

“The Nexus between International Terrorism and Organized Crime”

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H.E. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee,
H.E. Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Chair of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions
Committee and Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

It is my honor to address you on behalf of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States, on this important occasion. I would like to thank the chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee for inviting the OAS to participate in this relevant meeting. Today's topic of discussion -The nexus between international terrorism and transnational organized crime- has become one of the major challenges facing our region.

The Secretariat of Multidimensional Security, through the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE), has been active in enhancing the coordination among countries in the Americas to strengthen a global response to the serious threats to international peace and security posed by terrorist acts and transnational organized crime. The OAS encompasses 35 countries total, as diverse in geography as in the security-related challenges we face, from localized criminal activity to sophisticated transnational criminal networks that traffic drugs, weapons, people, and illicit goods and materials both throughout the region, and to and from other parts of the world.

While the majority of our Member States have largely avoided the direct impact of groups like ISIL, Al Qaeda or their affiliates, it is widely understood that many of the vulnerabilities and gaps exploited by criminal organizations are equally susceptible to exploitation by terrorists. Existing weaknesses such as undetectable movement of terrorist organization members due to porous borders; links with established drug trafficking organizations that provide large quantities of cash; links with organized criminal organizations activities; weak or inefficient legal frameworks to counter terrorism; and the use of alternative money remittance systems are some of the weaknesses exploited by terrorists’ groups in certain geographical areas of the region.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the security challenges posed by transnational organized criminal activity take greater precedent than the threat of an act of terrorism. But it's also widely understood, especially in the law enforcement and security communities, that a security gap that enables the movement of large quantities of drugs or other illicit items - over land, or by sea, or air - could also be used to move materials intended for a terrorist attack. Furthermore, the routes and methods by which people are trafficked - or money is moved - could also enable the movement across borders of people planning to commit an act of terrorism, or even use the profits of transnational criminal activities as a source of funding to finance an act of terrorism or a terrorist organization. These organizations have diversified their sources of funding through narcotics trafficking and other illicit activities establishing strong alliances with transnational criminal groups operating in the region.

In addition, there is growing evidence that some of the drivers of organized criminal and gang activity throughout the Americas -- including persistent poverty and social and political instability -- share important parallels with the drivers of violent extremism that is conducive to terrorism.

The linkages between organized crime and terrorism in our region are numerous, and they could be summarized as follows:

- The most common money laundering predicate offenses in the region are illicit drug trafficking, illicit trafficking in stolen goods, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, corruption and bribery, and environmental crimes. All of these different forms of criminal activity constitute potential funding sources for terrorist organizations. Certain geographical pockets throughout our Hemisphere are generating increasing concern about the profits from criminal activities being funneled to terrorist groups.
- We are equally concerned with securing the movement of people and goods across borders, which is particularly challenging given the geography of the region. The same is true of the vast waters of the Caribbean, which are extremely difficult to secure.
- Countries in our Hemisphere require improved access controls and container inspection techniques at sea ports, and increased capacities of border and migration personnel to identify travel document fraud, and increased information-sharing and analysis, including the use of API and PNR, and tools like Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database.

Currently CICTE's 12 terrorism prevention programs assist OAS Member States in the design and implementation of government policies and strategies to improve their counter-terrorist capabilities. In this regard, CICTE's programs are focus on supporting OAS Member States to:

- Amend existing legislation and enact new laws and regulatory frameworks to comply with international standards, the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism; the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions;
- Strengthen international and regional cooperation and information sharing cooperation between key agencies, including border control authorities, customs officials and other national law enforcement agencies;
- Expand criminal investigations and prosecutions to include the use of intelligence as admissible evidence and special investigation techniques and put in place appropriate mutual legal assistance and extradition mechanisms.
- Combat the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes. Transnational criminal groups and terrorist groups exploit the same vulnerabilities that have made the Internet a strategic tool for the operations and financing of terrorist groups; including to recruit or train new members; to collect and transfer funds; to organize terrorist acts, or to spread propaganda and incite others to violence.

Our region has made notable progress in addressing many of these issues, but much remains to be done. The fight against terrorism and transnational crime organizations requires increased information and intelligence sharing, the development of global cooperation, and coordinated actions among competent agencies. Counternarcotic and counterterrorism agencies should be alert to the signs of possible linkages among the two groups.

The role of regional organizations should be instrumental in supporting national, sub-regional and regional efforts to adopt counter-terrorism strategies as well as tackling the linkages between terrorism and transnational organized crime.

Last, those of us in regional and international organizations working on these issues have a key part to play supporting States as they try to better understand and manage evolving security challenges. We need to work together to better improve cooperation among countries and coordinate our efforts for the ultimate objective of reducing criminal and terrorist activities.