

DON'T GO IT ALONE: America's Interest in International Cooperation

Building Global Alliances in the Fight Against Terrorism



*By Alistair Millar and Eric Rosand
Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*



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This paper was commissioned by the Better World Campaign, a sister organization of the United Nations Foundation, as part of a series of papers developed for the 2008 Presidential campaign and incoming administration. These papers offer strategies for enhancing international cooperation to address global challenges and advance U.S. interests. The views represented in the paper are those of the authors.

*Executive Summary***Building Global Alliances in the Fight against Terrorism**

Facing an evolving, global terrorist threat, the international community's ability to deal effectively with it will only be as strong as the international community's weakest link and the United States derives more benefit when it works with partners around the globe rather than alone in the international fight against terrorism.

Immediately after 9/11, the U.S. made a promising start by working with the international community. Since then, however, attention to this crucial element of counterterrorism policy has dwindled significantly.

To protect America from another major terrorist attack and repair its damaged reputation on the international stage, the new Administration will have to make strengthening international cooperation a top priority, including by reasserting American leadership in multilateral institutions.

The next Administration will need to revitalize U.S. policy and practices in order to plug gaps in global capacities and improve relations with global partners and institutions to better protect America. It will need to cooperate more effectively with other nations, which can shoulder the burden of providing counterterrorism capacity-building and training assistance, especially in regions where the U.S. may lack access and leverage. More effort will also be needed to exchange information on terrorists with both allies and non-traditional allies and raise U.S. and global security standards for travel and border crossings through extensive international cooperation.

The next Administration can make important progress in both areas by working more closely with multilateral bodies, which have a critical role to play in global efforts to combat terrorism, by:

- **Setting international norms.** International organizations, particularly the UN, have a critical role to play in the establishing and monitoring the implementation of international legal frameworks, which provide the essential basis for the cooperation between states in combating terrorism and bringing terrorists to justice.
- **Enabling technical cooperation between countries.** Myriad different international functional bodies, such as those devoted to combating terrorism financing, aviation, and maritime security, facilitate the standard-setting and day-to-day technical cooperation essential to combating terrorism.
- **Assisting states to build their capacity to combat terrorism.** The UN plays a unique and invaluable role as an important facilitator and provider of those efforts among functional, regional, and sub-regional organizations. The United States cannot simply identify and fund its own priorities. Americans' security against terrorism is interwoven with that of other countries. The U.S. must work with these countries to identify and fund counterterrorism priorities in

every corner of the world. An effective UN can help leverage the limited resources available and help raise the capacity of all states to combat terrorism.

- **Engaging with non-traditional allies.** The UN offers a forum for engaging with traditional and non-traditional allies on a range of counterterrorism issues, including those related to countering the growing radicalization and extremism that fuels Islamist terrorism and for which there is currently no broad-based and effective forum.

Recommendations

This paper offers the following recommendations for the next Administration to implement in its first one hundred days:

- **Appoint a White House “czar” for international counterterrorism cooperation;**
- **Appoint a diplomat as the Department of State’s Counterterrorism Coordinator;**
- **Ensure ambassadorial-level leadership on counterterrorism at the UN; and**
- **Call for the establishment of a global anti-terrorism organization.**

“Building the capacity of all countries to counter the terrorist threat must be a top priority of the new Administration.”



Protecting Americans

The primary responsibility of the next Administration will be to protect the American people. More than six years after the 9/11 attacks, transnational terrorist networks and homegrown Islamist terrorists continue to pose serious challenges to international peace and security. Attacks on our closest allies in Spain, and Britain, which were planned by individuals with ties to Europe, North Africa, and South Asia, underscore the reality of a complex global problem that requires a coordinated, comprehensive global response. Terrorists have proven adept at exploiting gaps to fund, organize, equip and train their recruits, carry out attacks, and avoid arrest. Given the fast-moving nature of the global terrorist threat, the international community's ability to deal effectively with it will only be as strong as its weakest link. Building the capacity of all countries to counter the terrorist threat, therefore, must be a top priority of the new Administration.

Today's terror networks typically have no affiliation to sovereign nations and operate across national boundaries and in areas that often lay outside the United States' sphere of influence. To respond to this threat, counterterrorism efforts must cut across the cultural, ethnic, regional, and religious divides that terrorists seek to exploit. Though it is the world's strongest military and economic power, America cannot be everywhere at once and shoulder by itself the immense burden of addressing a global threat that will likely last beyond this generation.

America needs the support of allies big and small, north and south, to build and sustain the capacities necessary to address the threat effectively. A robust military and effective covert intelligence gathering capabilities must remain at the cutting edge of our efforts to capture and defeat terrorists. Focusing on these measures alone, however, is not sufficient to address a multifaceted and adapting global threat. International cooperation on a broader range of approaches using a wide array of tools deserves greater attention and resources to improve collective efforts to address emerging threats such as radicalization and recruitment and to keep counterterrorism squarely on the international agenda. More seamless coordination and more effective capacity building are also vital to ensure the cross-border cooperation required to track funding, disrupt planning, and prevent future attacks, as well as to investigate, capture, and prosecute terrorists. The international cooperation that helped thwart the planned August 2007 major attack by al-Qaeda-inspired terrorists on U.S. targets in Germany highlights this essential element of effectively addressing the threat.

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America must present a vision that looks beyond the fear and uncertainty created by those who have attacked us. It is time to look beyond 9/11 and unite our country around a sense of collective purpose rather than dwelling on the enemy. It must also take the lead in addressing the conditions that contribute to the continuing spread of radical Islamism, such as festering regional conflicts, lack of the rule of law, and marginalization. While no American President should ever put alliances and international cooperation before the security of the American people, failure to provide the leadership needed today to strengthen counterterrorism alliances around the world and adapt them to address evolving threats undermines the security of the United States.

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Immediately following the September 2001 attacks, the U.S. made a promising start by working with the international community, including by successfully placing the issue at the top of the agenda of the UN and other multilateral bodies. Since then, however, attention to this crucial element of counterterrorism policy has dwindled significantly. Over the past six years more attention and the lion's share of our national security resources are being devoted to the war in Iraq and to bilateral counterterrorism partnerships, including with countries with limited political freedom and suspect human rights records. Today, as a result, we require a revitalized effort to plug gaps in global capacities and improve relations with global partners and institutions to better protect America. The U.S. must build and sustain an effort of global cooperation that will not only help prepare for and prevent the next attack, but help it prevail against terrorism over the long-term.

Going Global

In the international effort to combat terrorism, it has become utterly clear, despite the claims of some in the Bush Administration and its more hard-line supporters, that the United States derives far more benefit from engagement with multilateral organizations and other partners than by going it alone. Counterterrorism cooperation means that other nations can help shoulder the burden of providing capacity building and training assistance, especially in regions where Washington lacks access and leverage. More work needs to be done in the new Administration to stimulate the exchange of information on terrorists with both trusted and non-traditional allies and raise U.S. and global security standards for travel and border crossings through extensive international cooperation. Multilateral engagement also provides opportunities not only to foster (or rekindle) bilateral relationships with traditional and non-traditional partner countries to combat terrorism, but to raise common awareness of the threat and build the trust necessary for sharing information to prevent and detect terrorist acts.

To the extent that America's security against terrorism is interwoven with that of other countries, the new Administration must work with them to identify and fund counterterrorism priorities in every corner of the world. While some countries and regions have the capacity to identify and implement their counterterrorism priorities, many others still do not. This conclusion was echoed by the Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force on Terrorist Financing, which noted that while substantial progress has been made in many countries, a lack of technical capacity still inhibits the ability of many countries to comply fully with their counterterrorism-related obligations.¹ In fact, lack of capacity is a problem in a number of the countries and regions identified by the 9/11 Commission as likely bases of operation for some of the most dangerous international terrorist networks.²

Traditionally, Washington has been the world's top provider of technical assistance and resources to improve the counterterrorism capacities of developing countries. After 9/11, the Departments of State and Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency all significantly increased their counterterrorism assistance programs. More recently, however, inflation-adjusted funding for many of these programs has flattened out.³ These assistance-related resources represent a minuscule amount of the money allocated to the effort against terrorism, but in many developing countries they are of critical importance and must be maintained and enhanced.

Airport and maritime security and foreign law enforcement capabilities are among the priority programs that need more robust funding. Programs like these help train intelligence, police, and judicial personnel in developing countries where terrorists have taken root. By providing more funding for such programs, Washington would not only increase the ability of host countries to contribute to the worldwide effort against terrorism, but enable those governments to better protect U.S. commercial and security interests, as well as Americans who travel or live abroad. Such programs also enable law enforcement officials here and abroad to cooperate on the implementation of strict anti-terrorism laws, to adapt to changing conditions as terrorists alter their tactics, and to track the activity of terrorist networks to thwart attacks in the planning stage before they can be executed. The cooperation between U.S., British, and Pakistani law enforcement officials that foiled a terrorist conspiracy to blow up as many as ten transatlantic flights bound for American cities in August 2006 is a case in point.

The new Administration must ensure that these funding priorities are recognized and approved by Congress.⁴ Better protection of the nation's infrastructure must also be a goal of the new Administration. Soft targets like electric grids and reservoirs are vital to our national security, public order, and national economy. In the United States today, some 85 percent of this infrastructure is in private hands. The next Administration will need to do a better job at reaching out to the private sector in getting its cooperation to protect this infrastructure from being attacked.

Furthermore, given the number of multinational companies and the global nature of the economy, it is not enough for the Department of Homeland Security and its Western European counterparts to energize and coordinate their respective national efforts to protect critical infrastructure. An attack on such infrastructure almost anywhere around the globe could have devastating ripples into the United States.

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Recommendations to Protect America

Unfortunately, the missteps leading up to and the conduct of the war in Iraq, as well as the unilateralism that has characterized the Bush Administration's broader foreign policy, have impeded America's ability to develop the global cooperation necessary to address the threat of terrorism, both in the long and short term. Terrorism is a truly global problem and the United States must demonstrate it is committed, wherever possible, to tackling the challenges through peaceful, multilateral, non-military cooperation.

To protect America from another major terrorist attack, the new Administration will have to make strengthening international cooperation, including by reasserting American leadership in the UN and other multilateral institutions, a top priority and the cornerstone of U.S. efforts to repair its damaged reputation on the international stage. Below are a number of steps the next Administration should take during its first one hundred days:

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Appoint a White House “Czar” for International Counterterrorism Cooperation

The Department of State's Office of the Counterterrorism Coordinator, which has traditionally had the lead in this area, lacks both the resources and gravitas within the State Department, let alone the inter-agency system, to ensure coordinated and effective U.S. engagement with bilateral and multilateral partners. Leadership in this area should move to the White House. In order to highlight the non-military emphasis of U.S. counterterrorism policy, the “czar” should not be drawn from the ranks of the military.

Appoint a Diplomat as the Department of State's Counterterrorism Coordinator

The Counterterrorism Coordinator should be a respected current or former Ambassador or other senior diplomat, who should make it a priority to meet and establish enduring contacts with relevant representatives from regional and other multilateral agencies and organizations, which have too often been ignored by previous coordinators. In the Bush Administration, this position has been held by current or former military or intelligence officials who often have had little diplomatic experience and limited understanding of how multilateral institutions can be used to further a broad range of U.S. counterterrorism objectives. The Counterterrorism Coordinator should also be provided with sufficient funds to support and sustain a wide range of international and regional capacity building and other non-military counterterrorism programs, both bilaterally and in multilateral institutions.

Ensure Ambassadorial-Level Leadership on Counterterrorism at the UN

An Ambassador for counterterrorism should be appointed to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York. Although the mission currently has five ambassadors, including the Permanent Representative,

they are often distracted by a host of other pressing country or region-specific issues, whether it is Darfur, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, North Korea, or Iran. Since September 11, 2001, no U.S. Ambassador has shown sustained interest in the counterterrorism portfolio, leaving the impression that Washington simply does not value the role of the UN in this area. This lack of sustained leadership must change. The appointment of a counterterrorism Ambassador to the UN would be an important first step. During the period required to get congressional approval for this new ambassadorial-level slot, the Ambassador for Special Political Affairs at the Mission should be charged with overseeing the counterterrorism portfolio at the mission and his or her title temporarily changed to “Ambassador for Special Political Affairs and Counterterrorism.”

Call for the Establishment of a Global Anti-Terrorism Organization

The next Administration should call for the establishment of a global anti-terrorism organization under the auspices of the UN. The new White House “Czar” for International Counterterrorism Cooperation should lead an inter-agency process within the U.S. government to guarantee that this organization receives support from all the relevant departments, including Homeland Security, State, Justice, Treasury, and Defense. It should be made abundantly clear, perhaps in a presidential address to the General Assembly in September 2009, that the new global counterterrorism body will serve the interests of not only the United States, but also

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countries in all parts of the world, and that the next Administration intends to work with partners within and outside of the UN in supporting the creation and the work of such an entity. In addition to overcoming the inter-agency turf battles among State, Defense, Treasury, Justice, and Homeland Security that have characterized U.S. multilateral engagement on counterterrorism issues under the Bush Administration, White House leadership will be needed to overcome the inevitable skepticism from career U.S. government counterterrorism officials regarding the contributions that multilateral bodies can make to this global effort.

The reasons why the United States would benefit from the creation of an effective global body dedicated to counterterrorism are numerous.

- It could provide a forum for engaging with traditional and non-traditional allies on a range of counterterrorism issues, including those related to countering the growing radicalization and extremism that fuels Islamist terrorism and for which there is currently no broad-based and effective forum. To overcome the stigma attached to its bilateral relations with many Muslim countries, the U.S. could take advantage of such a forum for developing broad-based programs with countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, and other leading voices in the Muslim world as part of a multilateral effort to help to overcome the growing skepticism and distrust among Muslim nations and communities around the globe that the U.S.-led counterterrorism effort is targeting Islam.

- It could help sustain U.S. engagement in the hard and unglamorous work of counterterrorism when the political spotlight fades at home and help sustain international engagement that has already waned because of the perception that this has all been about U.S. interests and even U.S. hegemony.
- It could improve the coordination, cooperation, and information sharing among individual nations and different multilateral bodies currently engaged in counterterrorism activities and become the focal point for coordinating international counterterrorism technical assistance efforts, which would help the international community make better use of the limited funds and expertise available.
- It could help spread among many countries the capacity building and training burdens that are currently subsidized by the United States and a handful of other countries.
- It could focus on the urgent task of identifying and correcting vulnerabilities in countries that are not priority countries for the U.S. but which run the risk of becoming terrorist safe havens or breeding grounds for terrorism.
- If designed properly, a new global body could not only be able to set international counterterrorism standards for trains, busses and other mass transit systems, where, unlike aviation, international norms on security do not currently exist, but also publicly identify those countries lacking the political will to comply with these standards.
- It could also highlight its members' commitment to upholding the highest standards of human rights and the rule of law while countering terrorism by enunciating a clear set of principles in this area. Such an initiative should be coupled with the closing of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and a clear statement by the next Administration signaling America's strong support for these standards.
- Finally, a new body could provide a forum for the United States to show its commitment to a multilateral, rule-of-law-based approach to combating terrorism and enable it to work more effectively with traditional and nontraditional allies, conferring greater legitimacy to its counterterrorism efforts and reassuring other countries that the days of American unilateralism in addressing the terrorist threat are a thing of the past.

The military has an indispensable role to play on the frontlines of the fight against terror. However, it is time for a strategic realignment to alleviate the immense pressure on our military and to ensure that our global partners are fighting with us and sharing the burden. As the 2006 U.S. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism states, “during the Cold War we created an array of domestic and international institutions and enduring partnerships to defeat the threat of communism. Today, we require similar transformational structures to carry forward the fight against terror and to help ensure our ultimate success.” With the continuation of terrorist attacks around the globe, the need to fill this gaping hole in the international system has become more obvious than ever.

About the Authors

Alistair Millar is the director of the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation in Washington, DC and teaches graduate level courses on counterterrorism and foreign policy at The Johns Hopkins University and George Washington University.

Eric Rosand is a senior fellow at the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation in New York and a non-resident fellow at New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

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¹ Maurice R. Greenberg, chair, "Update on the Global Campaign Against Terrorist Financing," Second Report of an Independent Task Force on Terrorist Financing Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, June 15 2004. Available online at the Council on Foreign Relations <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Revised_Terrorist_Financing.pdf> (accessed November 1 2007).

² According to the 9/11 Commission Report, U.S. and foreign intelligence officials list six regions as being the most likely ones in which terrorist leaders would re-locate their bases: western Pakistan and the Pakistan/Afghanistan border, southern/western Afghanistan, the Arabian peninsula, southeast Asia (from Thailand to the southern Philippines to Indonesia, West Africa including Niger and Mali), and "European cities with expatriate Muslim communities, especially central and eastern European cities where security forces and border controls are less effective." National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004), p. 366.

³ Congressional Budget Justification Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2008, p. 95. Available online at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/84462.pdf> (accessed November 1 2007).

⁴ For example, the State Department requested \$157.5 million for fiscal year 2007 for its core counterterrorism programs, but Congress reduced the amount by \$20 million. See Josh Meyer, "The Bush administration says it wants to end extremism by addressing underlying conditions, but the money goes to military might," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18 2007.

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Better World Campaign
1800 Massachusetts Avenue, NW 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 462-4900 | Fax: (202) 462-2686
www.betterworldcampaign.org

Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 1012
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 667-0610 | Fax: (202) 667-4201
www.globalct.org

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