



The G8's Counterterrorism Action Group

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The Group of Eight (G8) leaders established the Counterterrorism Action Group (CTAG) at the 2003 Evian summit with a view to enhancing global counterterrorism capacity-building assistance and coordination activities and to reducing duplication of effort. The G8 had become increasingly dissatisfied with the slow progress of the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) in trying to stimulate and help coordinate global counterterrorism capacity-building activities during the first two years of the latter's existence.¹ Among the goals in creating the CTAG was to offer the CTC a donor forum in which to share information regarding priority assistance needs related to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1373,² with a view to identifying the appropriate donors to address each identified need. The G8 agreed to invite "other states, mainly donors,"³ and the CTC to join the group, which now includes Australia, the European Commission, Spain, and Switzerland.⁴

For reasons that will be discussed below, the CTAG's performance has been uneven, largely failing to meet the goals set out in the 2003 G8 summit document. Yet, the CTAG still offers the best opportunity currently available for enhanced coordination of donor counterterrorism assistance, including on the ground, which remains needed. In order to maximize the CTAG's effectiveness, however, a number of steps should be taken, some of which are already underway.

(1) the practice of convening local CTAG meetings should be reinvigorated;

(2) CTAG member countries with the strongest interest in particular countries or regions should organize local or regional CTAG meetings on a permanent basis to ensure more continuity and sustained CTAG interest in the field, rather than the current approach, which gives the CTAG presidency responsibility for organizing such meetings around the globe during its year-long term;

(3) CTAG members should show a greater willingness to share relevant information about pertinent ongoing or planned activities with their CTAG colleagues;

(4) other active counterterrorism donors should be invited to join the group to make it more representative and ensure all the major donors are around the table;

(5) the Japan-led efforts to strengthen the CTAG relationship with the CTC and its group of experts, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Director (CTED), should continue; and the CTED should continue to provide CTAG members with timely and sound analysis of country or regional needs and priorities, well enough in advance of CTAG meetings to allow the group to focus on particular countries, regions, or themes; and

(6) an expanded CTAG should be delinked from the G8's Lyon-Roma Anti-Crime and Counterterrorism Group meetings (for organized crime/counterterrorism practitioners) to help ensure that the CTAG meeting attracts more interest and

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resources from capitals or delinked from the G8 entirely so that the CTAG chair is not also serving as G8 president. The latter approach would allow the CTAG chair to devote more attention and resources to the chairmanship and help raise the profile of the group and build wider support for its work.

Early Success: 2004

The CTAG experienced some success during the 2004 U.S. G8 presidency when it worked with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to identify and address gaps in countries' capacities in countering the financing of terrorism (CFT). During that year, the CTAG and FATF developed a list of priority countries, the FATF undertook technical assistance needs assessments of these countries and shared them with the CTAG, and CTAG members divvied up responsibility for addressing those needs, seeking to avoid any duplication of effort.⁵

CTAG Efforts Stall: 2005–2007

After this initial period of achievement, CTAG efforts stalled as it sought to broaden its focus beyond the CFT field into other aspects of Resolution 1373 (e.g., criminal justice and other law enforcement issues and border control capacities), where a stronger partnership with the CTC/CTED was needed but slow to materialize due to the limitations on each side. Unlike with the FATF, the lack of rigorous analysis from the CTC/CTED and its rather rigid information-sharing rules often left CTAG members without any, let alone reliable, needs assessments on which to determine how to allocate assistance. A number of limitations on the CTAG side hampered its ability to deliver concrete results over a sustained period of time as well. These constraints included the lack of continuity from year to year due to the rotating presidency, which is exacerbated by the significant organizational and administrative burden placed on the CTAG chair delegation and the lack of a permanent secretariat. In addition, the CTAG has generally been an

afterthought to the G8's Lyon-Roma Anti-Crime and Counterterrorism Group meetings. Finally, major counterterrorism assistance providers such as the United States and the United Kingdom have tended to be somewhat reluctant to discuss, much less share, information about their counterterrorism assistance priorities and ongoing programs with CTAG members, which has impeded information sharing and wider coordination efforts.

Thus, by the end of 2005 the CTAG had yet to deliver the results G8 leaders thought it would when they established it at the G8 summit in Evian, leaving a senior U.S. Department of State official to assert that "we have yet to devise a consistent [multilateral] framework to effectively address the numerous gaps that continue to exist between what we can do and what we need to do."⁶

With CTAG members finding less and less use for the group, the annual schedule of meetings was reduced, starting in 2007, from a full-day meeting following each of the three yearly Lyon-Roma meetings to a half-day meeting twice a year. The half-day meetings allowed limited time for substantive discussions. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, the new schedule made it more difficult to attract those officials responsible for coordinating national counterterrorism capacity-building efforts to attend the meetings. In some instances, G8 member states started designating the head of their delegation to the Lyon-Roma work, i.e., law enforcement officials with limited actual involvement with CTAG activities, to fill their CTAG seat.

More attention, however, was devoted to "local" CTAG meetings, where ambassadors from the country holding the G8 presidency began to convene CTAG members at the country level to discuss the relevant country's counterterrorism assistance needs and priorities, the ongoing

assistance programs of different CTAG members, and the donors that would take the lead in helping to fill remaining gaps. Although devolving CTAG activity into the field is the right approach in theory, local CTAG members too often lacked understanding of the breadth of counter-terrorism assistance programs being delivered in-country, often by a wide range of donor government agencies.⁷ In addition, in part because of lack of resources and political interest, CTAG member capitals often failed to provide local CTAG representatives with the necessary background information in advance of the in-country meetings to allow for an informed discussion.⁸ Further, even when provided with the necessary information, local CTAG representatives were generally insufficiently empowered to take decisions to match identified needs with concrete assistance.

Renewal Under the Japanese G8 Presidency

To its credit, during its G8 presidency and taking advantage of new CTED leadership (the pragmatic and experienced former Australian counterterrorism ambassador, Mike Smith), Japan sought to revitalize the CTAG. Japan focused much of its attention on reinvigorating the CTAG-CTC/CTED relationship and the local CTAG meetings, drawing in part on the successful CTAG-FATF experience. Thus, in advance of each CTAG meeting, the CTAG began working with the CTED to identify a handful of countries on which to focus. The CTED then presented CTAG representatives in New York with detailed analyses as to the priority needs in those countries, giving delegations sufficient time to consult with their capitals about their ability and interest in addressing CTED-identified priorities. The ultimate goal was to transform CTAG meetings into a forum where individual CTAG delegations are prepared to discuss concrete capacity needs in a preselected number of countries and possibly

agree to address those needs. In April 2008, the capacity-building needs of five countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Tanzania) and one region (West Africa) were discussed at the CTAG meeting in Japan, with the CTED presenting CTAG representatives with a list of priority recommendations for capacity-building assistance. As a result of this process, among other things, three CTAG members have agreed to fund training workshops for law enforcement officials in West Africa to be held at the African Union's Algiers Centre for the Study and Research of Terrorism, and a number of CTAG members have expressed an interest in providing the necessary funding or technical assistance to fill some of the gaps identified in a couple of countries.

One of the keys to long-term CTAG success is a strong partnership with an effective CTED, which in turn needs to continue to improve its analytical capacities and make specific, tailored recommendations regarding assistance priorities. For their part, CTAG members will need to share more information in a user-friendly format with the CTED regarding their respective capacity-building programs so that the CTED has a fuller picture of the existing capacity-building work. CTAG members also need to come to the table prepared to respond positively to at least a few CTED recommendations, as is now starting to occur.

The Way Forward

Efforts to reinvigorate the CTAG should be encouraged. These should include further strengthening the CTAG-CTC/CTED relationship and inviting a number of additional counterterrorism donors to join the CTAG. In addition to enhancing the legitimacy of the group, which has suffered somewhat as a result of

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additional donors might inject more energy and resources into CTAG activities. The transparency of CTAG’s work, which has been limited, should be enhanced, including by finding ways to reach out to regional bodies and nongovernmental organizations, which are sometimes involved in counterterrorism capacity-building activities. In addition to considering the possibility of delinking CTAG from the Lyon-Roma group or even the G8 as a whole, consideration should also be given, to expanding the CTAG mandate beyond the narrow law enforcement and other security-related issues being addressed by the CTC/CTED and covered under Resolution 1373. The CTAG was established prior to

the adoption of the September 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the shift to a more holistic response to addressing the terrorist threat than the one characterized by the Security Council’s focus on law enforcement and other security measures. However, CTAG’s mandate should now reflect this framework, which has wider support within the global South, where most recipients of CTAG assistance lie, than Resolution 1373 and covers a broader set of counterterrorism issues where enhanced and coordinated capacity building is needed.

Notes

¹ For a full description of the CTAG mandate, as outlined at the 2003 G8 Evian summit, see “Building International Political Will and Capacity to Combat Terrorism: A G8 Action Plan,” July 2003, http://www.g8.fr/evian/english/navigation/2003_g8_summit/summit_documents/building_international_political_will_and_capacity_to_combat_terrorism_-_a_g8_action_plan.html.

² Adopted some two weeks following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, this resolution requires all UN member states to take a series of legal and operational measures to prevent and combat terrorism.

³ “Building International Political Will and Capacity to Combat Terrorism: A G8 Action Plan,” July 2003, para. 3.2.

⁴ The CTAG’s membership initially comprised the G8 countries, Australia, and Switzerland (largely based on U.S. political interests at the time), as well as the European Commission, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and the CTC, whose seat was later taken by its expert body, the CTED, when the Security Council established it in March 2004. Spain, which was chairing the CTC during 2003–2004 when it was a close ally of the Bush administration, was subsequently invited to join.

⁵ Celina B. Realuyo, “G-8 Counterterrorism Action Group Efforts to Combat Terrorist Financing” (presentation, Vienna, March 11, 2004), http://www.osce.org/documents/sg/2004/03/3297_en.pdf.

⁶ E. Anthony Wayne, statement at the Fundacion Jose Ortega y Gasset, Madrid, 16 November 2005, <http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/terrorism/state/57413.pdf>.

⁷ Various CTED staff, interviews with author, April 2009 (participants in different local CTAG meetings). A notable exception, however, was in Kenya during the British CTAG presidency in 2005 when, as a result of CTAG discussions organized by the British ambassador in Nairobi, the United States and United Kingdom agreed on a division of labor on the provision of training of Kenyan border control officials, with the United States focusing on coastal patrol and the United Kingdom on border patrol.

⁸ CTAG member country representatives, interviews with author, 2008 and 2009. The author experienced this situation while working on counterterrorism issues at the U.S. Department of State during 2002–2006.

The Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation is a nonpartisan research and policy organization that works to improve internationally-coordinated responses to the continually evolving threat of terrorism by providing governments and international organizations with timely, policy-relevant research and analysis. Building on its years of research on regional and international counterterrorism initiatives, the Center continues to identify ways to strengthen non-military counterterrorism efforts.

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