop, which is part of a larger IPI-CGCTC project looking at how to enhance the impact of the United Nations on international efforts to counter terrorism and other transnational security challenges, included representatives from the United Nations and governments in and outside South Asia, as well as researchers and other nongovernment experts from and on the region. The two-day workshop allowed participants to exchange views on the nature of the terrorist threat in, and vulnerabilities of, the region and discuss the UN Strategy in a regional context. Participants also considered the opportunities the Strategy offers for 1) better understanding the challenges to implementation on the ground; 2) enhancing the effectiveness of the overall UN response to terrorism in the region, including by linking UN efforts more closely with regional and national activities; 3) developing a more effective regional response, including by strengthening the counterterrorism capacities and contributions of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and other regional mechanisms, formal and informal; 4) developing a broader based regional response to the threat and deepening counterterrorism cooperation in the region; 5) ensuring greater respect for human rights while countering terrorism in the region; and 6) strengthening the region’s overall preparedness to combat terrorism. These discussions will help inform the project’s final report, to be released in early 2009. The report will include a series of action-oriented recommendations directed at international, regional, and national stakeholders.

2. The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House Rule, i.e., all of the discussion was off the record and not for attribution. The following summary highlights some of the key themes identified during the meeting. It is not an official or complete record of the proceedings and does not necessarily reflect the views of the meeting sponsors or participants.
The Terrorist Threat and Vulnerabilities in South Asia

3. While acknowledging the difficulty in defining the terrorist threat in a region where there are so many different manifestations of political violence, there was an effort to categorize groups according to motivation: nationalist politics (e.g., Hizbul Mujahideen in Kashmir or the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)); religious extremism (e.g., Lashkar-e-Toiba or Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh); and ethno-nationalist separatism (e.g., Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)). It was noted that these different categories are by no means mutually exclusive and that in most cases terrorist groups do not fit neatly into one but rather multiple categories. It was argued that lack of economic development – which was cited as a primary driver of Naxalite/Maoist terrorism – should be included as a fourth motivating factor. The importance of external drivers, such as the U.S.-led War on Terror and invasion of Iraq, was also highlighted.

4. A series of major trends in terrorism in the region were also identified. Among these was the phenomenon where militants are being attracted to Afghanistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan (FATA), and Kashmir, with new terrorist groups emerging from these conflict areas to create a “pull then push” dynamic; the increasing use of suicide bombing as a tactic; the prevalence of state-sponsored or facilitated terrorism; the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; and prolonged political conflicts with fragile and/or failing peace processes.

5. Another major trend that was put forward by the participants is an increasing shift from political to extremist religious motivation for terrorism in the region, though not all participants were convinced this was the case. The rise of more puritanical forms of religion associated with terrorist movements and the waning influence of more political/secular groups, such as Hizbul Mujahideen in Kashmir or Leftists in India and Bangladesh, were cited as examples. Some argued this was just a function of the further degeneration of these conflicts while others felt it was simply politically motivated groups exploiting religion for their cause and did not represent a meaningful shift in the motivation behind the violence.

6. A fundamental trend identified across the region was described as a “governance gap” in which states have little control over – and provide few basic serves to – much of their populations. This “governance gap” was credited by some as contributing to the emergence of Maoist/Naxalite and other groups. Efforts to address such insurgencies through military force alone, it was argued, are doomed to fail unless the underlying deficiencies in governance at the local level and inequities in development are addressed. Furthermore, it was noted that the “governance gap” contributes to state fragility, undermining the state’s response capacities and in many cases also creating an enabling environment for the use of violence in politics.

7. Participants also highlighted the role of intelligence agencies in inciting and facilitating much of the cross border terrorism in the region. The situation was described as an “undeclared intelligence war” between the major countries in the region that civilian governments seem incapable and/or unwilling to rein in. Others cautioned against focusing on recriminating neighbors to the detriment of pursuing regional
cooperation against terrorism. Hope was expressed that states in the region would cease to view their neighbors’ problems as opportunities but rather as common challenges, given the cross-border nature of security challenges like terrorism, organized crime, and illicit trade of drugs and small arms/light weapons. A proposal was made for a high level meeting of intelligence chiefs to start addressing the issue on a professional basis.

8. It was reiterated that terrorism cannot be isolated in one country or another but in most cases is a challenge that transcends borders. Terrorism’s transnational nature in South Asia necessitates a regional approach; however some questioned whether it is realistic to try to implement such an approach given the political tensions and mistrust among countries in the region. Instead, it was suggested that informal apolitical fora may be a better way to pursue regional cooperation on the expert and professional level.

9. Given the prevalence of political violence in the region and its myriad manifestations, it was argued that there must be an agreed definition of terrorism among the countries of the region before they can move forward with combating it in a regionally coordinated fashion. Each state cannot be allowed to define terrorism to suit its own purposes. An agreed definition, it was argued, would further enhance cooperation among law-enforcement agencies and promote interoperability among them.

10. It was pointed out that SAARC has raised counterterrorism to the top of its agenda at several successive summit meetings. Despite this apparent recognition at the political level of the need for regional cooperation, the challenge remains how to go about it, with some arguing that leaders in the region continue to pay only lip service to it. Thus, several participants urged the development of a South Asian regional counterterrorism strategy and the creation of a technocratic mechanism for counterterrorism cooperation in the region.

11. It was suggested that SAARC could benefit significantly from interaction with the United Nations and the framework of the UN Strategy, in particular from the UN’s technical expertise. The United Nations offers a comparative advantage of political distance and both neutrality and universality, compared to regional organizations, which may be too close to the politics of the region. The central question was raised as to whether there can be a regional approach and to what extent the United Nations can play a useful role in stimulating such an approach and use its distance and expertise as an advantage.

**The UN Strategy and the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force**

12. There was general agreement on the Strategy’s significance at the international level and its potential significance to the region. In the Strategy, all UN member states condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The Strategy also emphasizes the importance and contributions of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. Furthermore, it highlights the need to address deficiencies in good governance and development which were identified as key to addressing terrorism in the region. The Strategy, it was argued, therefore provides a consensus framework for states,
international and regional organizations, and civil society to address terrorism in the region over the long term. Some, however, were less certain about the relevance of the UN Strategy on the ground in the subcontinent, claiming that while there is little in the Strategy with which they could disagree, they found very little that resonates with their experiences in South Asia or that compels changes in state behavior seen as fueling political violence.

13. The general nature of many of the Strategy’s provisions, it was noted, allows regions a degree of latitude as they seek to develop implementation plans and programs and determine how best to implement the Strategy to maximize its impact on the ground. In transporting and adapting the Strategy to the realities of South Asia, participants underlined the importance of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UN Task Force), regional and subregional bodies, civil society, and forums such as this meeting which enable these key stakeholders to engage as envisioned in the Strategy.

14. Although it was pointed out that the UN Strategy incorporates many pre-existing UN resolutions and norms, novel elements of the UN Strategy were also highlighted, including countering terrorist use of the internet, biosecurity, and highlighting victims of terrorism. The Strategy also, for the first time at the global level, outlines a “holistic” approach to counterterrorism that combines “hard” short term preventive counterterrorism measures with “soft” longer term efforts to address underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

15. Furthermore, it was noted that the UN Strategy provides a useful framework for an inclusive approach to countering terrorism not only at the international level but also regionally and at the state level, where “joined-up” or “whole of government” approaches are needed for improving coordination across the Strategy.

16. The UN Task Force, which brings together 24 entities across the UN system to cooperate and coordinate their activities on counterterrorism, was described as the “practical expression of the UN Strategy” in the UN system and a key facilitator for member state action on Strategy implementation. Participants were cautioned to be realistic about expectations for what the United Nations can accomplish through the Task Force. As a mechanism the Task Force is not very resilient and is trying to make do with limited resources and uneven support for its work among the membership. Importantly, though, the Task Force can be a catalyst for action (if not an agent of that action itself). It was noted that the efforts of the Task Force to date have been almost entirely inward looking and it was suggested that the issue now is for it to reach out to relevant stakeholders on the ground in different regions, in particular to experts in national capitals. As was pointed out, for the Task Force to function effectively it must be able to count on reliable regional partners.

17. Participants urged the United Nations and the Task Force to think beyond government/state-centric responses to terrorism and think about regional and nongovernmental responses particularly with regard to interreligious dialogue and research. Participants also emphasized that the issues in South Asia are very specific to the region and these must be figured into its outreach efforts in the region.

Addressing Conditions Conducive to the Spread of Terrorism
18. In the context of South Asia, several different causes or conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism were put forth including, economic marginalization, the prevalence of radical ideology, and the presence of prolonged unresolved conflicts. There was some disagreement over the role that poverty plays in contributing to terrorism with some believing that poverty still plays a direct role in radicalization and recruitment and others citing evidence that poverty has not been shown to have a direct causal link to terrorism.

19. Although South Asia, as a whole, contains a host of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, significant attention was paid to Pakistan. An increasing “Talibanization” and militancy in the tribal areas, as well as the fragility of its government, were mentioned as primary factors in the rise of terrorist acts. In addition, the rise in cross-border attacks by U.S. forces along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has prompted an increase in anti-Americanism broadly and helped fuel the cycle of recruitment and radicalization. In both instances, military incursions into the FATA, whether by U.S. or Pakistani forces, have displaced large segments of the population. Finally, it was asserted that Pakistan has been a victim of its own policies by using militant groups to further its own foreign policy objectives vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan.

20. The FATA region itself was also discussed as an internal, largely non-governed region, having its own set of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, some of which are separate from the rest of Pakistan. As an underdeveloped region with high unemployment, high illiteracy, a lack of political representation, and a weak legal system, Taliban-inspired groups are able to find and exploit “governance gaps.” Like the rest of Pakistan, it was argued that there has been insufficient improvement in the education system and poor public education standards, which has contributed to the influence of madrassas, some of which continue to play a role in violent radicalization. There was a call for a dramatic increase in investment in economic development as a way to counter economic marginalization, especially in the FATA region of Pakistan. To counter radical ideology, some proposed an “intellectual intervention,” by regional academics and religious scholars to create joint research agendas and better understand, and engage in inter- and intra-religious debates relevant to the counterterrorism discourse. Among those highlighted was an ongoing intra-Sunni dialogue which many external observers have failed to take note of but which has the potential for shaping religious interpretations and practices in Muslim communities throughout South Asia.

21. The UN Task Force has several working groups on conditions conducive to terrorism. For example, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) is heading up the working group on prolonged unresolved conflicts. It was argued that sometimes, but certainly not always, the prevention of conflict is helped by looking at it through a counterterrorism lens. The UN Secretariat and its good offices play an important role in this regard. The DPA’s Mediation Support Unit has been used by a wide variety of actors to give advice, share best practices, and provide analytical support to UN and other senior officials seeking to promote conflict resolution.
22. It was argued that three of the most important factors in countering conditions conducive to terrorism will be addressing the challenge of democratic governance – including the quandary they pose regarding the inclusion of religious-based parties in government, the lack of capacity of states in the region to respond to the threat, and confidence building measures which are important to alleviate the mistrust between states, which acts as a barrier to cooperation.

Preventing and Combating Terrorism

23. Several models of effective counterterrorism strategies were considered. In particular, the UK counterterrorism model was cited a kind of national best practice for a “joined up” approach to counterterrorism that might offer lessons to states in South Asia. The UK model includes a “cross departmental approach” that coordinates the efforts of the Home Office, local government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Police, the Department of Education, and others. Importantly, this joined up approach includes discussions between counterterrorism actors and the UK Department for International Development. The point was made that although development actors remain focused on development efforts, they recognize that political violence has an impact on much of their work on the ground. It was pointed out that language that emphasizes “political violence” rather than “terrorism” should be used as the latter often makes engagement with the subject and key actors problematic for development organizations.

24. Among the key lessons extrapolated for South Asia is the importance of tackling the issue of radicalization. It was pointed out that while Bangladesh has acknowledged the problem of radicalization and is taking steps to address the issue, neither Pakistan nor India has a clear counter radicalization strategy.

25. In terms of the counterterrorism efforts of countries in the region, discussion focused in particular on India which has taken a number of important steps to enhance its counterterrorism efforts, including by adopting new security and legislative measures. India’s increased attention to socio-political issues were also addressed, including its efforts to address conflicts in Punjab, Kashmir, and the North East, and Maoist violence, as well as efforts to address fundamentalism, improve education and standardize curricula, and ensure the even distribution of development assistance.

26. Some, however, questioned the efficacy of India’s counterterrorism efforts given the fact that despite a robust military and law enforcement response, India has experienced a significant increase in terrorist violence. Others criticized India’s use of civilian groups and militias in combating terrorism, claiming that it is now spending more on support to paramilitary groups than on its formal military and law enforcement efforts to combat terrorism and that such efforts are in fact fueling terrorism.

27. Some participants also were critical of South Asian states for what they described as an “excessive” commitment to bilateral solutions to terrorism and urged more engagement with SAARC and the United Nations on devising regionally coordinated responses. A number of participants were skeptical of the prospects for improved regional counterterrorism cooperation within SAARC, pointing out that given the difficult
political relationships in the region, SAARC had evolved from its initial concept as a forum for discussing security issues into one focused on economic issues. Participants, however, noted that even on that front SAARC had not met expectations in spite of some progress. Given the lack of political will to cooperate and the significant capacity gaps within the region, it was suggested that there is a big role for the United Nations and other international organizations that are perceived as politically neutral in improving counterterrorism cooperation South Asia.

28. Participants suggested that the United Nations and SAARC cooperate on establishing a meaningful information/intelligence sharing mechanism at the regional level, where none currently exists. It was noted that such a database would need to be “pre-incident,” but that experience suggests that such efforts are easily confounded by groups and individuals changing their names. It was, however, suggested that technology might offer solutions to these problems. Others argued that the issue is getting countries to actually utilize existing Interpol databases by submitting information and extending access, not the creation of new ones.

29. Discussion also touched on some of the United Nations’ efforts in or as they might relate to the region. For example, the United Nations is trying to promote counter radicalization. The Task Force working group on addressing violent radicalization and extremism that leads to terrorism has conducted a survey of national efforts in this area and is disseminating that information to member states. The UN Security Council’s Al Qaida/Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team has convened meetings of the intelligence services of countries in South Asia where they would not meet outside of a UN framework. The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) in the region is working on human rights and counterterrorism and, although not labeled as “counterterrorism” programs, other non-traditional UN counterterrorism actors are active on the ground in Sri Lanka, for example, in areas related to countering terrorism. These include the Special Rapporteur on Child Soldiers and UNICEF, which has a program on rehabilitating child soldiers.

Building State Capacity to Counter Terrorism

30. In considering the wide ranging capacity gaps in the region, the view was expressed that counterterrorism capacity building must be done in a broader context of state capacity building. Many South Asian states have strong central governments but are weak at the local levels and poor at delivering goods and services to their populations. The military, police, judiciary, and other government officials may be very capable at the national level but inadequate, both in numbers and training, at the local levels. It was suggested that this dichotomy between strong central states and weak local governments helps explain why countries in the region frequently employ the military or state security services, which are often viewed as the most effective instruments of government, to confront what should in most cases be a local law and order matter.

31. The discussions with regard to Pakistan suggested that problems are no longer just in the FATA, but extend to Islamabad where the political, economic, and social issues underlying the crisis will have to be worked out. Although a parliamentary resolution recently agreed to by all political parties is an important first step, it was argued that
Pakistan needs a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy that includes a redefinition of its relationship with Afghanistan. Cooperation with the United States in the “War on Terror,” it was noted, has yielded a lot of money and arms for Pakistan, but this assistance has not been sufficiently applied to the critical missions of counter insurgency and promoting development in the FATA.

32. In Nepal, participants discussed the constructive, but not entirely uncontroversial role, played by the United Nations in the peace process and a shifting mission for the United Nations from facilitating and monitoring the peace process and elections to the provision of capacity building assistance to ensure the sustainability of the peace. It was noted that the United Nations might have drawn on its extensive experience to apply lessons learned regarding transitional governments, as some in Nepal felt that the United Nations had not sufficiently planned for the post-election scenario.

33. Discussion of UN counterterrorism-related capacity building focused on the work of the UN Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its Executive Directorate (CTED). CTED activities as they relate to capacity building include monitoring the implementation of resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005), identifying shortfalls in implementation, and facilitating the provision of technical assistance. In addition to examining country reports and exchanging information with international, regional, and subregional organizations, CTED conducts on-site visits to member states – so far three in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan). CTED is currently focusing its facilitation efforts on countries which it has visited and thematic and geographic areas that are receiving less attention from donor countries.

34. Among the key capacity shortfalls that CTED has identified in the region are in areas of legislation, countering the financing of terrorism, law enforcement, and border controls. In addition, it was pointed out that there is a need to institutionalize human rights safeguards within law enforcement entities in the region, for example, the RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) in Bangladesh. It was noted that countries from South Asia are the largest troop contributors to UN peacekeeping missions and thus military personnel appear familiar with the basic human rights standards, including those articulated by the United Nations. Yet, it is the military and law enforcement officials in precisely those same countries which are often accused of human rights abuses in the course of their efforts to combat terrorism. To address this issue it was recommended that the focus shift away from human rights “awareness raising” towards professional training. There is a need to remove the stigma of needing assistance in this area and elevate its importance as a matter of professional conduct.

35. The United Nations, participants agreed, can play an important role in capacity building in the region but to date has not. A number of suggestions were made to try to enhance the UN’s impact in this field. For example, CTED was urged to come up with specific capacity building project proposals for the region and donors were encouraged to recognize the value of funding and otherwise reinforcing UN counterterrorism efforts in South Asia. Others, however, stressed the importance of creating a mechanism at the regional level (including possibly under the auspices of the United Nations) or empowering an existing body to perform the facilitation function, given the enhanced appreciation of the priority needs of the region at that level.
Protecting Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism

36. It was pointed out that there have been chronic human rights violations committed by law enforcement agencies and security services across the region in the name of countering terrorism. In some instances the “War on Terror” has been used by governments as a justification to round up political opponents or suppress minorities and other perceived threats to central governments. Partly as a result, there is a lack of trust between governments and their populations in the region when it comes to countering terrorism. The point was made that so long as external actors (e.g., the United Kingdom and United States) are complicit in some of the human rights violations, it will be difficult to convince governments in the region to ensure greater respect for human rights while countering terrorism.

37. Some suggested that in order for human rights norms to be upheld, governments need help establishing and empowering institutions, including national human rights commissions. It was noted that CTED country visits include a human rights adviser, but that the United Nations has no best practices in place for institutionalizing the protection of human rights in the context of counterterrorism – particularly as it relates to the law enforcement community. It was pointed out, however, that CTED is working with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and OHCHR to develop best practices and trainings. Others suggested a more holistic and sustainable approach to capacity building on human rights issues such as the use of mentoring programs for judges, prosecutors, and other criminal justice officials, but indicated that donors do not seem interested in funding such activities, preferring instead to focus on training workshops.

38. Others suggested that the entire discourse on terrorism needs to be looked at in a different way. For instance, the focus has too often been on the militants with little attention paid to state terrorism or the ways in which the state perpetuates a cycle of terrorism.

Regional Responses to Counterterrorism

39. Although counterterrorism has been on the SAARC’s agenda since its creation more than 20 years ago, it has been unable to facilitate practical cooperation on this issue among its members. A host of reasons were cited for SAARC’s inaction. First, it was noted that regional cooperation, in general, is lacking due to territorial disputes, particularly the Kashmir issue or the demarcation of the Afghan-Pakistan border, a lack of political will among key players in South Asia, and deep-seated mistrust between governments. The mistrust and political animosity has left states reluctant to seek help from their neighbors in countering terrorism, has tempted states to meddle in the affairs of their neighbors, and undermined the mechanisms that SAARC does have in place. For instance, there remain unanswered extradition requests even with the recent SAARC treaty on mutual legal assistance in place. In addition, intelligence sharing has been negligible or nonexistent despite repeated calls coming from SAARC summit
meetings. Participants reiterated calls for a SAARC administered database for sharing information and intelligence at the regional level.

40. It was pointed out that despite the numerous meetings of SAARC and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation where counterterrorism was on the agenda and the many counterterrorism declarations adopted by these bodies, neither organization could boast of many practical contributions to regional cooperation. Although recognizing the political obstacles to making progress in this field, participants suggested that efforts to deepen cooperation could focus on information exchanges, bringing together intelligence officials, and capacity building/training. In addition, some called for the enlistment of the academic and research communities in the region as a way to push for reform. Thus, joint research projects linking together the region’s think tanks were proposed as a way to enhance cooperation and affect policy decisions.

41. Some suggested that new regional mechanisms for stimulating counterterrorism cooperation were needed and that there were plenty of models to draw on from other regions in this regard. However, in doing so, careful attention should be paid to ensuring that one keeps in mind what is appropriate for the region, given both its needs and political realities. Thus, there was disagreement over whether to try to create a forum in South Asia similar to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Those in favor cited ARF’s success in building trust and confidence among formerly antagonistic countries in Southeast Asia and allowing them to discuss often sensitive security issues at a regional level. Others, however, pointed out that the ARF is largely a “talk-shop” and that South Asia is in need of a forum that can move beyond dialogue and stimulate practical cooperation at the technical level, especially since it already has SAARC. To this end, it was suggested that consideration be given to the creation of a regional law enforcement training center (modeled on the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation). This center could train lower-level practitioners and other officials and slowly help undermine the mistrust that exists at the political levels between countries in the region. Another possibility would be to convene lower level ad hoc regional meetings of counterterrorism practitioners (e.g., police chiefs), perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations.

42. Some, however, contended that a regional response is simply not possible at this time. States are fomenting terrorism in neighboring states and if anything, defense establishments need to come together, not political leaders. Increased emphasis on greater regional economic integration was put forth as a method to pave the way for cooperation in other venues. It was argued that the key to all cooperation in the region has always been India and its willingness to cooperate. Some suggested that there has been an evolution of Indian thinking in recent years which may bode well for pursuing a more coordinated regional effort.

43. The point was made that the United Nations should treat the lack of counterterrorism cooperation in the region as an opportunity for it to help shape a regional response. Before doing so, however, the United Nations itself should seek to develop a strategic approach to engaging with the region on these issues as part of an effort to link the United Nations more closely to regional counterterrorism needs and
efforts in South Asia. There remains little appreciation in South Asian capitals of what the United Nations is trying to accomplish in this field, which led some to call for more coordination between what is happening within the UN system and in South Asia on counterterrorism. It was recommended that the UN Secretary-General appoint a special representative on counterterrorism to spearhead these efforts. Others called upon the Task Force to identify key groups of national practitioners in the region willing to work together on practical matters related to the implementation of the Strategy and work slowly to build informal regional networks of cooperation among them.

44. It was also pointed out that the Commonwealth Secretariat has a role to play in fostering counterterrorism cooperation in South Asia, in accordance with the mandates from the Commonwealth Heads of Government, Law Ministers, and Foreign Ministers. On numerous occasions since the formation of the Commonwealth’s Counterterrorism Committee in 2001, the Commonwealth Heads of Government have emphasized the need for a holistic approach to counterterrorism. The point was made that the Secretariat has worked in collaboration with many regional and international agencies including UN bodies such as UNODC and CTED in facilitating counterterrorism initiatives in Commonwealth countries. It was further noted that five out of the eight members of SAARC were members of the Commonwealth and had shared legal traditions, use of a common language, and historical associations. Therefore it was asserted that the Commonwealth would be an effective and complementary partner to the UN and other regional and international bodies in assisting member countries to implement the UN Strategy in South Asia. It was also pointed out that the Commonwealth Report on “Civil Paths to Peace” was significant in providing an insight into facilitating effective counterterrorism work.