

Strengthening Regional Security Cooperation in South Asia

Engaging Experts, Practitioners, and Civil Society

BACKGROUND

While terrorism and political violence are not new challenges in South Asia, the increasingly transnational and diffuse nature of terrorist groups and violent extremism today has transformed the nature of the threat in the region and heightened concerns about its impact beyond. A number of challenges including significant development needs, multiple ongoing conflicts, and the illicit trafficking of goods, narcotics, and persons, add layers of complexity to the threat as well as responses to it. Porous borders, weak governance in some places, common histories and traditions, and cross-border kinships combine to give terrorism a regional dimension in South Asia. Nevertheless, the region was proactive in its response and as early as 1987, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) adopted a Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and subsequently updated it in 2004 to meet the obligations placed upon states by Security Council Resolution 1373 and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. However, complex political relationships in the region as well as limitations on resources and law enforcement capacities have placed constraints on regional cooperation on issues relating to terrorism and violent extremism.

Given these challenges and regional tensions, the United Nations can play a valuable role as a neutral convener, partner, and facilitator of capacity-building assistance. In addition to Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1624, and subsequent resolutions, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) provides an important framework for both improving practical counterterrorism cooperation and the delivery of capacity-building assistance, as well as addressing more fundamental underlying political, social, and economic issues. Moreover, it “encourages non-governmental organizations and civil society to engage” in efforts to address the climate conducive to the threat of terrorism.

Across many different issues, South Asia has benefitted from a diverse and vibrant civil society sector. Whether on development issues, women’s empowerment, children and families, health or



Participants at the workshop on the role of the media in addressing terrorism and violent extremism in South Asia, Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS, Singapore, December 2012

civil liberties issues, civil society groups have often been at the forefront of social and political discourse. Nongovernmental actors and practitioner networks can be valuable partners in developing cooperative efforts to address terrorism and violent extremism across South Asia and complement more formal regional initiatives.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

For six years, the Global Center on Cooperative Security, with support from Denmark, Australia, the United States, and other governments, has been working with the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to bring together law enforcement officials—police officers, prosecutors, and judges—from each South Asian country approximately every six months to develop strategies and share experiences, lessons learned, and best practices in handling cases relating to international crime and terrorism. To complement this process and draw on the rich experiences and expertise of nongovernmental and expert partners in South Asia, the Global Center, with support from the government of Norway, has been organizing a series of workshops to provide a platform for civil society actors to exchange insights, experiences, and good practices in preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism, and to develop ideas for collaborative mechanisms to address these challenges in the region.

The workshops are held in partnership with the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore. An initial round of consultations with key stakeholders, one in New York (October 2011) and another in Singapore (April 2012) identified a number of key areas in which regional experts and civil society could contribute to regional counterterrorism efforts. In particular, the roles of the media, women, academics, and rule of law institutions in countering terrorism and violent extremism were discussed. Subsequent thematic workshops delved deeper into these topics—a December 2012 workshop explored the role of the media in creating or mitigating an atmosphere conducive to the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. A September 2013 workshop examined the roles of women in addressing crucial development and security issues which might underscore grievances that lead to terrorism and violent extremism. A third and final workshop in this series will be held in December 2014 and will focus on engaging communities in countering violent extremism and exploring the relationship between communities, civil society, and law enforcement and opportunities to foster greater regional security cooperation.

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.

For further information about this project, please contact Ms. Rafia Barakat Bhulai at +1 646 350 4740 or rbhulai@globalcenter.org.

WASHINGTON DC
1101 14th Street, NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

NEW YORK
747 Third Avenue
4th Floor
New York, NY 10017

GLOBAL CENTER (UK)
11–12 Tokenhouse Yard
London EC2R 7AS
United Kingdom

GOSHEN
129 South Main Street
Suite 1
Goshen, IN 46526

www.globalcenter.org