



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Terrorism Prevention Branch

FACT SHEET OF THE MULTI-AGENCY TASK FORCE (MATF) 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 "MATF", composed of Security and Judicial focal points, who work together for a better counter-terrorism cooperation in the Region.](#)

Within the MATF, the Focal Points work together to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation in the Region, in particular by analysing the [operational challenges](#) posed in the different cases involving Foreign Terrorist Fighters, sharing [good practices](#) in response to these challenges and discuss ongoing cases. Overall, their role is to facilitate as much as possible the cooperation between their services and with their counterparts, including for joint investigation requests, international mutual legal assistance and extradition requests, in particular through [direct informal and regular contacts](#).

The Group also serves as a common catalyst in view of building a strong mutual [trust](#) leading to an effective cooperation in terrorist cases.

THE PROJECT – Context, Content and General Objectives

The [UNODC/TPB project](#) for the enhancement of international cooperation in criminal matters against foreign terrorist fighters in the Middle East and North Africa Region is a complementary component of the [UNODC/TPB's Global Initiative on Strengthening States' 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 [focal points group](#), composed of personnel in charge of investigations, prosecutions and international cooperation in criminal matters against terrorism (see conclusions of the regional workshops held in Beirut (November 2016) and Tangiers (March 2017) on "Strengthening regional cooperation in cases involving Foreign Terrorist Fighters").

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 (in particular, the discrepancies linked to the definition of terrorist offences and the procedural characteristics that can potentially hold back a good judicial cooperation).

Thanks to a generous initial contribution from Canada, this project provided a response to the needs requested by States in the Region, notably by [setting up the MATF](#) and [developing tools](#) adapted to the needs of practitioners in cooperation matters.

Finally, the project aims to address the requirements of [the International Legal Framework against Terrorism](#), in particular the UN Security Council Resolutions relating to Foreign Terrorist Fighters, regarding aspects of cooperation in terrorism cases, including the Resolutions 2178 (2014), 2322 (2016), 2379 (2017) and 2396 (2017). In addition, the project aims to participate in the implementation of other relevant international legal instruments, notably 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 composed of two permanent Focal Points per country, designated by their respective governments:

- ✓ A [Law Enforcement Focal Point](#): a senior law enforcement officer or liaison officer in charge of leading investigations and cooperation in terrorist cases;
- ✓ A [Judicial Focal Point](#): a senior Criminal Justice Officer, in charge of leading investigations, prosecutions and cooperation in terrorist cases.

The MATF is therefore fitted with a [mixed composition](#) as it combines [two complementary institutions in terrorist cases](#), namely the Security institution and the Judicial institution. A close cooperation between these Officials is all the more important in emergency situations, for example, in the imminence of a terrorist attack of following an attack.

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 (FTF). Given the current evolutions and mutations of this polymorph threat, a specialisation is a major added value. Gathered in a same forum, the Focal Points of the Group 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 and formal legal assistance mechanisms, the MATF facilitates their good execution thanks to the work of its Focal Points, ahead of formal

frameworks or in parallel, in order to build a solid case together. Informal cooperation and preliminary direct contacts between focal points facilitate the good understanding of the constraints and action framework of each country, allowing the exchange of valuable analyses 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. For example, the following functions were assigned by the Focal Points, among others:

- To facilitate the procedures related to Mutual Legal Assistance (including letters rogatory), and to other requests of cooperation for terrorist cases between 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 provide advice and help with regards to the development and update of common tools aiming to enhance cooperation.
- 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.
- In the future, 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 allow them to continue the substantive discussions on the subject and related topics.

This project also allowed the development of useful and relevant tools, mainly a [practical guide](#) dedicated to the preparation and transmission of effective cooperation requests between Member States of the MATF. This guide aims to ease the work of practitioners in the region and provide them with the information they need to build an extradition or mutual legal assistance request and thus, to have more chances to get a positive response. The guide includes, among

other practical information, competent authorities in each country, possible channels of transmission, requirements for requests to be admissible, specific conditions and, the different national and international legal instruments applicable. It will allow a full access to the applicable law of the requested State and facilitate the identification of legal bases.

ROLE OF THE UNODC

The role of the UNODC and its network of experts is to advise and support the MATF in the establishment of an appropriate infrastructure for its work, to direct the mechanism during its phase of establishment and to take all measures related to the framework and the management of the project and its organisational aspects, on the basis of its experience in creating similar regional networks of cooperation. The UNODC helps, as far as possible and in accordance with its mandate, to implement the recommendations and operational propositions the Task Force can issue, notably by resorting to experiences of other Platforms and Networks, as well as by developing adequate tools.

CONTACT

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