

THE MULTI-AGENCY TASK FORCE OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION



OVERVIEW

Within the framework of its project to enhance international cooperation in criminal matters against Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Middle East and North Africa Region, the Terrorist Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC/TPB) supported the development of a **new specialised cooperation network, called “Multi-Agency Task Force (MATF)”**, composed of security and judicial focal points, who work together for a better counter-terrorism cooperation in the region. The overall mission of the focal points, which are the driving forces of the network, is to **facilitate** as much as possible the cooperation with their counterparts abroad, including in the requests for joint investigation, mutual legal assistance and extradition. They also analyse **operational challenges**, share **good practices** and discuss **ongoing cases**. In this respect, the MATF allows **direct contacts** between the focal points, enabling a **swifter sharing of information**.

The MATF serves as a catalyst in view of building a strong mutual **trust** among the focal points for a more effective cooperation in this area.

For instance, at the end of 2018, **information shared through the Task Force** led to the arrests and seizure of precursor chemicals for an improvised explosive device (IED) which was destined for use in a terrorist attack. In 2019, competent authorities extradited a terrorist suspect associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) **thanks to direct communications through the Task Force** that facilitated the localization of the suspect, his transfer from the detention centre and the extradition process in view of bringing him to justice. Requested and requesting countries, both from the MENA region, coordinated their efforts and actions through the Task Force to clarify the extradition mechanism and ensure compliance of the judicial order with procedural requirements of both states.

THE PROJECT – Context, Content and General Objectives




The UNODC project on strengthening international cooperation in criminal matters against foreign terrorist fighters in the Middle East and North Africa Region is a complementary component of the **UNODC Global Initiative on Strengthening Criminal Justice Responses against Foreign Terrorist Fighters**.

The launch events of the Global Initiative and the various regional workshops that followed allowed a deep analysis of the main challenges and needs faced by States in international cooperation matters. Participants expressed the need to improve the **interinstitutional cooperation** between different agencies: Law enforcement and Justice but **also interstate cooperation** at the regional level, in view of effectively addressing together terrorist cases, including cases involving Foreign Terrorist Fighters. To this end, it was suggested to create a **group of focal points**, composed of personnel charged with investigations, prosecutions and international cooperation against terrorism.

Moreover, it has been outlined that authorities in charge of judicial cooperation need a **better knowledge** of the counter-terrorism national frameworks of other countries.

For example, through the development and dissemination of legal guide per countries, detailing the characteristics of each national legislation and mentioning contact points, in an effort to facilitate judicial assistance and overcome cooperation challenges arising from the differences between national legal frameworks.

Thanks to a generous initial contribution from Canada,  this project responded to the needs expressed by the States of the Region, notably through the **establishment of the MATF** and the **development of tools** tailor-made to the needs of practitioners in the field.

Finally, the project aims to address the requirements of the **international legal framework against terrorism**, in particular the provisions related to enhancing counter-terrorism cooperation, set forth in UN Security Council Resolutions, including the Resolutions 2178 (2014), 2322 (2016), 2379 (2017) and 2396 (2017). This project also contributes to the implementation of other relevant international legal instruments, including the Conventions that apply in the region, such as the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism (1988) or the Convention on Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance in Counter-Terrorism (2008).

COMPOSITION

The founding countries of the MATF are **Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia**.



The MATF is fitted with a **dual composition** as it combines **two complementary institutions in counter-terrorist investigations and prosecutions**, namely law enforcement and the judiciary.



✓ **Judicial Focal Point:** senior criminal justice officer, in charge of leading investigations, prosecutions and cooperation in terrorist cases.



✓ **Law Enforcement Focal Point:** senior law enforcement officer or liaison officer in charge of leading investigations and cooperation in terrorist cases;

A close coordination between agencies is all the more important in emergency situations, for example, in the imminence or in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, to ensure prompt response.



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SPECIALISATION

The MATF is a mechanism specialised in **terrorism related matters**, founded specifically to address the urgent needs expressed by the States concerning cooperation in cases involving **foreign terrorist fighters**. Given the current evolutions and mutations of this polymorph threat, such specialisation is a major added value. Gathered in a same forum, the focal points of the Task Force can regularly take stock of these evolutions, in particular by sharing situation analyses of their respective countries.

The MATF is **not intended to substitute official and formal law enforcement and judicial cooperation frameworks** already in place in the countries involved,

nor to jeopardise the legal and constitutional mechanisms already in place.

Far from being a substitute to conventional international mutual assistance in criminal matters, the MATF facilitates its good execution thanks to the work of its focal points, in support of formal cooperation mechanisms, in order to build a solid case together. Preliminary direct contacts between focal points facilitate the good understanding of the constraints and procedural frameworks of each country, allowing the exchange of valuable analysis and expertise on terrorist cases.

ROLE OF THE FOCAL POINTS

The Focal Points defined together the scope of their missions and functions in the **Rules of Procedure** of the MATF. Among others:

- To facilitate the procedures related to requests of cooperation to Member States of the MATF, in accordance with their national legislation and international obligations, by providing technical advice regarding the drafting, sending, implementation and follow-up of cooperation requests; and provide a support in identifying the competent national authorities to receive and examine the requests.
- To share experiences, expertise, good practices and analytical studies, including on operational challenges related to terrorism issues.

- To exchange, on a voluntary basis, operational information on counter-terrorism, in particular information related to investigations led in the State in question, information that can have an impact on another MATF country. Each State decides, on a cases-by-case basis, which information to share, besides mechanisms and norms adopted to this end.



- To raise awareness among the competent authorities of the criminal justice system on the role and added value of the MATF and use direct and fast contacts to discuss practical and pragmatic solutions to overcome the difficulties.

TOOLS

In addition to in-person meetings, the UNODC set up a dedicated **Online Forum** on its Counter-Terrorism Online Training and Cooperation Platform (<http://ctlp.unodc.org>) with access restricted to the focal points in order to facilitate their exchanges and communication and continue substantive discussions.



A **practical guide** dedicated to the preparation and transmission of effective cooperation requests to Member States of the MATF was also developed.

The guide includes, for each country, practical information on cooperation mechanisms, competent authorities, channels of transmission, requirements for requests to be admissible, specific conditions and the applicable national and international legal instruments. It facilitates access to the applicable law of the requested State and the identification of legal bases.



MATF Practical Guide

For more information on the MATF, contact Carine Girdou, Programme officer of the UNODC/TPB at carine.girdou@un.org.