

Promoting Counterterrorism Cooperation in South Asia

Engaging Judges, Prosecutors, and Police Officers

BACKGROUND

South Asia has suffered a significant degree of terrorist violence over the years at the hands of groups espousing a wide variety of ideologies. In 2013, South Asia alone accounted for over 38 percent of terrorist incidents worldwide. The region is home to several ongoing conflicts and is marked by political volatility and numerous development challenges. Porous boundaries, increasing cross-border social and economic connections, and limited capacities have contributed to the internationalization of the terrorist threat within the region and beyond. The cross-border dimensions of often-interrelated security challenges and the common constraints many states in the region face in responding to them highlight the importance of developing an effective, broad-based regional response to terrorism.



Participants at the 7th Regional Workshop for Judges, Prosecutors, and Police Officers in South Asia on Effectively Countering Terrorism, Islamabad, Pakistan, October 2013

Regional tensions, however, pose serious obstacles to deepening security cooperation in South Asia generally and on counterterrorism cooperation in particular. Regional actors, notably the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), have adopted a number of relevant regional instruments but have struggled with their implementation. Despite declarations regarding the need for greater collaboration among states on issues related to border security, mutual legal assistance, and law enforcement, cooperation has been slow to materialize. The result is that, despite the grave threat posed by terrorism to the region's citizens, counterterrorism-related practitioners have few opportunities to interact with their counterparts and deepen their technical capacities.

In a 2009 joint report with the International Peace Institute, *Countering Terrorism in South Asia: Strengthening Multilateral Engagement*, the Global Center on Cooperative Security (at the time named the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation) identified the establishment of a mechanism for facilitating regional cooperation and capacity building at the practitioner level as a key priority. The report argued that the United Nations should take a lead role in promoting the establishment of such a mechanism.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Responding to the need, the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) launched a process aimed at facilitating and catalyzing cooperation among judges, prosecutors, police officers, and other counterterrorism-related officials in South Asia. Since 2010, the Global Center, with support from Denmark, Australia, the United States, and other governments, has been working with CTED to implement this process, bringing together law enforcement officials from each South Asian country every six months to develop strategies and share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in handling cases relating to international crimes and terrorism. The topics addressed include the preservation of evidence and securing crime scenes, forensic examinations, witness protection, community policing, relevant international legal frameworks, interview and interrogation, and advanced investigative techniques.

This multiyear process has several key objectives: 1) enhance regional criminal justice and law enforcement capacities to address terrorism and related crimes; 2) promote cooperation among regional counterterrorism practitioners; and 3) establish the groundwork for the regularization and institutionalization of cooperation among law enforcement officials and regional counterterrorism practitioners. To date, the process has taken place over seven workshops held in Bangladesh (November 2009), Sri Lanka (June 2010), Indonesia (November 2010), Bhutan (May 2011), India (March 2012), Nepal (March 2013), Pakistan (October 2013), and Singapore (April 2014). It is anticipated that the next workshop in the series will be held in the Maldives in November 2014.

This process made evident the important role of judges in an effective criminal justice system and a complementary project was launched in March 2013 to deepen the engagement of judges in the region. The project endeavors to strengthen the judiciary by compiling and developing strategies for the improved adjudication of terrorism cases, particularly those with a transnational element. The Global Center and CTED are working with judges from across South Asia to draft a regional toolkit to support the development of national bench books. The drafting process further supports the broader regional goals of promoting cooperation and enhancing regional capacity.

As part of a parallel process, the Global Center also convenes a series of workshops to provide a platform for non-governmental experts from across all SAARC countries to exchange insights, experiences, and good practices in preventing terrorism and violent extremism. The results of these workshops are integrated into the process for police, prosecutors, and judges.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The UN's engagement in South Asia has yielded significant accomplishments in terms of improving counterterrorism-related cooperation and capacity, including by:

- Facilitating regular meetings of police, prosecutors, and judges with the active participation of all 8 members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.
- Identifying key gaps in capacity counterterrorism-related capacity across the region.
- Providing substantive training and resources to an expanding pool of criminal justice officials on topics related to domestic and international cooperation in criminal matters; interview and interrogation; use of sensitive evidence; advanced investigative techniques; and other relevant topics.
- Building a region-wide cohort of police officers, prosecutors, and judges.
- Sustaining those cohorts through an online expert community.
- Catalyzing additional capacity development efforts relating to judges, witness protection, and civil society.

- Leveraging additional resources for the above and other related capacity development efforts in South Asia.
- Working towards the formalization of professional networks among law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges in the region.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL CENTER ON COOPERATIVE SECURITY

The Global Center works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. In collaboration with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional, and global levels.

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