Strengthening Regional Capacities to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in the IGAD Region and the Greater Horn of Africa

JANUARY 2015

BACKGROUND

The threat posed by transnational terrorists and other violent groups in Eastern Africa is not new to the region. Indeed, many regional conflicts have been interwoven with prolonged rebellion, proxy wars, insurgencies, and terrorism-related violence. A number of regional terrorist groups and other armed nonstate actors can be viewed as, at least in part, a consequence of the region’s numerous inter-communal, civil, and inter-state wars over the past decades. At the same time, states in the region are faced with a multitude of structural governance and nation building challenges, with responses to violent extremism often being reactionary and repressive in nature. Add to that certain environmental conditions and protracted violence, it should come as no surprise that safety, human security, and economic development are negatively affected, and access to public goods and the provision of basic social services is suboptimal.

As the region confronts these complex and interconnected challenges in the areas of development, armed conflict, (economic) instability, and terrorism, there is a strong realization that no single country can manage alone. The emergence of regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD, consisting of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda) therefore offer valuable opportunities to enhance regional coordination and cooperation on transnational threats such as terrorism.

Over the last decade, a consensus has grown among governments, experts, and civil society actors that efforts to counter terrorism without acknowledging and addressing the drivers of violent extremism are likely to be counterproductive, and could increase political marginalization of communities and make vulnerable segments of those communities (such as un- or under-employed youth) susceptible to the allure of violent ideologies. Increasingly, national and international counterterrorism strategies—including the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy—reflect the need to address underlying drivers and adopt a more comprehensive approach that includes not only governmental and law enforcement personnel, but also engages civil society and development actors. However, preventive capacities focusing on countering violent extremism (CVE)
in Eastern Africa have been limited, with only a select number of national initiatives reflecting this new approach.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Starting January 2015 for a period of 16 months, this project aims to address this contradiction by supporting government officials in the IGAD region of East Africa in deepening prevention capacities including by partnering with civil society actors and communities in order to build resilience against violent extremism. The Global Center on Cooperative Security and the IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) will jointly realize a number of deliverables to enhance cooperation between governmental and nongovernmental actors and strengthen the effectiveness of policies aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.

The project will include efforts aimed at creating a deeper knowledge base on local drivers of insecurity and key stakeholders, the development of several regional CVE workshops and training programs, and enhancing and strengthening partnerships with local actors.

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.

ABOUT THE IGAD SECURITY SECTOR PROGRAM

The IGAD Security Sector Program (ISSP) aims at building national and regional capacity of the Horn of Africa countries in the fight against terrorism and other transnational organized crime. ISSP operates within a framework of four pillars: Counterterrorism; Transnational Organized Crime; Maritime Security; and Security Institutions Capacity Building. ISSP and the Global Center have been cooperating for over five years in Eastern Africa, and further strengthened their partnership on the basis of a MOU signed in July 2013.

For more information about this project, please email Mr. Eelco Kessels, Senior Analyst at the Global Center (ekessels@globalsecurity.org) or Dr. Simon Nyambura, Head of the Counterterrorism Pillar at ISSP (simon.nyambura@igad.int).