Preparing the Global Counterterrorism Forum for the Next Decade

By Eric Rosand

GCTF representatives pose for a group photo at the ministerial plenary meeting in Istanbul on June 7, 2012. (Photo by Saul Loeb/AP)

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- Since 2011, when the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) was launched as the first dedicated global counterterrorism platform, it has helped catalyze more dynamic and practical cooperation on counterterrorism among a more diverse set of government and nongovernmental stakeholders and an enhanced role for the United Nations.

- In its first nine years, the forum has succeeded in developing numerous good practices for practitioners, helping create three institutions to implement priorities, and incubating ideas for UN action.

- The GCTF has been less effective in promoting and supporting implementation of its guidance and building partnerships at the local level.

- The future of the GCTF should be informed by the broader multilateral architecture on counterterrorism that has evolved since 2011 and the need to connect to and support local actors, which now play a much more important role in responding to and preventing terrorism and violent extremism.

- Its members should consider three core recommendations: narrowing the scope of activities; building new and strengthening existing partnerships with regional and local stakeholders; and prioritizing cooperation, collaboration, and engagement.

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VIOLENT EXTREMISM

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines the work and achievements of the Global Counterterrorism Forum since its launch in 2011 and how it can be best positioned for the next decade of counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism efforts. Informed by interviews, conversations, and survey responses, as well as an off-the-record experts' roundtable, it was supported by the US Department of State's Bureau of Counterterrorism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Didier Burkhalter (right) represented Switzerland at the June 7, 2012 ministerial meeting of the Global Counterterrorism Forum in Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo by AP)

Introduction

As the twentieth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington approaches, the global nature of the terrorist threat not only remains but also is now more widespread. The statistics speak for themselves: in recent years, more than 110 countries saw their citizens travel to conflict zones to support terrorist groups; scores are now dealing with how to manage the return of their citizens.[1] In 2018, seventy-one countries recorded at least one death from terrorism, the second-highest figure since 2002.[2] According to experts at the United Nations, the threat of ISIS persists despite its loss of territory and the death of its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[3] Groups such as al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram also remain of concern. Racially or ethnically motivated terrorism is now on the rise, particularly in Europe, Oceania, and North America—a 320 percent increase in such attacks over the past five years.[4] In addition, these groups are "learning from their jihadist predecessors."[5] Low-cost, lone-actor attacks, often focusing on what are now known as soft targets, are increasing, and terrorist groups continue to use social media to recruit and radicalize. Many of the threats are locally rooted, as terrorist recruiters seek to exploit political, social, and economic grievances.[6]

Terrorist networks have also become increasingly global and interconnected even as they remain locally tethered. The transnational nature of the threat underscores the continued importance of international cooperation in all aspects of a response. The salience of local contexts challenges international actors to more carefully calibrate efforts to connect with and support local

actors and to work with them to thwart attacks, bring terrorists and their supporters to justice, eliminate terrorist safe havens, and prevent the radicalization and recruitment of (mainly) young people to terrorism at the community level. Looking ahead, a wider array of governmental agencies, intergovernmental bodies, and nongovernmental bodies, including civil society and the private sector, needs to be engaged and involved to prevent and counter the terrorist threat more effectively.

Over the years, multilateral bodies and platforms have helped facilitate and deepen this cooperation, leveraging varied comparative advantages. This work includes forging consensus among governments on strategies and approaches, setting norms and standards to guide national and local efforts, delivering training and otherwise helping countries build their counterterrorism capacities, mobilizing resources to support these capacity-building efforts, and enabling the sharing of information and experience among officials and experts across countries.

In fact, one of the underreported counterterrorism advances over the past decade has been the extent to which the multilateral architecture has evolved to allow for more dynamic and practical counterterrorism cooperation among a greater diversity of policymakers, practitioners, and experts. Reasons for this include the shift from the perception that terrorism is a Western-imposed priority to the emergence of the truly global phenomenon that exists today, as well as the launch of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) in September 2011—the first "built-for-purpose global counterterrorism body."[7]

The multilateral architecture has evolved since then, of course. Spurred partly by a desire to move beyond the excesses of the so-called war on terror, it has expanded and strengthened. The changed landscape is most notable at the United Nations, which for much of the first decade after 9/11 was underperforming. Today, thanks in large part to the emergence of ISIS as a worldwide threat in 2014, counterterrorism is now a priority. The UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) was established, for example, the first Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism appointed, and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Compact (a framework uniting forty-two related UN bodies) launched. A variety of UN entities have developed guidance, recommendations, or other publications across different areas of counterterrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), and donor support for UN-led efforts has continued to grow.[8] The UN Trust Fund for Counter-Terrorism, for example, has received nearly $250 million for UN counterterrorism and P/CVE projects from more than thirty donors, some 80 percent of which is from Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Other multilateral bodies have also intensified their counterterrorism and P/CVE efforts.[9] Organizations such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Council of Europe, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Interpol, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have developed new strategic frameworks and action plans, delivered training or capacity building, facilitated practitioner networking, or mobilized apolitical will. In addition, international development institutions such as the OECD and World Bank, historically reluctant to associate with what many viewed as a Western-imposed security agenda, have become engaged in P/CVE because they are increasingly aware of how extremism and other forms of violent conflict can undermine development gains.[10]

The past decade has also seen a steady increase in the number of new multilateral counterterrorism or P/CVE bodies, platforms, and initiatives. Perhaps most prominent is the now
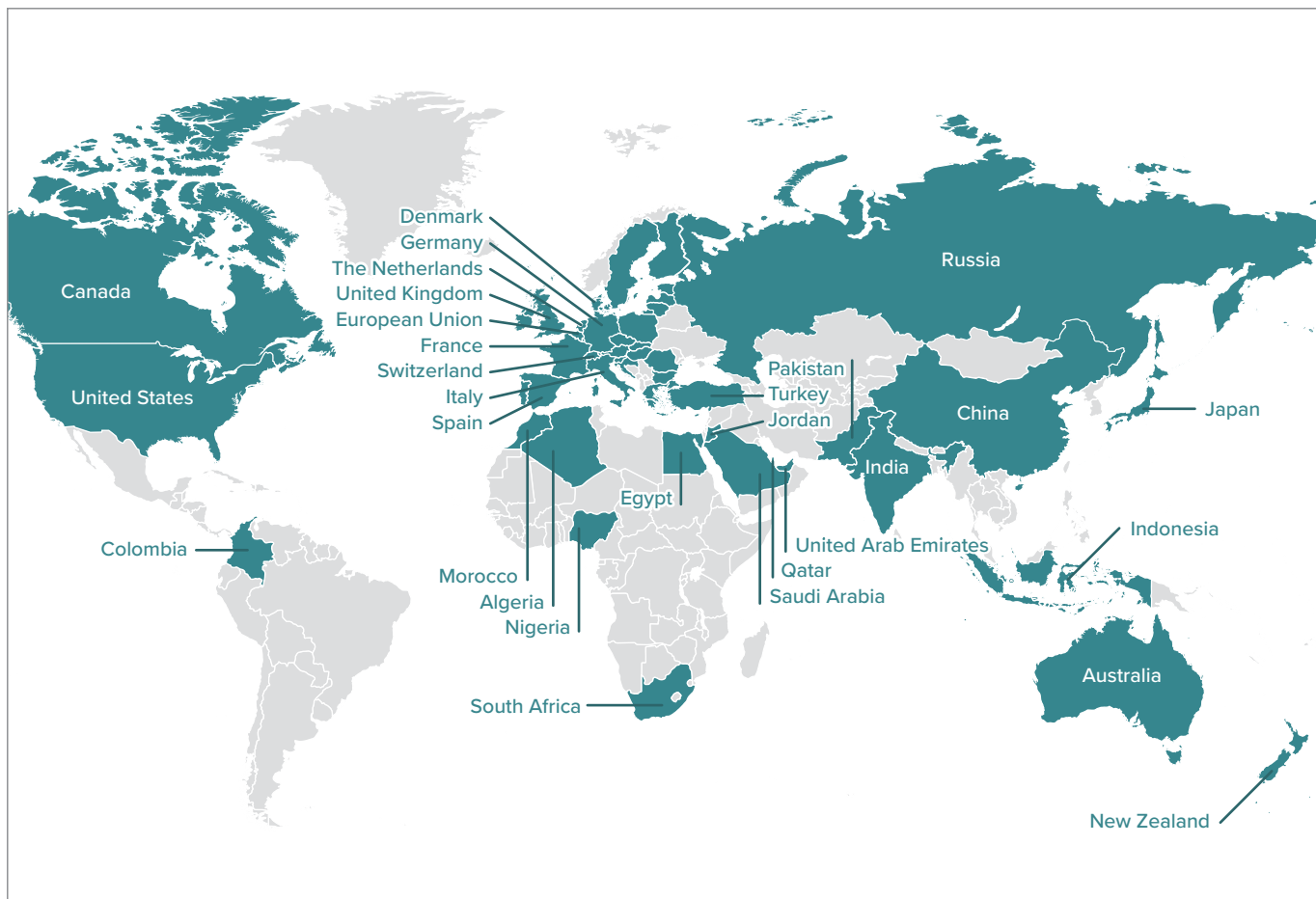
MAP 1. GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM FORUM MEMBERS

Adapted from artwork by Vector Shop/Shutterstock

eighty-two-member Defeat-ISIS Coalition, with its four working groups, various implementation platforms, and a growing interest in expanding its geographic focus beyond Syria and Iraq. In 2019, seemingly inspired by both the GCTF and the D-ISIS Coalition, the United States spearheaded the launch of an eighty-country coalition, with a series of working groups, to address Hezbollah and other Iranian-sponsored terrorist activities.[11] Other recent additions include organizations or platforms with a particular regional (such as the IGAD Centre of Excellence for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, and the Permanent G5 Sahel Secretariat) or thematic (Etidal and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism) focus, and others targeting specific stakeholders such as cities (Strong Cities Network), women (the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership), researchers (RESOLVE Network), or youth (YouthCAN).

The GCTF's thirty members—twenty-nine countries plus the European Union (see map 1)—are now in the process of reflecting on their achievements and how best to position the body for the future, taking into account the evolution of the threat of terrorism and the more elaborate multilateral architecture that now exists to counter it. The analysis and recommendations in this report are intended to help inform this process. First, though, a closer look at the forum's origins, achievements, and challenges is in order.

Origins

The idea for the GCTF came at time when the multilateral counterterrorism architecture was quite limited. It emerged from the US Department of State to address gaps in the international landscape revealed in the first decade after 9/11 and as part of a wider effort to strengthen international cooperation on counterterrorism.[12]

First, much of the focus was on the military and intelligence sides of the response, and little attention was paid to civilian-led counterterrorism institutions and actors. Second, although some productive work was taking place at the UN and other multilateral bodies, those organizations lacked many of the counterterrorism capabilities they have today. The UN was seen as too big, political, and bureaucratic, and the G-8 as too exclusive; meanwhile, regional organizations, frequently distracted by other priorities, were limited in geographic scope and often in resources.

Because terrorist threats were increasingly transcending borders and regions, no venue existed for national counterterrorism coordinators, prosecutors, judges, border control officers, and prison officials to meet with their counterparts from various regions to share experiences, challenges, and needs; to mobilize resources and expertise; and to build trust.[13] The GCTF— with its carefully selected thirty members comprising the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, frontline countries with experience dealing with terrorism within their borders and regions, and traditional US allies with resources and relevant expertise—was launched to address this gap.[14]

As reflected in its founding political declaration, the objectives were to create an "action-oriented, informal, civilian-led forum" to complement and reinforce the work of the UN and regional bodies. This would allow senior counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners from various regions to share experience, good practices, and assessments; identify and develop innovative solutions for addressing critical, common counterterrorism gaps and challenges; mobilize resources and expertise to implement these solutions; coordinate and facilitate capacity-building activities; and incubate ideas and initiatives that the UN could further develop and implement.[15]

The GCTF organized itself in contrast to what was perceived as the overly rigid, opaque, and formal approach of more traditional multilateral bodies. Its "terms of reference"—which were revised in 2017 to facilitate more input from nonmembers—allowed it "to operate in a flexible and inclusive manner," "evolve with the terrorist threat," and be driven by the members themselves (as opposed to international civil servants), with a light support structure called the Administrative Unit. The unit's mandate emphasized managing GCTF events and facilitating the sharing of information on relevant practices and programs.[16]

Achievements

Given this light infrastructure and the need to rely entirely on voluntary financial or other contributions from its members and partners, the GCTF's level of output over nine years, along with its ability to realize many of its initial objectives, is striking.

Rather than just "talk shop"—a common critique of many multilateral counterterrorism gatherings—the GCTF's workshops and meetings (some 250 in total) have generated "a library's worth

of practical guidance to help counterterrorism officials and practitioners do their jobs more effectively."[17] This now includes more than thirty framework documents and more than four hundred good practices that address a range of trends, threats, and policy challenges in the civilian-focused counterterrorism and P/CVE domains.

> Before the GCTF's existence, officials and practitioners had few (and certainly no sustained) opportunities to convene, share experiences and challenges, and build trusted relationships to leverage bilaterally.

Whether providing criminal justice officials tools to handle terrorism cases while adhering to international human rights standards, identifying innovative ways for border security officials to prevent terrorists from crossing long and often porous borders, offering good practices for police to engage effectively with local communities to reduce rather than aggravate the threat, or developing novel practical guidance on topics ranging from the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist prisoners to the prevention of homegrown terrorism, the GCTF has prioritized developing tools that have broad applicability where UN-level guidance may be lacking or limited, whether for political or other reasons.
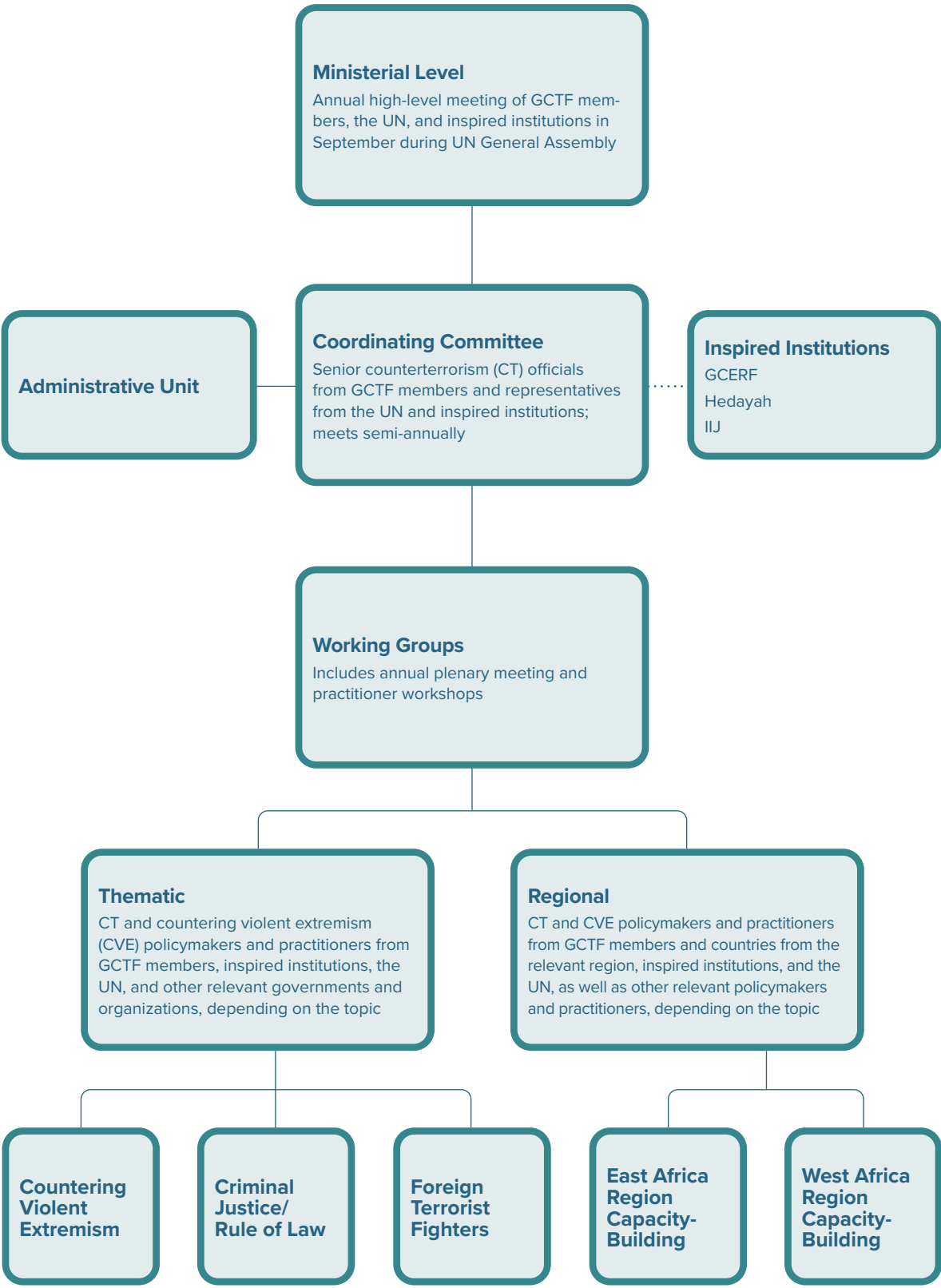
As intended, the forum has served as an "incubator of ideas" that can be moved forward by the UN, in particular the Security Council. Examples include its work in 2014 to address the flow of foreign terrorist fighters. This set the stage for Security Council action that was heavily influenced by the forum's good practice document.[18] Other examples where GCTF products have influenced UN action are the forum's work on the use of drones, the protection of soft targets, and kidnapping for ransom.[19] More broadly, the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate's technical guide on the implementation of relevant Security Council counterterrorism resolutions is replete with references to GCTF good practices documents.[20]

Through meetings of its strategic-level Coordinating Committee and thematic and regional working groups, the GCTF has enabled interactions among foreign ministry and interior ministry counterterrorism coordinators, policymakers, and experts, as well as prosecutors, police, border officials, corrections officers, and other practitioners. Before its existence, officials and practitioners had few (and certainly no sustained) opportunities to convene, share experiences and challenges, and build trusted relationships to leverage bilaterally.

GCTF members recognized from the outset the need to prevent the forum from falling victim to a familiar criticism of multilateral bodies—that they produce a lot of paper, from resolutions to reports to recommendations, "which collect dust and have little practical relevance to the real world."[21] With this in mind, members developed the concepts and mobilized political and financial support for three independent, international bodies—often referred to as the "inspired" institutions—largely dedicated to supporting local implementation of the forum's core priorities. The idea was that GCTF members would help fund and, as a result of their seats on the governing boards, provide strategic direction to these entities, with a view to ensuring their work plans aligned with GCTF priorities, including the implementation of framework documents.

Two of the inspired institutions are focused on training and capacity building. Hedayah, an international "center of excellence" on countering violent extremism, is hosted and primarily subsidized by the United Arab Emirates. The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) in Malta trains criminal justice officials, particularly from the Middle East and North Africa, Sahel, and Horn of Africa regions, on rule of law–based counterterrorism practices.

FIGURE 1. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM FORUM (GCTF)

Ministerial Level
Annual high-level meeting of GCTF members, the UN, and inspired institutions in September during UN General Assembly

Administrative Unit

Coordinating Committee
Senior counterterrorism (CT) officials from GCTF members and representatives from the UN and inspired institutions; meets semi-annually

Inspired Institutions
GCERF
Hedayah
IIJ

Working Groups
Includes annual plenary meeting and practitioner workshops

Thematic
CT and countering violent extremism (CVE) policymakers and practitioners from GCTF members, inspired institutions, the UN, and other relevant governments and organizations, depending on the topic

Regional
CT and CVE policymakers and practitioners from GCTF members and countries from the relevant region, inspired institutions, and the UN, as well as other relevant policymakers and practitioners, depending on the topic

Countering Violent Extremism

Criminal Justice/ Rule of Law

Foreign Terrorist Fighters

East Africa Region Capacity-Building

West Africa Region Capacity-Building

Hedayah has trained or worked with approximately three thousand practitioners, professionals, and experts from more than a hundred countries. Seventy-nine activities were implemented between August 2018 and September 2019 alone that provided direct support to twenty countries on topics such as families and PVE, developing PVE national action plans, and community policing.[22]

Since its 2014 launch, the IIJ has provided capacity-building training for more than five thousand criminal justice practitioners, including prosecutors, police officers, corrections officials, and judges from 120 countries. Training is typically geared to translate GCTF framework documents into local action.[23]

The third institution is the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) in Geneva, the first multilateral entity dedicated to financing and supporting grassroots efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. With this initiative, the GCTF was again a step ahead of more formal multilateral actors. The UN's P/CVE efforts, for example, intensified some eighteen months after GCERF's September 2014 launch, when the Secretary-General published his PVE Plan of Action (which called for a "whole of society" approach to PVE that GCERF was already championing) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) later launched its $100 million global PVE program. Since its inception, GCERF has mobilized some $100 million from seventeen donors. Through its projects in seven countries (Bangladesh, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Kosovo, the Philippines, and Tunisia), it has reached more than 1.3 million direct beneficiaries while building the capacity and facilitating the networking of grassroots PVE actors.[24]

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

The GCTF has yet to be the subject of a rigorous, independent evaluation, although the T. M. C. Asser Institute in The Hague is conducting an impact assessment study as part of the GCTF cochair-led strategic review to prepare the forum for its second decade of work. Nevertheless, interviews with those who have participated in forum activities identified several ingredients that contributed to its success in achieving so many of its original objectives.

First is the forum's apolitical and nonbinding nature and technical emphasis. This has allowed it to address issues that could be divisive and ripe for politicization in more traditional multilateral settings. For example, neither the UN Security Council nor the General Assembly have adopted a resolution or endorsed a report or set of recommendations with a specific focus on P/CVE because some UN member states, including a few GCTF countries, oppose doing so.[25] Even while these GCTF members often succeed in limiting the UN's involvement in P/CVE, the forum has been able to maintain a practitioner-driven CVE working group that has produced more than a dozen good practice documents and is developing the first guidance on how to strengthen cooperation between national and local actors around P/CVE.[26]

Related to this has been the forum's ability to identify, respond to, and provide timely guidance—all relatively quickly—on new or emerging challenges. This guidance has then helped lay a foundation for the UN to take action. As one GCTF member pointed out in an interview for this report, "The GCTF good practices, which have been vetted by a core group of UN member states that includes the P-5, offer UN experts a starting point or common baseline for the elaboration of UN recommendations or principles on the same topic."

Another key ingredient, according to many interviewed for this report, is the composition of the forum's membership. It is limited enough to allow it to make consensus-based decisions efficiently, but its geographic diversity and the inclusion of all five permanent members of the Security Council give it legitimacy as a global actor. The GCTF has further enhanced this credibility with the participation of scores of nonmember countries, organizations, and experts, including from private industry, in its activities over the years. Finding ways to deepen and broaden this involvement, particularly in regions that have few or no GCTF members, will be critical to its continued success.

A further ingredient has been its ability to develop not only good practices guidance, but also training toolkits and other material, and to host or facilitate implementation workshops to help policymakers and practitioners operationalize the guidance in their local context. Examples of this include the forum's work on preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism online and addressing the life cycle of radicalization to violent extremism.[27] The latter involves the development of good practices documents, recommendations, and practitioner guides covering community engagement to build resilience to extremist violence through rehabilitating former terrorist offenders. This was the first effort by any multilateral platform to promote a full-spectrum approach to P/CVE. The related guidance, toolkits, and example documents were made available on a smartphone app and included topics such as community policing and CVE, education-based approaches to CVE, and the role of family members and women in preventing radicalization.[28]

A final ingredient has been the strong relationship that has developed between the forum and UN bodies, one that has both deepened and broadened since the reform and partial consolidation of the UN's counterterrorism architecture in 2017.[29] The GCTF's founding documents prioritize complementing, promoting, and enhancing the UN's counterterrorism efforts, in particular supporting states' implementation of the UN counterterrorism framework, starting with the 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Examples of the "close and mutually reinforcing relationship with the UN system" include how many of the forum's good practices documents either seek to operationalize discrete aspects of the UN counterterrorism or P/CVE framework or, as mentioned, have contributed to the expansion of this framework. Other examples include joint UN-GCTF initiatives and UN-led efforts to implement GCTF initiatives.[30]

Challenges and Limitations

Despite these achievements, the GCTF faces a number of challenges, all of which have emerged over the past nine years. Whether it can build on its successes in 2020 and beyond will depend largely on whether and how it is able to overcome them.

IMPLEMENTATION

Although the GCTF has been proficient in generating global good practices, it has been criticized for being less effective in promoting and otherwise supporting implementation at the national and local levels, as well as tracking and sharing examples of implementation efforts to demonstrate its impact. This is a familiar criticism of multilateral bodies that produce frameworks, adopt resolutions, or issue recommendations.[31] Yet for the GCTF, given its practical, action-oriented emphasis—one of its founding objectives being to support implementation of the UN's Global Counter-Terrorism

Strategy—and the ever more diffuse nature of the threat, addressing this criticism is particularly important.

The challenge for the forum—a platform dominated by national governments—is greater because it increasingly gears its good practices documents for local actors and not just national-level officials, its more traditional interlocutors. For example, GCTF members have acknowledged the critical role local government officials and civil society organizations (CSOs) play in the implementation of good practices on topics such as addressing homegrown terrorism or returning foreign terrorist fighters. However, the ability of these local stakeholders to contribute to the guidance is limited to the dozen or so typically invited to each workshop organized to develop it, where they are significantly outnumbered by and typically take a back seat to national government officials. This challenge surfaced during the forum's ongoing national-local cooperation initiative, which was explicitly focused on overcoming the barriers to P/CVE collaboration between national and local actors.

Reasons for the forum's difficulties in translating its global-level guidance into local action vary. First, although it can develop training materials and organize regional workshops to raise awareness of the generalized good practices in different geographies, it does not and was never intended to deliver training, mentoring, or other capacity-building support. As one member delegate recently noted, when it comes to capacity building and implementation, "the work of the GCTF only touches the [tip of the] iceberg."[32] It needs to rely on partners with the requisite resources, expertise, and mandate. Identifying these partners and building trusted partnerships is essential.

The GCTF recognized this limitation early on and incubated the inspired institutions to address it. Of the three, the IIJ deserves particular credit for consistently organizing its work around specific criminal justice–related good practices documents, focusing its efforts on cascading the relevant doctrine down to the national and sometimes local level, and then documenting where a particular government or practitioner has taken action to implement the good practices in a manner tailored to the local context.[33] Yet too often these stories are not shared, even among all GCTF members. Neither of the other inspired institutions—Hedayah and GCERF—appear to prioritize alignment of their work with specific good practices. Thus, they are generally not focused on helping contextualize and otherwise raise awareness of particular GCTF good practices or on sharing concrete examples of how they have helped translate the global doctrine into local action—even though the work of these organizations relates to the implementation of GCTF guidance at the national and local levels.

Beyond the inspired institutions, a few international nongovernmental organizations and the UN and other multilateral entities have, with short-term funding support from one or more GCTF members, implemented awareness-raising or training activities at a regional or national level around GCTF good practices. For example, the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate led a series of workshops on the protection of critical infrastructure—addressed in Resolution 2341—that specifically incorporated awareness raising on the forum's good practices on soft targets that informed the resolution.[34] In addition, the Global Center on Cooperative Security, in cooperation with the now defunct GCTF Detention and Reintegration Working Group, developed a Countering Violent Extremism in Prisons program to support tailored implementation of prison-related good practices in Indonesia, Kenya, and Morocco.[35]

Mourners gather along Las Ramblas, in central Barcelona, where an August 2017 vehicular attack killed thirteen pedestrians and injured 130 others. (Photo by Samuel Aranda/New York Times)

The good practices are cascading down in a few other examples as well. Yet information about these efforts—including their effectiveness and how they might align, complement, or reinforce other capacity-building work in this area—is not systematically shared within the GCTF, let alone the wider community of practice.

For example, the GCTF website does not appear to offer any information on these implementation activities beyond, perhaps, a cursory description of the project. In addition, opportunities seem to be few, if any, for those organizations involved in supporting GCTF implementation to engage in a frank discussion with each other and GCTF members on challenges and recommended ways to translate the forum's global good practices into local action. The NGOs involved are typically invited to the relevant meeting to present on their work, but unlike the inspired institutions are not seen as core partners; they are instead viewed as implementers, thus limiting their access to the forum as a whole. This prompted a representative of one such NGO to ask, "How does the information and experience we have gathered about implementation feed back into the GCTF if we don't have a seat at the table?"

Furthermore, the vast majority of these organizations are not from the beneficiary region or country, and therefore may lack the necessary understanding of the local context or credibility within the targeted region or countries. All of this is compounded by the intentionally light structure that supports the GCTF—the Admin Unit—which has thus far not been provided with the resources nor the mandate to prioritize the implementation of GCTF products and the different lines of work that would involve.

GOOD PRACTICES

As mentioned, many identify the GCTF's ability to convene experts to develop practitioner-friendly good practices on cutting-edge topics in a timely manner as one of its comparative advantages. Yet some have noted how the good practices themselves, in terms of the content and process for developing them, may be among the barriers to implementation, particularly at the local level.

Although intended to capture a variety of perspectives and to apply to a diversity of contexts, the process of developing good practices appears to be driven by a select few GCTF members, often with little input from developing countries. The typical twelve- to eighteen-month process

involves two to three regional workshops that include GCTF members, representatives from the UN and nonmember governments from the region, as well as CSOs, think tanks, researchers, and, where particularly relevant, the private sector.[36] These workshops feed into a nonbinding document generally drafted by a think tank or international NGO, then circulated by the Admin Unit to forum members for comments and clearance under a silence procedure, and then adopted by consensus by the GCTF.

Although a select number of nonmember governments, organizations, and experts are generally invited to the workshops, the Admin Unit typically only sends out such invitations six weeks before the event. This can leave nonmember invitees too little time to secure the necessary approvals and funding to attend. Furthermore, only limited funding is typically made available to support the participation of experts from the Global South.[37] The GCTF also has a policy to not fund the travel of experts from member governments, which can inhibit the ability of some members from the Global South to participate. This can lead to a glut of Western (and national) perspectives feeding into the development process but too little input from the primary intended beneficiaries. Moreover, in the development phase, the process does not place a premium on involving those organizations, whether regional bodies or networks, that stand to play an important role in promoting implementation.

The Admin Unit, however, has several options to help enable a more inclusive and transparent process that includes more local voices. One would be to crowdsource or open the draft good practices for comments online, similar to what the US Agency for International Development did for its new but not yet public CVE policy or the World Bank did for its Fragility, Conflict, and Violence strategy. Using a cost-effective and efficient software platform would minimize the burden on the Admin Unit, thus offering opportunities for more than what is typically a small group of non-GCTF members to provide input into the product. Another would be to create a fund to allow more practitioners and other experts from Official Development Assistance–eligible countries to become involved in the elaboration process. The fund could receive contributions from GCTF members interested in ensuring more opportunities for practitioners from countries in the Global South to contribute.

The top-down approach to the development of GCTF good practices—developing them at a global level and limiting local and nongovernmental input, and then seeking to adapt and implement them in a particular local context—has at times created obstacles to gaining the necessary local ownership for the products. This has complicated efforts to advance GCTF implementation on the ground.

Beyond the process concerns, some have commented on variances in the documents themselves, in terms of length, style, and substance. Certain documents elaborate a series of short and concise good practices that offer more general guidance: for example, education and CVE include twenty-four good practices totaling six pages. Others are more detailed and longer, such as the role of the judiciary in handling terrorism cases, which includes nine good practices on fourteen pages. Some are presented in a more practitioner-oriented, user-friendly format, such as prison rehabilitation and reintegration. Others are seemingly more geared for policymakers, experts, and researchers, such as the use of rule of law–based administrative measures in a counterterrorism context. Some are drafted by actual practitioners, others by academics, think tanks, or NGOs.

Because the GCTF has yet to assess or otherwise collect data on the impact of its various framework documents, determining which approach lends itself best to local implementation and under what circumstances is difficult. Nevertheless, in addition to trying to collect this data to better identify which approaches have resulted in the most practitioner-friendly products, the forum could—as recommended in a recent independent assessment of the work of a thematic working group—adopt transparent quality-control measures for the good practices focusing on the development, review, production, translation, and dissemination of the documents, which in turn could "ensure greater coherence, transparency, legitimacy in development and thus more support for implementation."[38]

One topic these quality control measures could usefully address relates to human rights. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism recently expressed concern regarding the depth of the GCTF's commitment to human rights, pointing in particular to the good practices documents. Although promoting human rights–compliant, rule of law–based approaches to counterterrorism is one of the forum's stated objectives, the Special Rapporteur noted the good practices documents typically do not provide practitioners with enough guidance on how to ensure respect for human rights during implementation. She also observed that the forum lacks a "structural commitment to human rights protections" and that "occasional and general references to human rights in GCTF documents do not assuage these profound concerns."[39]

It would be difficult to address all of these concerns and maintain the forum's informal, action-oriented, flexible approach that relies entirely on voluntary contributions of both human and financial resources. Taking some steps, however, would satisfy some of them, which in turn would help enhance the legitimacy of GCTF products:

- Adding a human rights officer to the Admin Unit, including via a rotating secondment from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights;
- Systematically involving human rights officers—preferably with practical experience that police and other frontline actors can relate to—from the multilateral bodies most relevant to the particular set of good practices, and representatives from relevant human rights organizations in developing (or at least reviewing) the document; and
- Ensuring that those organizations supporting the implementation of the good practices in specific regional or local contexts are equipped with the necessary human rights expertise.[40]

TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

Another, related challenge is the often-limited awareness of the GCTF's existence—including its achievements and comparative advantages—among regional, national, and local stakeholders whose cooperation and partnership are essential to helping translate good practices into action on the ground.

Despite its limited membership, the forum was intended to face outward in its philosophy, its solutions and tools, and its mobilization of resources and expertise for the benefit of

counterterrorism policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders, whether at the national or local level or within or outside government. Yet an unnecessarily opaque approach to its work and the lack of a dynamic communications strategy have circumscribed the forum's reach and the quantity and quality of its partners—and therefore its impact.

Examples of this opacity include limiting informative summaries of workshops or other activities to members and the few nonmembers who might have participated in the relevant activity; limited external engagement on specific activities, where such outreach would help raise awareness in different regions and countries of the GCTF's relevance; a hard-to-navigate website that contains only basic information and official documents, has limited information about outside activities linked to the implementation of good practices, and does not highlight examples of the forum's on-the-ground impact; and no presence on social media, which impedes efforts to raise the forum's visibility and promote its activities. Addressing these shortcomings, starting with a deeper commitment to transparency and developing a sophisticated communications strategy, should be among the priorities as the GCTF prepares for its second decade. Doing so, however, may also require members to revisit the role of the Admin Unit and certain working methods.

The role of the Admin Unit was circumscribed given the desire for a nimble and member- rather than secretariat-driven outfit; its mandate was primarily limited to administrative, logistical, and branding functions, as well as managing the rudimentary website. Yet, as GCTF members look to the future, they need to consider the founding vision in light of increasingly apparent realities. One of these is the limited bandwidth and diminishing willingness of members to lead initiatives, which has led to a growing reliance on international NGOs and think tanks to implement them. Another is the need for the GCTF to analyze its efforts and assess its impact, particularly implementation of good practices. Last are the growing communications and coordination demands, which necessitate more engagement, partnering, and emphasis on building and sustaining relationships with a growing diversity of stakeholders worldwide.

The Forum's working methods also need to be adjusted to best position it for its second decade of work. It was originally intended to be more responsive and transparent and less formal and bureaucratic than traditional multilateral bodies like the UN, but over time, as the pace of work intensified, it put in place a series of rules designed—at least in part—to ensure that each activity, regardless of the location and topic, had a similar look and feel. These rules, which have led to seemingly inflexible timelines for virtually every aspect of the forum's work, have often stood in the way of it serving as an informal, inclusive, action-oriented platform that would attract "the most capable and experienced . . . [local] practitioners and experts to the table."[41] According to both members and NGOs involved in organizing activities, although the forum has at times been able to operate more efficiently and quickly than more formal multilateral bodies, these requirements have in some cases led to a process that can be more time consuming, bureaucratic, and cumbersome than even what the UN or regional organizations offer.[42]

At a minimum, and particularly in light of current challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the GCTF should consider changing its working methods to allow for virtual consultations and meetings, which would also enable it to streamline its operations and reduce the number of in-person workshops and other meetings. In doing so it can create more opportunities for local stakeholders to contribute to good practice development.

PARTNERSHIPS AND SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

From the outset, much of the forum's partnership-building focus has been directed toward the UN, motivated by three desires. First was to assuage concerns that the GCTF might try to sideline or undercut the central role many countries believed the UN should play in the multilateral counterterrorism architecture. Second was to underscore how the forum was launched to support the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and to complement and reinforce the efforts of the various UN counterterrorism (and now P/CVE) actors. Third was to receive the UN's imprimatur on its work products to enhance the forum's legitimacy, particularly among nonmembers. These investments in building a relationship with the UN have yielded tangible results, among them joint initiatives, regular coordination meetings, and a 2018 joint ministerial statement.[43]

Yet similar investments have not been made in building partnerships with regional or locally rooted organizations or networks, which are critical to promoting and tailoring the implementation of GCTF good practices among its constituents. As a result, too few such organizations and networks are invested in its success or incentivized to promote its efforts on the ground.

As the forum enters its next phase of work, it should focus more attention on engaging and building partnerships with regional and local organizations. This could include identifying and nurturing a leading partner in each region that has the necessary political will and capacity to act as a partner, and developing these partnerships to mirror the evolution of its UN relationship. Activities might include joint initiatives and events as well as regional organizations' endorsements of GCTF products.

For example, in what are now the two priority regions—East and West Africa—the IGAD Centre for Excellence on P/CVE and ECOWAS, respectively, could be selected as lead partners. These groups could, among other things, host forum activities and ensure the necessary participation of experts from their regions. Among the incentives to do so is the ability to more easily tap into the global resources and expertise within the forum, which they could leverage to support building counterterrorism and P/CVE capacities in their regions.

Such partnerships would likely lead to more local ownership of forum products and activities in regions that have few, if any, GCTF members. This could result in increased progress on implementing good practices, which are often perceived as having been developed with limited input from the specific countries and local actors now being encouraged to implement them.

The Architecture in 2020

As a result of developments in the last decade, the multilateral counterterrorism and P/CVE architecture is more elaborate and dynamic than ever. The forum's long-term success, and simple survival, depend on its being able to identify and focus on its comparative advantages and to live up to its founders' ambition of a flexible platform that can evolve with the terrorist threat and counterterrorism and P/CVE requirements.

Unlike in 2010, opportunities are now ample for policymakers and practitioners to discuss and share experiences and expertise, and networks connecting women, youth, researchers,

Former Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Ali Alhakim spoke during a meeting of the Defeat-ISIS Coalition in Washington, DC, on February 6, 2019. (Photo by Alex Brandon/AP)

and other civil society actors are numerous. Although further improvements are needed, the multilateral architecture is no longer geared exclusively to the needs of diplomats and other national government officials.

Because of these enhancements, the multilateral system is now better equipped than ever to analyze and identify country-specific counterterrorism and P/CVE needs; produce and disseminate a diversity of guides, recommendations, and other capacity-building tools across a range of counterterrorism and P/CVE topics; and design and deliver a variety of training workshops on the application of these tools at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

Yet this expansion appears to have been driven as much by short-term political considerations as it has by a coherent strategy that prioritizes the need to leverage the existing architecture where possible. This has resulted in a plethora of new multilateral actors or initiatives all competing for attention from policymakers and practitioners, and funding support from donors. A clear division of labor remains elusive.

Rather than looking at how existing fora can be leveraged to address new threats, the preference has been to roll out new platforms designed to address a given subset of the threat. Following in the GCTF's footsteps, multiple high-level counterterrorism initiatives with expert working groups are now underway. Competition has therefore intensified both for the attention of foreign and other ministers, and for the limited time of practitioners from many of the same countries the forum tries to attract. As the head of one multilateral counterterrorism body explained by email,

> The pace of international counterterrorism meetings is very full and seems to be increasing, even more so now with [UN Office of Counter-Terrorism] activity. We are seeing countries and organizations becoming increasingly more selective in their participation in events across the GCTF, UN, and broader civil society organizations environment, particularly when these programmes are overlapping; capacity to cover multiple events in similar time windows is diminishing.

This seemingly uncontrolled growth has led not only to an ever-more cluttered multilateral counterterrorism and P/CVE calendar but also to an ever-increasing number of new multilateral activities and programs angling for donors' limited resources.

As a result, the three inspired institutions, which were launched partly to attract and pool donor funding around priority issues, find themselves competing with new programs focused on the same topics. Hedayah, which works with countries in the Horn of Africa, now goes head-to-head for funding, participation in workshops, and political support with the newer IGAD Centre for Excellence on P/CVE in East Africa. Similarly, when GCERF was launched in 2014, it was the only multilateral entity that could deliver small grants to local civil society groups to prevent violent extremism. It is now up against several P/CVE small-granting mechanisms funded by the same donors or different country-focused UN PVE programs. One such example is the €5 million, EU-funded PVE project in the Sahel, which provided small grants to more than sixty CSOs in the region. Several of these were in Mali, a country where GCERF funds are also supporting local CSOs.[44]

Given the increase in the number of multilateral counterterrorism and P/CVE actors, coordination among them and their donors has become of the utmost importance to minimize duplication and redundancies, maximize synergies, and ensure that gaps are filled and limitations of the architecture are addressed.

What entity is best placed to serve this coordination function? Although the UNOCT has set its sights on improving coordination among the forty-two UN Global Counter-Terrorism Compact entities, its ability to coordinate among the dozens of actors outside the UN system—let alone do so effectively—remains unclear. This gap is one that the GCTF might be in a position to help address, whether on a thematic or a regional level. Addressing this and other gaps will require the GCTF to undertake several structural and organizational actions.

Prioritizing vertical cooperation and collaboration. The architecture is replete with bodies promoting horizontal cooperation. Each one typically focuses on a discrete stakeholder group, such as national government officials, local authorities, practitioners, civil society, or researchers. Few if any, however, prioritize promoting collaboration and cooperation across levels and types of actors in a country context and beyond. The lack of such vertical collaboration and cooperation is often a barrier to implementing global counterterrorism or P/CVE frameworks locally. An increased focus on vertical cooperation would help ensure the perspectives of CSOs and local, frontline practitioners are more systematically integrated into regional and global counterterrorism and P/CVE conversations. Although CSOs are increasingly invited to participate in multilateral counterterrorism and P/CVE conferences, opportunities for structured and sustained engagement between multilateral bodies and CSOs on the P/CVE agenda specifically are infrequent. Given the expected adoption of its good practices on national-local cooperation in P/CVE in September 2020, the forum is well positioned to play a leading role in promoting vertical cooperation at a global, regional, national, and local level across a range of P/CVE issues.

Engaging frontline, non–law enforcement practitioners. Although the multilateral architecture increasingly caters to the needs of practitioners—whether in terms of facilitating the sharing of experience or expertise, or developing and delivering training and other capacity-building programs—a disproportionate amount of attention remains on law enforcement and criminal justice professionals. Enhanced focus is needed on professionals who are more recent arrivals to counterterrorism and P/CVE conversations, such as social workers, mental health professionals, educators, peacebuilders, and other development actors. This is another area in which the forum, particularly if its working methods are more closely aligned with its founding vision, may be uniquely placed

among existing multilateral bodies to plug this gap. In fact, some of its recent efforts, including activities focused on families of returning foreign terrorist fighters, which have included non–law enforcement practitioners from different disciplines, suggest that it might be moving in this direction.[45]

Discussing progress and challenges around implementation of the P/CVE agenda. Despite increased attention on P/CVE in recent years, no platform is in place on which to exchange views on how to best address the more sensitive aspects of P/CVE, which can touch on governance-related, structural, and other drivers of violent extremism.[46] More broadly, opportunities, let alone recurring ones, are limited for government and nongovernmental actors to discuss progress in and challenges to implementing the global P/CVE agenda, drawing in both development and peacebuilding actors and security and other more traditional counterterrorism stakeholders. Given its technical, nonbinding nature, its well-functioning CVE working group, and the numerous good practices documents it has developed, the forum could potentially fill this lacuna as well.

Growing and sharing the evidence base for and monitoring and evaluating P/CVE efforts. The past few years have seen increased attention on the need to understand what has and has not worked to build resilience against and otherwise prevent and counter violent extremism. This has included a focus on better understanding the context-specific drivers of violent extremism and improving the design and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of P/CVE programs to allocate existing resources more effectively and help bolster the argument for more P/CVE investments. Among other things, this attention has led to more research, the production of various M&E toolkits, and an increase in publicly available, independent evaluations of P/CVE programs.

Although some multilateral actors, including Hedayah and UNDP, have contributed to these efforts, gaps in the multilateral architecture persist. For example, effort is needed to gather, analyze, and share existing data consistently with policymakers and practitioners from a range of countries and, where necessary, generate new data; to provide guidance to interested policymakers and practitioners on the design of effective P/CVE interventions; to enable the translation and dissemination of more P/CVE research and programming tools into the relevant local languages; and to offer independent M&E services to donors and program implementers.[47]

Much as it did with its inspired institutions, the GCTF could play a leading role in mobilizing resources and political support from its members and other key stakeholders to address this gap, whether through an existing multilateral body or research center or a new one.

Looking Forward

As they explore ways to build on early achievements, GCTF members could take a variety of steps to best position the forum for continued success in a multilateral environment that has changed considerably in the last nine years. Preparations for the second decade of work should target three interconnected objectives.

Narrowing the scope of activities to focus more on the forum's comparative advantages vis à vis other multilateral actors. The perspective should be both regional and thematic, looking at which gaps in the multilateral architecture the GCTF can usefully fill. It also involves shifting the balance more toward implementing or updating existing good practices documents—to

help ensure they keep up with practice—rather than prioritizing the development of new documents. An increased focus on implementation includes gathering and sharing data on efforts to date and mobilizing and promoting new implementation efforts going forward.

Maximizing the impact of work at the local level and among local actors. This includes building new and strengthening existing partnerships with regional and local stakeholders. These partnerships are critical to translating good practices into local action. To this end, consideration should be given to shifting to a bottom-up approach to develop good practices, with the process starting at a regional level and designed around the needs and priorities of regional and local stakeholders. In addition, the Admin Unit should be mandated and resourced to build and sustain these relationships and develop a comprehensive communications strategy (to include a social media component) that allows the forum to better articulate its objectives and priorities and raise awareness of its activities and achievements with a broader audience. As is true of other objectives, this may require adjusting the mandate for or increasing the resources of the Admin Unit.

Prioritizing complementarity, cooperation, collaboration, and engagement. This focus recognizes not only the increasingly crowded multilateral playing field, but also the forum's limited resources and bandwidth as well as the need to rely on incentivized partners (national and local, in and outside of government) to maximize its impact. A key element includes deepening ties with the inspired institutions to better leverage their networks and experience and align their work with GCTF priorities, thus increasing the network of partners invested in the forum's success. This focus will also likely require streamlining and updating working methods to allow for more transparency and efficiency, consistent with the forum's founding philosophy. In this context, allowing and relying more on virtual consultations—especially during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, when resources and the ability to travel are likely to be more limited—will be necessary.

When considering how best to achieve these objectives, GCTF members should take into account not only the expansion and strengthening of the multilateral architecture since 2011, but also the evolution of both the threat and how best to address it during that same period. These developments underscore the imperative of ensuring the involvement of, building connections with, and understanding the needs of local actors who are regarded as essential stakeholders today, but who were not given high priority when the forum was launched.

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36. For example, representatives from the private sector actively participated in the GCTF initiatives that led to the development of good practices related to countering unmanned aerial surveillance system threats (drones) and the protection of soft targets.

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