



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Terrorism Prevention Branch

FACT SHEET



Multi-Agency Task Force (MATF) of the Middle East and North Africa Region

SPECIALISATION

The Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC/TPB) has launched a new project which overall objective is to create [a group composed of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice focal points, working together towards the enhancement of the cooperation against terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\) Region](#).

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.

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 FTF, and sharing [good practices](#) in response to these challenges. 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 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 establishment of the MATF falls within the framework of a [new UNODC project](#), that will be implemented from 2017 to 2019. This project is a complementary component of the [UNODC Global Initiative on the Criminal Justice Responses to FTF \(2015-2020\)](#) which is composed of 5 pillars, the last one being dedicated to [enhance international cooperation in FTF cases](#). The new UNODC project falls within this last pillar, as its major and main objective is to reinforce international cooperation in criminal matters against FTF in MENA.

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 FTF.

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 FTF”).

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 contribution from Canada, this new project aims to provide a response to the needs requested by States in the Region during the abovementioned events, 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 to the more recent United Nations Security Council's Resolution related to FTF and cooperation (such as Resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2322 (2016), and the Resolutions related to the Al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant group (ISIL/Da'esh) Sanctions Regimes). In this context, the establishment of the MATF could constitute a historical step towards the reinforcement of cooperation in the Arab world.

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; and
- ✓ 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 aspects**, namely the Law Enforcement aspect and the Judicial aspect. Such a combination is key to achieve results in terrorist cases, mostly in urgent situations, in the sense that judicial cooperation may not succeed without an effective Law Enforcement cooperation. The Law Enforcement cooperation being an essential prerequisite to any Judicial action, it is important that different institutions (Judges and Police Officers) from different countries work together.

The MATF does not intend to be a substitute for existing conventional international mutual legal assistance mechanisms. Rather than being a substitute, the MATF could ensure a smooth cooperation through its Focal Points network, upstream and in parallel of formal existing frameworks. Informal cooperation and all prior direct contacts of the Focal Points will allow a good understanding of the constraints and action frameworks of each country, allowing a precious sharing of analysis and expertise on terrorist cases.

ROLE OF THE FOCAL POINTS

The Focal Points determine themselves **the scope of their missions and functions** in the framework of the MATF. Throughout the launch meeting, the following functions were suggested:

- Overall, to serve as a “bridge” to foster cooperation between their services and their counterparts abroad, notably through direct informal contacts, the following of requests received and the transmission of any information on the processing of a request (timelines, substantive and formatting requirements of requests, etc.);
- To provide expertise on their respective legal and procedural framework (laws, treaties, regulations with regard to police interventions, etc.);
- To help identify the competent interlocutors in their respective countries for the processing of requests;
- To provide advice or opinions on cooperation requests (operations and joint investigations, simultaneous actions, international judicial assistance and extradition requests, transfers of inmates, etc.)
- To propose and help develop common tools (fact sheets, other tools that could be useful to improve cooperation between MATF members) as well as share with UNODC any new needs in cooperation matters, throughout the setup process of the MATF.
- To share good practices and expertise that can be useful to their counterparts (for example on investigations strategies and methods, on tactics, investigations and judicial cooperation in terrorist cases methods, including those involving FTF);
- To exchange more general analyses, notably on the status and evolutions of terrorist threats in the countries involved and in the region, to take stock of these evolutions and on the recent trends regarding certain groups or terrorist cells (composition, *modi operandi*, etc.);
- To exchange operational information on ongoing terrorist cases, on a voluntary and case by case basis, and use direct contact to discuss pragmatic and applicable solutions that could be used to overcome practical and operational challenges.

STRATEGY AND FORMAT

The first MATF meeting took place in Casablanca, Morocco, from 7 to 9 November 2017.

The format and the content of the next meetings will be determined following the needs expressed by the MATF Focal Points. The schedule of future meetings is currently under development.

In addition to in-person meetings, the UNODC will set-up a dedicated **Online Group** 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.

Another main objective of this project is to develop useful and relevant tools, mainly a **practical guide** dedicated to the preparation and transmission of effective cooperation requests between Member States of the MATF. These practical fact sheets will aim 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 fact sheets will include, among other practical information, competent authorities, channels of transmission, requirements for requests to be admissible, languages of requests, etc. Excerpts of national legal instruments and status of ratifications as well as all relevant international instruments will also be included in the practical guide in the fact sheets. This will facilitate the identification and accessibility of the legal grounds and legal framework of the requested State. The content of the guide will be elaborated on the basis of responses of the Focal Points to a questionnaire distributed to them.

ROLE OF THE UNODC

The role of the UNODC and its network of experts is to provide advice and support the MATF in its creation, in setting appropriate infrastructures, notably by resorting to the experience of other existing Platforms and Networks as well as by supporting the development of adequate tools (notably the abovementioned guide). In addition, the UNODC provides technical support specific to the MATF, leads the Task Force up to the operational level and undertakes all the steps related to the framework and administrative management of the project.

CONTACT

For more information on the MATF, please send an email to Carine Giralidou, Programme officer of the UNODC/TPB at carine.giralidou@un.org