



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

Building States' Capacity to Combat Terrorism:

Lessons for the Next U.S. President

Thursday 30 October 2008

SUMMARY

The Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation hosted a discussion on building states' capacity to combat terrorism with Darcy Anderson from the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State; Christian Mahr from the United Nations Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate; Celina D. Realuyo from the National Defense University; and Carol Fuller from the Organization of American States' (OAS) Inter-American Committee against Terrorism. Center Director, Alistair Millar, moderated the event. The event was off-the-record; this summary provides only a general overview of the discussion.

Drawing on their wide-range of expertise, the discussants shed light on some current capacity-building programs existing at the national, regional, and global levels. They identified successes and challenges in these efforts, discussed the importance of coordination of those efforts, and spoke more broadly on ensuring that the significant capacity shortfalls that exist around the world are met with targeted initiatives that seek to address priority needs.

Discussion of U.S. counterterrorism capacity-building efforts focused on U.S. State Department programs, in particular its Antiterrorism Assistance Program (ATA), which provides partner countries with training, equipment, and technology needed to find and arrest terrorists, build legal investigative capacity, and respond to terrorist incidents. Although the ATA program has an annual budget of only around \$140 million, it was noted that since 2001, State has invested nearly \$1 billion in ATA and in the last 20 years trained thousands of participants in 150 countries. Also mentioned was the Terrorist Interdiction Program (TIP), which has primarily been used to enhance border security capabilities. Since 2001, TIP has

provided assistance to more than 20 countries, including Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Kenya.

These and other State Department counterterrorism assistance programs, however, represent only a small fraction of U.S. counterterrorism capacity building, which includes a whole range of activities undertaken by different government agencies including the Departments of Treasury, Homeland Security, Justice, and, of course, Defense. The discussants highlighted several examples of effective coordination efforts both between agencies and at the regional and international levels. In 2006, State's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism launched the Regional Strategic Initiative, an inter-agency effort to create flexible regional counterterrorism teams, driven by U.S. ambassadors in the field and tasked with generating a unified, holistic approach to counterterrorism. Other initiatives include the Counterterrorism Finance Training and Assistance Program, which delivers technical assistance and training from experts in eight U.S. agencies, and the Foreign Emergency Support Teams, which are interagency teams on-call to respond on short-notice to terrorist incidents worldwide.

On the regional and international level, programs such as the International Law Enforcement Academies and the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership were mentioned as examples of effective multilateral cooperation led by the United States. In addition, the National Defense University's International Counterterrorism Fellows program was cited as a small scale program that has yielded significant results. The program selects practitioners with a counterterrorism background from other countries to learn best practices on how to implement a 'whole of government' approach. These fellows return to their countries upon completion of the program, often to assume high ranking counterterrorism positions.

Outside of U.S. national programs, the work of regional organizations, such as the OAS' Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (known by its Spanish acronym, CICTE), were discussed as effective avenues to provide capacity-building assistance. As one of the older and most active organizations dealing with counterterrorism, CICTE has worked to strengthen state capacity on specific policy issues, e.g. border and maritime security, and develop partnerships with regional governments and international organizations. Recently, CICTE has partnered with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum to harmonize port security procedures and with the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) to convene experts and share best practices on document security issues.

The role that the United Nations and specifically the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) has played in enhancing capacity building at the global level was also highlighted. As a body that has only been in existence since 2004, the view was expressed that while CTED's technical assistance strategy is still evolving, it has made significant progress in identifying its niche and where it may best be able to add value to international capacity-building efforts. With a mandate to monitor implementation of certain Security Council-imposed counterterrorism obligations and facilitate (rather than actually deliver) related technical assistance, CTED has recently shifted away from a macro approach to one that is more tailored and realistically focused on prioritizing a limited number of countries/areas deemed most in need of assistance. CTED has decided to focus on identifying countries and thematic areas which have escaped major donor attention and to limit referrals for assistance to states that have been visited by CTED experts.

In addition to focusing on neglected areas, CTED's other main comparative advantage (and that of the United Nations and multilateral organizations more generally) cited by the participants, is its ability to "soften the edges" in the politically sensitive area of counterterrorism. Working through the United Nations to assess priorities and build capacity is often seen as more palatable for recipient states and helps to avoid the perception that they are acquiescing to the demands of powerful donor countries. For a number of key donor countries, working with the United Nations also makes it easier to legitimize their assistance in the field of counterterrorism vis-à-vis their own populace.

Reactions were mixed on the performance of the G8's Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG), a group created in 2003 to enhance donor coordination and global counterterrorism capacity-building efforts more broadly. Comprised of the G8 countries and some other key donors and/or assistance providers, CTAG was cited as a critical forum for the coordination of counterterrorism capacity-building assistance and essential to reinforcing CTED efforts to facilitate the delivery of technical assistance. The performance of both CTAG and CTED has been uneven and the relationship between the two has not sufficiently adapted as the threat has evolved. It has also not reached its intended potential nor has it been able to sustain the necessary, consistent engagement from G8 member states and CTAG partners. However, in 2008, under the direction of the Japanese Presidency, CTAG and CTED have sought to refine and improve their relationship, including by organizing a series of 'local meetings,' which have conveniently been scheduled to coincide with CTED country visits. As part of the revised methodology, CTED identifies

priority needs and refers them to CTAG to decide which donor will take the lead in addressing the particular need. Bi-annual 'pre-meetings' are also arranged in New York to fine-tune coordination between CTED and CTAG member countries prior to the main meetings held in capitals. These arrangements have allowed CTED to make a concentrated pitch for specific countries most in need of assistance.

Despite the benefits of CTAG and its work with CTED and other organizations to facilitate capacity building, several potential challenges and shortfalls were identified. A primary challenge for CTAG moving forward is to engage with more donors representing more regions. The need to develop capacity-building strategies to enhance efficiency at local and international levels was also noted. For instance, the view was expressed that there is significant overlap with other types of technical assistance, namely donors of development assistance. As a relatively new field, counterterrorism technical assistance would benefit from learning best practices from other technical assistance sectors.

The meeting concluded with a broader discussion of the challenges confronting current counterterrorism capacity-building efforts and recommendations for how to improve them.

First, there was a call for better coordination between national, regional, and international actors to avoid duplicative efforts.

Second, a more 'holistic' approach was advocated, in line with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, that makes the connection between development and security. The focus should not only be on building short term counterterrorism capacity but must be combined with efforts to address longer term and more fundamental capacity problems related to e.g. lack of the rule of law, poor governance, and underdevelopment. It was noted that these more inclusive approaches, beyond simply contributing to preventing terrorism, would help counter radicalization over the longer term.

Third, capacity-building efforts should be based on and framed in the context of the needs and priorities of recipient countries. For example, it is possible to address counterterrorism as a subset of the broader issue of transnational crime, as a way to address the most pressing priorities of recipient countries and build capabilities that enhance counterterrorism capacity without labeling it as such.

Fourth, counterterrorism should remain a top priority, and funding for capacity-building programs should continue despite shifting national

priorities. The United States needs to not only continue to commit significant resources to these efforts but ensure that its vast resources (including human) are effectively deployed.

Fifth, the United States should do more to support the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as a way to rebuild its cooperative relationships with the international community.

And last, given the sensitivity of security issues, a “softer” approach based on increased multilateralism and better engagement with civil society and the private sector would yield better long term results and foster greater political will to combat terrorism.