

Enhancing Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in South Asia

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In the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Bush administration labeled Iraq the "...central front in the war on terror," a view that was met with skepticism by U.S. allies and domestic critics.¹ Since 2003, however, a growing consensus of experts claim that South Asia², not the Middle East, poses the greater threat of international terrorism.³

¹ In a September 7, 2003 address to the nation (*USA Today*, September 7, 2001), President Bush declared, "Two years ago, I told the Congress and the country that the war on terror would be a lengthy war, a different kind of war, fought on many fronts in many places. Iraq is now the central front." Shortly thereafter, Sen. Robert Byrd expressed his doubt on the administration's claim: "Through carefully worded rhetoric, the administration has morphed the image of America's most wanted man from Osama bin Laden to Saddam Hussein," see David Stout, "Bush Tells Returning Troops Iraq is Crucible in Fight on Terror," *New York Times*, September 12, 2003. In a separate article, Sen. Bob Graham argued, "Iraq was not part of the war on terrorism prior to our military invasion...our real enemies continue to be al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and other international terror groups which have their base of operations outside of Iraq," Devlin Barrett, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, September 11, 2003. Despite this criticism, Bush continued to label Iraq the "central front," see Donna Miles, "Bush Calls Iraq Central Front in Terror War, Vows Victory," *Armed Forces Press Service*, October 6, 2005, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=18145> (accessed November 29, 2008); see also "Transcript of President Bush's Speech at the Veteran of Foreign Wars Convention," *New York Times*, August 22, 2007. For a discussion of European responses, see Brian Knowlton, "Bush's Plea Draws Praise, but Few Iraq Contributions," *International Herald Tribune*, September 9, 2003.

² South Asia is here defined as the countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

³ In 2007, Edward Gistaro, the national intelligence officer for transnational threats, and Michael Leiter, principal deputy director of the National Counterterrorism Center, issued a statement to the House Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Armed Services Committee in which they said: "The primary concern is in al-Qaeda

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On one level, this is a result of the improved security conditions in Iraq and the simultaneous devolving situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has prompted a shift in resources and focus. But many officials have emphasized the greater importance of counterterrorism in South Asia from the beginning, pointing to a combination of weak institutions, vast ungoverned territories, rampant corruption, and quasi-complicit governments. These factors, when combined with economic marginalization and extremist ideologies, will continue to provide trans-national terror groups with an attractive operating base for the foreseeable future.

The diverse mix of terror groups operating with impunity in South Asia, combined with fragile political situations, have rightfully raised concern over the safety of nuclear materials and arsenals. In order to effectively meet the challenge of countering these varied threats, a more nuanced approach that promotes greater regional cooperation and aims to build the counterterrorism capacity of regional governments, organizations, and civil society must be pursued. Unfortunately, regional cooperation in South Asia has been severely hampered by the India-Pakistan conflict, trade barriers, and a lack of political will. As a result, there has yet to be a serious effort to devise a coherent regional or sub-regional response.

The Terrorist Threat, Vulnerabilities, and Capacity in South Asia

The 2007 "Country Reports on Terrorism," an annual publication of the U.S. State Department, argues that international terrorism remains a significant threat in South Asia.⁴ Regional viewpoints tend to agree; Shamsul Islam, a research fellow at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), argues that, due to protracted religious, ethno-cultural, and political conflicts, South Asia "...remains politically volatile with the potentialities to threaten peace and stability in the areas both within and beyond it." He lists the ethno-religious problems between India and Pakistan, the insurgency in

in South Asia." They went on to express the concern that "...we [the U.S.] have not paid sufficient attention to the places that [today's] threat is most real." The full statement is http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20070725_testimony.pdf (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁴ US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, "Chapter 2: South and Central Asia Overview." Released April 30, 2008. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2007/103709.htm> (accessed May 2, 2008).

Nepal, the Civil War in Sri Lanka, and the growing violence in Bangladesh as primary causes for concern.⁵

According to the State Department report, al-Qaeda and remnants of the Taliban regime are still able to freely operate in the vast and porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, while some segments of al-Qaeda have reportedly fled to Bangladesh.⁶ Violence between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka, despite a 2002 cease-fire agreement, has left more than 5,000 people dead since 2006.⁷ In Nepal, violent attacks have persisted despite the Maoist rebels being co-opted into the new interim government. Finally, India, the region's most powerful nation, remains one of the "world's most terror-afflicted countries," with 2,300 lives lost to extremist violence in 2007.⁸ A string of deadly attacks in 2008, including the recent violence in Mumbai, indicates a continuation of this trend.⁹

Despite the efforts of regional organizations, most notably the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), counter-terrorism efforts in South Asia have, thus far, been completely devoid of any meaningful cooperation. Lacking a regional framework, states have had to rely almost exclusively on domestic counter-terrorism initiatives, which have suffered from inadequate anti-terror laws, a lack of technical training, and the "selective" or over-militarized prosecution of terror groups for political purposes. Assistance from extra-regional international actors to build the counter-terrorism capacity of governments has the potential to make a difference, but without a regional approach, it too will remain ineffective.

Groups operating in South Asia represent a multitude of ideologies and political goals, and some are loosely affiliated or have overlapping objectives. In addition, most of the terrorist violence transcends national borders, if for no other reason than the relocation of ethnic and religious communities following the India/Pakistan

⁵ Shamsul Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," in *New Life Within SAARC*, ed. Nischal Pandey and Dev Raj Dahal, (Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2005): 135.

⁶ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*; see also Bruce Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Background and US Relations*, Congressional Research Service, (Updated August 2, 2007).

⁷ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Somini Sengupta, "Facing a Wave of Violence, India is Rattled," *New York Times*, July 28, 2008.

Partition of 1947. For these reasons, any attempt to classify such a diverse set of actors is sure to prompt debate. This paper acknowledges the inherent difficulties in placing terror groups into neatly labeled boxes, yet for the purposes of presenting policy prescriptions, it attempts to categorize them based on motivation. When organized in this fashion, there are three distinct groups - those motivated by: 1) the Kashmir conflict; 2) religious extremism; and 3) ethno-nationalism or Marxist principles.

The Kashmir Conflict

Terror groups operating in the disputed territories of Jammu and Kashmir continue to foment unrest between India and Pakistan, and the level of violence in Kashmir is usually a good barometer of the current state of relations between New Delhi and Islamabad. Since the Line of Control was established following the 1971 India-Pakistan War, most of the violence can be attributed to three groups: Hizbul Mujahideen (Hizbul), Lashkar-e-Toiba (Lashkar), and Jaish-e-Mohammad (Jaish). Of the three, Hizbul is the only group that seeks the limited political goal of autonomy for Kashmir; it is also the only group comprised primarily of Kashmiris. The latter two, Lashkar and Jaish, differ from Hizbul in that most of their recruits are drawn from Pakistan, and they share the broader ambition of destroying the Indian state.¹⁰

The Tashkent and Simla agreements – reached after the 1965 and 1971 wars, respectively – stated that the Kashmir issue would need to be solved through bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan.¹¹ Despite this arrangement, Pakistan has repeatedly tried to internationalize the plight of the Kashmiri people, calling for a UN-mandated plebiscite and drawing attention to atrocities committed by Indian security forces.¹² Conversely, India claims that Pakistan has used the militant groups operating in Kashmir to incite violence and wage a proxy war.¹³ Following the 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2002 nuclear standoff between India and Pakistan, however, the overall

¹⁰ D. Suba Chandran, "Jammu and Kashmir: India's Objectives and Strategies," *Swords and Ploughshares* 16:1 (Winter 2007-8): 4-6.

¹¹ Mehraj Hajni, "The Kashmir Conflict: A Kashmiri Perspective," *Swords and Ploughshares* 16:1 (Winter 2007-8): 12.

¹² Chandran, *Jammu and Kashmir*, 5.

¹³ Ashley Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008), 5.

level of cross-border violence in Kashmir has abated. Partly, this has to do with fears over a nuclear escalation,¹⁴ but U.S. pressure on the Musharraf government to end its support for the Kashmiri militants was also a determining factor. With that said, some questioned the authenticity of Musharraf's efforts (prior to his recent resignation) to curb Kashmiri violence. Material support for militant groups may have been temporarily halted by Islamabad following the 2005 resumption of peace talks, but Musharraf remained sympathetic to their cause and continued to provide moral support.¹⁵

The Kashmir conflict highlights a number of the obstacles to enhancing counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia. First and foremost, the issue of cross-border terrorism has become embedded in the larger political battle between New Delhi and Islamabad. While India considers the violence as state-sponsored terrorism, Pakistan sees the militants as Kashmiri "freedom fighters." Secondly, the Kashmir dispute continues to be an impediment to regional cooperation on a host of other issues where there are obvious shared interests, including trade, transportation, and energy. Cooperation in these other areas, while not directly related to counter-terrorism, is important because it could reduce poverty and alleviate the so-called conditions conducive to terrorism. As is too often the case between India and Pakistan, however, meaningful cooperation is impeded because negotiations are contingent upon a resolution to Kashmir.

Religious Extremism

A second set of terror groups fall under the banner of religious extremists. Primarily, these groups consist of radical Islamist militants and include the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and associated groups. The remnants of the Taliban regime have found refuge in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, as well as in Afghanistan proper. Increasingly, they have shown an ability to organize attacks on coalition forces, aided in part

¹⁴ Syed Rifaat Hussain, "Pakistan's Changing Outlook on Kashmir," *Swords and Ploughshares* 16:1 (Winter 2007-8): 9.

¹⁵ Ashley Tellis. *Pakistan and the War on Terror*, 5. Tellis argues that the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has provided support and training to various Kashmiri militant groups. Debate also exists as to how much control the Pakistani government exercises over the ISI. See Eben Kaplan and Jayshree Bajoria, "The ISI and Terrorism: Behind the Accusations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 27, 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11644/> (accessed December 3, 2008).

by the local populations along the Afghan/Pakistan border, some of which share a common Pashtun tribal heritage. Similarly, al-Qaeda members have taken advantage of the vast ungoverned spaces on both sides of the Durand Line¹⁶ to protract and regroup. Cadres of al-Qaeda and numerous like-minded groups have targeted U.S. and NATO forces, as well as the Pakistani government. The continuing presence of coalition troops in Afghanistan, combined with Pakistan's willingness to prosecute the U.S.-led "War on Terror," is likely to result in continued attacks against Afghanistan, the U.S., and Pakistan itself. Whether or not the newly elected president, Asif Zardari, or the post-Musharaff coalition government in Pakistan will chart a new course of action remains to be seen.

Although it has garnered less attention, some analysts, such as the Center for International Policy's Selig Harrison, have warned about a growing threat of religiously inspired terrorism in Bangladesh. He warns of "...a growing Islamic fundamentalist movement linked to al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence agencies," which has attempted to convert Bangladesh into a new "...regional hub for terrorist operations."¹⁷ Some evidence corroborates this claim, as reports have surfaced that as many as "...150 Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fled to Bangladesh" following the commencement of military action in Afghanistan. It has also been reported that Al-Qaeda sought to recruit displaced "Rohingya" (Burmese Muslims) from refugee camps in the Bangladesh/Burmese border area.¹⁸

The attraction of Bangladesh as an operating base lies in its fragile central government and its weak institutional capacity to combat terrorism. Rampant corruption and poverty has left a sizable portion of the population unemployed and susceptible to radicalization,¹⁹ a process that has been aided, in part, by the increased influence of Is-

¹⁶ The Durand Line forms the 1,600-mile border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was established in 1893 after several wars between Afghanistan and what was then British India. It continues to be a source of unrest for both countries as it divides the Pashtun ethnic group.

¹⁷ Selig Harrison, "Get a Grip on Dhaka," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2008. See also Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Background and US Relations*, 11, and K. Alan Kronstadt and Bruce Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, Congressional Research Service, (Updated December 13, 2004): 34. For a contrasting viewpoint, see Sheik Mohammed Belal, "Bangladesh's Counter-terrorism Credentials," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 2008.

¹⁸ Kronstadt and Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, 34.

¹⁹ Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Background and US Relations*, 8-9, 12-13.

lamist factions in the once secular Bangladesh National Party.²⁰ Meanwhile, the corruption of government officials has facilitated the transportation of known terrorists to Bangladesh, both as a destination country and as a hub for extra-regional travel; some news sources have reported that “international extremists” were using Bangladeshi passports obtained by bribing sympathetic officials.²¹

Regional cooperation to counter religiously inspired terrorism has been hindered by arbitrary responses on the part of regional governments, most notably Pakistan. Calling Pakistan’s campaign against terrorism “selective” and “self-serving,” author Ashley Tellis writes that Musharraf exploited the opportunities offered by the war on terror to crack down on those groups that posed a threat to his regime while allowing groups that were seen as strategically important to Pakistan to remain operational.²² For instance, Musharraf showed a willingness to prosecute al-Qaeda members and domestic opposition groups, but was reluctant to take serious action against the Taliban, whom Pakistan had long supported as a buffer between itself and Iran. Likewise, the Pakistani-based Kashmiri militants – regarded as an extension of Pakistan’s foreign policy towards India – were admonished but not disbanded.

While some have criticized the selective nature of counter-terrorism, others have blamed the “heavy handed” tactics of regional security forces and the manipulation of anti-terror laws for the persistence of terrorist violence. The Director of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, I.A. Rehman, recently stated that “counter-terrorism” had become “terrorism” because citizens have been stripped of their basic human rights in the course of counterterrorism investigations.²³ In this context, the prospects for improved regional cooperation will hinge upon the ability of regional governments, including the newly elected government of Pakistan, to reign in extrem-

²⁰ Ibid. See also A. Tariq Karim and Christine Fair, “Bangladesh at the Crossroads,” *United States Institute of Peace*, Special report #181, January 2007, 2-5.

²¹ Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Background and US Relations*, 10.

²² Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror*, 4.

²³ “Counter-terrorism has become terrorism: HRCP,” *Daily Times*, July 19, 2008. http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C07%5C19%5Cstory_19-7-2008_pg7_46 (accessed November 29, 2008) See also, “Stamping out Rights: the Impact of Anti-Terror Law on Policing,” *Commission of Human Rights Initiative 2007 Report*, http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/chogm/chogm_2007/chogm_report_2007.pdf (accessed November 29, 2008).

ist elements while respecting human rights in accordance with international law.

Ethno-nationalism and/or Marxism Principles

The third set of terrorist groups encompasses a wide range of actors whose primary grievances lie within the state. This category can be further broken down into two sub-groups: ethno-nationalist separatists and leftist rebels. Separatist groups are active in every country in the sub-continent. Most notably, the ongoing struggle between LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka remains one of the bloodiest insurgencies in South Asia, claiming more than 64,000 lives over the past 20 years.²⁴ Separatist movements are also present in Pakistan's Balochistan and Sindh provinces, India's Punjab, and Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tract.²⁵ Although most of the violence in each of these conflicts is internal, they each have a spillover effect, known to author Kishore Dash as "cross-border ethnic sub-nationalism."²⁶ Dash, an expert on the subject of South Asian cooperation, believes this ethnic dynamic is one of the main sources of mistrust on the sub-continent. He explains:

Since ethnic minorities in all states of South Asia have close affiliation with their kinfolds in neighboring states, cross-border ethnic identities widely prevail in South Asia. As a result, ethnic conflicts in one state draw natural support from the co-ethnic groups in neighboring states. Not surprisingly, the spillover effects of these ethnic conflicts have led each country to blame the other for assisting separatist movements on its soil.²⁷

State support for cross-border ethnic sub-nationalism has long been a tool used by smaller South Asian states to challenge the unrivaled power of India. In turn, India has reciprocated, using the minority populations on its borders to foment unrest and prevent neighboring states from gaining ground on Indian supremacy. Regional coopera-

²⁴ Kronstadt and Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, 37.

²⁵ Kishore Dash, "Explaining the Dynamics of Domestic Preferences for Deep Cooperation in South Asia." (paper presented at 2006 International Studies Convention, (cited with permission of author): 13. See also Muhammad Tahir, "Tribes and Rebels: the Players in the Balochistan Insurgency," *Terrorism Monitor* 6:7 (April 3, 2008).

²⁶ Kishore Dash, *Deep Cooperation in South Asia*, 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

tion will continue to suffer until the tacit and/or overt support for these separatist movements is halted and a compromise is reached with the minority populations.

Leftist extremists, active in Nepal and the eastern and central areas of India, claim to be fighting on behalf of the rural poor and landless laborers. Known as “Naxalites” or “Maoists,” they primarily target the symbols of Western-influence and capitalism, but have also shown a willingness to target elected elites and Western tourists – the Nepalese communists have espoused a particular dislike for Americans traveling abroad.²⁸ The operational capacity of these two groups has been strengthened in recent years by the forging of cross-border ties.²⁹ Combined, the leftist groups in Nepal and India accounted for more than 1,000 attacks in 2007.³⁰ Although the Maoists of Nepal signed a peace deal with the government last year and oversaw the creation of a new Constitution, they have continued to threaten the resumption of their revolt.³¹

The terrorist threat assessment presented here is by no means comprehensive; it is intended to provide an overview of the main actors while highlighting how they serve to impede efforts at cooperation. Terrorist violence on the sub-continent often blurs the distinction between domestic versus trans-national, and lone actor versus coordinated attack. Furthermore, groups often switch affiliations, change strategies, and adopt different names in order to “dodge” counter-terrorism efforts.³² In the face of these challenges, the capacity of governments in South Asia remains inadequate despite increased assistance from the U.S., U.K., and other donors.

Given the complexity of the threat along with the geo-political animosities on the sub-continent and the inability of leaders to agree on a common definition of terrorism, it is not surprising that governments have failed to devise a coherent response. The current, state-

²⁸ For a discussion of the leftist groups operating in Nepal and India see US State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism*, and Kronstadt and Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, 31-32, 36-37.

²⁹ Rahul Bedi, “Cross-Border Links Strengthen India’s Insurgent Groups,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, November 1, 2004.

³⁰ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*.

³¹ “Nepal PM Dahal Warns of People’s Revolt,” *The Weekly Telegraph*, November 29, 2008, http://www.telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=4438 (accessed November 29, 2008).

³² Wilson John, “India’s Intelligence Services Struggle with War on Terrorism,” *Terrorism Monitor* 6:6 (March 24, 2008).

centric approach to counter-terrorism has focused on narrow and self-serving security objectives at the expense of a long-term strategy aimed at stopping the sources of terrorism. With radicalization on the rise and 40% of the total population living below the poverty level (an estimated 900 million people), the threat of terrorism in South Asia is not likely to subside in the immediate future, making the implementation of a long-term strategy of paramount importance.³³

Moving forward, South Asia should develop a plan that addresses the political, economic, and social conditions that create an environment conducive to the spread of terrorism. Scholars and policy-makers alike have recognized the need for such a holistic approach; Brigadier Arun Sahgal, a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis in New Delhi, urged SAARC to "...adopt a more proactive approach," to "...address the deep-rooted causes of the phenomenon of terrorism."³⁴ In 2002, Sri Lankan president Ms. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga said, "I believe honestly and strongly that the most effective response to conflict and terrorism is to root out the causes that generate them."³⁵ The challenge in the future will be for South Asia to agree on a cooperative approach that brings together a broad range of stakeholders while transcending the inherent political sensitivities of the sub-continent.

The Role of Regional and Sub-Regional Organizations

Regional and sub-regional organizations have the potential to provide a forum for fostering cooperation on counter-terrorism by implementing practical solutions that can address region-specific problems within the necessary regional context. They can also address issues such as economic integration, poverty alleviation, and the promotion of good governance and the rule of law, all of which play a role in undermining the conditions conducive to terrorism. Such bodies have been utilized successfully in other geographic regions to bridge the gap between governments and to bring together regional, sub-regional, and local actors to present a united front against the terrorist threat.

³³ Prabir De, "Cooperation in the Regional Transportation Infrastructure Sector in South Asia," *Contemporary South Asia* 14:3 (September 2005): 267.

³⁴ Brig. Gen. (ret'd.) Arun Sahgal, "Dealing with the Problem of Terrorism in South Asia," in *New Life Within SAARC*, ed. Nischal Pandey and Dev Raj Dahal, (Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2005), 201.

³⁵ Shamsul Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," 138.

The challenge for South Asia will be to find a vehicle for cooperation that can circumvent the political divisions and deep-seated mistrust among neighboring states.

Regional Level

At the regional level, SAARC represents the oldest and most ambitious attempt to facilitate cooperation in South Asia. The first SAARC Summit was held in Dhaka in 1985 and included representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (Afghanistan was added as the 8th member of the group in 2005). Since its inception, SAARC has sought to promote the welfare of the South Asian people by accelerating economic, social and cultural progress. To that end, Article I of the SAARC Charter stated that member countries shall "...promote active collaboration and mutual assistance," and work to "...strengthen cooperation among themselves in international forums on matters of common interests."³⁶

To help coordinate activities within SAARC, a small Secretariat was established in 1987 in Kathmandu. Although the secretariat serves an important monitoring role, the highest authority decisions are normally made at the annual SAARC Summit meeting. Unfortunately, political divisions and disagreements have often postponed or cancelled this event, increasing the importance of lower-level meetings in formulating policy. Although all official SAARC initiatives are taken by consensus and based upon respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference in the internal affairs of member states, the association encourages bi-lateral and multi-lateral initiatives that stand to further the goals of the original charter.³⁷ In recent years, multi-lateral initiatives have centered on the energy sector as SAARC countries realize the need for cross-border investments in order to achieve economic growth.³⁸ While current proposals to have a gas pipeline running from Iran through Pakistan to India have been slowed by political tensions, the initiative stands as

³⁶ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, "Original Charter, Article I," on SAARC, <http://www.saarc-sec.org/main.php?id=10&t=4> (accessed May 12, 2008).

³⁷ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, "Original Charter, Article II," SAARC, <http://www.saarc-sec.org/main.php?id=10&t=4> (accessed May 12, 2008).

³⁸ "Speed up work on gas pipeline projects: experts," *Daily Times*, June 12, 2008, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C06%5C12%5Cstory_12-6-2008_pg5_10 (accessed November 29, 2008).

a valuable confidence-building measure between SAARC members and may ease tensions over future counterterrorism cooperation.³⁹

SAARC representatives realized the need for counter-terrorism cooperation early on in the organization's history. Discussions about terrorism commenced before the inaugural summit meeting, and a terrorism study group convened as early as 1986 in Bangladesh.⁴⁰ The early meetings and reports culminated in the 1987 SAARC Regional Convention to Suppress Terrorism, which condemned "...all acts, methods and practices of terrorism," and acknowledged their negative impact on political stability and regional cooperation.⁴¹ The SAARC Convention provided a broad definition of "terrorist offences" that included a provision for all offences falling under the scope of previous international conventions.⁴² Finally, the Convention obligated all SAARC members to provide mutual assistance in legal matters and to appropriately extradite or prosecute alleged terrorists.⁴³

The 1987 Convention was strengthened in 2002 when, following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1373, SAARC adopted an Additional Protocol to the Convention to Suppress Terrorism.⁴⁴ The new protocol addressed the issue of terrorist financing, calling for the immediate criminalization of "...collection or acquisition of funds for the purpose of committing terrorist acts."⁴⁵ Ratified at the 12th annual Summit, it also re-affirmed South Asia's regional commitment to

³⁹ It has been suggested that since the US-India Nuclear deal was signed in October 2008, the main impediment to the 'peace pipeline' has come from the U.S., which doesn't wish to see greater ties between Iran and two of its most important allies in counter-terrorism. See, Shahan Mufti, "Pakistan Eyes 'Peace Pipeline' for Region," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 20, 2008.

⁴⁰ Dr. Mohan Lohani, "Terrorism in South Asia and its Implications for Regional Peace and Security," in *New Life Within SAARC*, ed. Nischal Pandey and Dev Raj Dahal, (Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2005), 181-182.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² SAARC, "Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism," 1987, <http://untreaty.un.org/English/Terrorism/Conv18.pdf> (accessed May 7, 2008).

⁴³ Ibid. See also, Shamsul Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," 136.

⁴⁴ By signing the Additional Protocol, all SAARC countries became a party to the 1999 UN Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Financing. See Article 4 and the Appendix of the Protocol at: <http://www.saarc-sec.org/main.php?id=11&t=3.2> (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁴⁵ SAARC, "Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism," <http://www.saarc-sec.org/main.php?id=11&t=3.2> (accessed May 12, 2008).

fight international terrorism and strengthened the normative framework upon which that commitment stands.

To help implement the provisions of the convention, SAARC created the 'Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk' (STOMD) in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which is made up of experts from throughout the region working to "...collate, analyze and disseminate information about the terrorist [incidents], tactics, strategies and methods."⁴⁶ While its accomplishments have been difficult to measure, STOMD has the potential to act as an early warning system and to facilitate dialogue between member states; it does not, however, have the ability to enact policy. Complementing the work of the STOMD are the Drug Offences Monitoring Desk (SDOMD) and an Expert Group on Networking among Police Authorities (Expert Group). The Expert Group has collaborated with and reviewed the progress of both the STOMD and the SDOMD, and in many instances, the mandates of all three groups overlap; they have worked together, for instance, on such issues as narcotics trafficking and drug production, which are not only seen as criminal matters but also as sources of terrorist financing.

Together, the STOMD, the SDOMD, and the Expert Group have called for the creation of an "Interpol-like" SAARC agency to increase the regional capacity of police forces throughout the region.⁴⁷ In April 2008, experts from all three bodies convened for a two-day conference in which representatives deliberated and emphasized the need for a joint strategy to fight terrorism, while urging all SAARC members to share intelligence to curb trans-national crime.⁴⁸ Heeding this advice, India and Pakistan agreed during the conference to exchange intelligence regarding recent attacks and to discuss the prospects for strengthening cooperation against terrorism.⁴⁹ Bi-lateral initiatives such as these may help build confidence between states, but they are largely retroactive in that they address crimes or attacks that have already occurred. This remains important and worthwhile work, but the region-

⁴⁶ Shamsul Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," 136.

⁴⁷ "India, Pakistan to Share Info on Terror Cases," *The Economic Times*, April 16, 2008, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/PoliticsNation/India_Pakistan_to_share_info_on_terror_cases/articleshow/2954537.cms (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁴⁸ "SAARC countries agree on intelligence sharing for curbing terrorism," *The Associated Press of Pakistan*, April 16, 2008, http://www.app.com.pk/en_/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=35688&Itemid=2 (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁴⁹ "India, Pakistan to Share Info on Terror Cases," *The Economic Times*, April 16, 2008.

wide response will require more attention to be paid to preventive measures aimed at stopping attacks before they occur, as opposed to reacting once they have already been perpetrated.

In some ways, SAARC would benefit from closer cooperation with extra-regional organizations to learn best practices and devise a strategy for improving preventive counter-terrorism measures. For instance, Shamsul Islam has advocated that SAARC take notice of the work of the Organization of American States (OAS) and its Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE) as models for how a regional organization can facilitate information exchange, establish national points of contact network, strengthen anti-terror legislation, and assist in capacity building for member states.⁵⁰ OAS and the CICTE have also had the distinctively similar experience of fighting the growing nexus between drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism; their experience with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) and the Tri-Border Area have important parallels with the problems SAARC faces in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In addition to OAS, SAARC should seek assistance from its geographical neighbor, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN's counter-terrorism program is far below the standard set by OAS, but it offers several advantages for SAARC. First, as geographic neighbors, the organizations share many of the same concerns and common interests. Second, South East Asia is a region that has been afflicted with the same brands of international terrorism as South Asia, and their methods of combating the threat may provide valuable lessons for SAARC. Finally, the prospects for inter-regional cooperation between South and South East Asia should be facilitated by the dual membership of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan in SAARC and the ASEAN Regional Forum, a group committed to the promotion of regional peace and security.

Complementing SAARC in its efforts to fight terrorist financing is the 36-member Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG). Established in 1997 as the regional arm of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the APG includes all SAARC countries in addition to countries in South East Asia. Following the 1999 UN Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Financing and subsequent Security Council Resolutions, the APG sought to enhance the capability of states to combat the financing of terrorism. Specifically, the APG

⁵⁰ Shamsul Islam, "Combating Terrorism in South Asia: Challenges and Prospects," 135.

Terms of Reference commits all APG members to implement FATF's 40 Recommendations on Money Laundering and nine Special Recommendations on Terrorist Financing.⁵¹

Despite these efforts, countries in South Asia have thus far struggled to enact appropriate anti-money laundering legislation. Although anti-money laundering efforts in Bangladesh and Nepal showed promise in 2007, legislation remained stalled in Dhaka and in the Nepali Parliament.⁵² Similarly, Pakistan passed an anti-money laundering ordinance in September 2007, but it failed to fully comply with FATF recommendations. India has made the most serious effort, to date, to fully implement the FATF standards. In 2002, they passed the Prevention of Money Laundering Act,⁵³ which resulted in the creation of a Financial Intelligence Unit to disseminate reports of suspicious transactions and the improvement of India's legal capacity to enforce laws. Recently, India introduced new legislation aimed at closing gaps in the original act by expanding the category of offences with cross-border ties to international terrorism.⁵⁴ Moving forward, SAARC, as the lone regional body, needs to have more oversight authority to ensure that countries in the region are fulfilling their pledge to enforce the standards of FATF.

Although SAARC has expressed the desire to increase regional cooperation against terrorism, many programs still lack the sufficient resources, authority, and political backing to prevent terrorism or address the conditions conducive to its spread. With that said, some have expressed optimism that the original Convention and the 2002 Additional Protocol can still be used as vehicles to implement reforms. Dr. Mohan Lohani, Executive Director of Nepal's Institute of Foreign Affairs, argues that the Convention "...has not been effec-

⁵¹ Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering website, <http://www.apgml.org> (accessed May 12, 2008).

⁵² US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism*.

⁵³ APG Mutual Evaluation of India, 2005,

http://www.apgml.org/documents/docs/19/India%20ME1%20-%20Final_published%20Aug07.pdf (accessed May 9, 2008).

⁵⁴ The 2002 Prevention of Money Laundering Act was recently amended to bring a new category of offences under the purview of the Act. The new legislation aims to make India fully compliant with FATF standards. Under the new amendment, money transfer service providers, casinos, and money traders will be required to report activity to India's Financial Intelligence Unit. "Money Laundering Bill Tabled in Rajya Sabha," *The Economic Times of India*, October 18, 2008, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/PoliticsNation/Money_laundering_bill_tabled_in_Rajya_Sabha/articleshow/3610507.cms (accessed October 19, 2008).

tively enforced owing to a lack of enabling legislation in most member states,” but he believes that it “...can become an effective mechanism to combat terrorism, provided there is a strong political will to implement it.”⁵⁵

Political will, as Lohani describes, may represent the biggest hurdle for improved cooperation, and while the prospects for increased political support remain uncertain, the recently concluded 15th SAARC Summit in Colombo may have provided reason to be hopeful about the future. At the Summit, the Heads of State of SAARC countries once again re-affirmed their commitment to fighting terrorism and cited a need to confront the threat in a “comprehensive manner.”⁵⁶ They recognized the “growing linkages” between terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking, and other illicit activities and called on member states to strengthen the legal regime against terrorism while improving information exchanges.⁵⁷ Whether or not these commitments go beyond rhetoric and enter into the implementation phase remains to be seen, but a second development – the finalization of the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters – may yield more concrete results. Signed by all SAARC Foreign Ministers, it aims to eliminate the need for separate bi-lateral agreements by harmonizing the domestic legal systems of member countries.⁵⁸ Once ratified, SAARC countries should find it easier to cooperate on counterterrorism investigations and the prosecution of terrorist suspects.

Prospects for the future of SAARC counter-terrorism activities should include a focus on practical and attainable initiatives as well as a long-term strategy to improve the overall state of regional counter-terrorism capacity. Short-term projects should include an expansion of the STOMD and SDOMD. Together, these two bodies should be enabled to host joint counter-terrorism workshops in member countries to provide law enforcement officials at the national and local levels with threat assessments as well as advice on how better to conduct

⁵⁵ Dr. Mohan Lohani, “Terrorism in South Asia and its Implications for Regional Peace and Security,” 181-182.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶ SAARC, “15th SAARC Summit Declaration,” <http://www.saarc-sec.org/data/summit15/summit15declaration.htm> (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Media Release, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the UN, “SAARC Convention to Help in Combating Terrorism,” August 27, 2008, <http://www.slmission.com/media-releases/21-ministry-media-releases-/123-saarc-convention-to-help-in-combating-terrorism.html> (accessed November 29, 2008).

counter-terrorism investigations. India, in an attempt to build the technical capacity of the monitoring desks, has offered to upgrade their physical infrastructure to “enable better information-sharing” between member states.⁵⁹ Greater collaboration between the STOMD and SDOMD is essential, given the growing nexus between drug production, organized crime, and terrorism in South Asia and particularly in Afghanistan.⁶⁰

Over the long term, SAARC faces the greater obstacle of overcoming regional animosities in order to establish a comprehensive counter-terrorism framework. One way to ease tensions across borders and between communities would be to better emphasize the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. While debate exists as to what these ‘conducive conditions’ are or whether poverty plays a direct role, the South Asia region would undoubtedly benefit from an improved educational system and greater economic development. Efforts to enhance educational and economic ties between countries would strengthen cross-regional relations and allay fears associated with increased cooperation. In addition, stronger cross-cultural ties would go a long way towards countering divisive and extremist ideologies while building confidence and trust between states and their citizens.

Sub-Regional Level

Given the institutional limitations of the SAARC and the paralyzing nature of political divisions between India and Pakistan, more meaningful counter-terrorism cooperation may be possible at the sub-regional level.

The primary sub-regional organization in South Asia is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sector Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), which includes the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Heralded as the “alternate” SAARC, BIMSTEC was founded in 1997 as a way to facilitate cooperation in areas such as trade and investment, technology, en-

⁵⁹ Sameer Suryakant Patil, Aparajita Mazumdar, and Kamala Kanta Dash, ed., *SAARC: Towards Greater Connectivity Conference Report* (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, & India International Centre, 2007), 7.

⁶⁰ Kronstadt and Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, 8.

ergy, transportation, communication, and tourism.⁶¹ Having yet to establish a headquarters or permanent Secretariat, BIMSTEC has been slow to get many of its programs off the ground. With that said, the initiation of Summit level meetings in 2004 has helped BIMSTEC gain traction as a viable pathway to better regional cooperation.

The primary advantage that BIMSTEC enjoys – the fact that Pakistan has thus far been excluded from membership – may in fact also be its biggest weakness. From one perspective, the absence of Pakistan means that BIMSTEC countries can operate without fear that decisions will be held hostage by the politics of the India-Pakistan dispute, and as a result, BIMSTEC may be able to pursue a more ambitious agenda. On the other hand, Pakistan is a prominent player in South Asian affairs and a country deeply affected by terrorist violence. As such, efforts to combat terrorism in the whole South Asia region need to include Pakistan as a central part of the problem and solution. The benefit of BIMSTEC's position vis-à-vis SAARC may rest in BIMSTEC's ability to build a solid framework, which can later be adopted by SAARC or can be exported to Pakistan (and the other remaining SAARC countries) by their invitation to join BIMSTEC at a later date.

Counter-terrorism was not initially on the BIMSTEC agenda, but the events of 9/11 and the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1373 prompted the organization to take a closer look at regional security issues. The 2004 Summit Declaration expressed a concern over the threat of terrorism and recognized "...that the solidarity and friendship existing among member states could be utilized as a basis to counter this threat."⁶² The declaration urged all member states to coordinate their efforts by exchanging information and cooperating in the ongoing efforts of the international community to combat terrorism in all its forms, "...irrespective of its cause or stated rationale."⁶³ More recently, BIMSTEC foreign ministers adopted a draft convention on combating international terrorism, trans-national organized crime, and drug trafficking at an August 2008 meeting in New Delhi. Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury called

⁶¹ Dipankar Banerjee, *SAARC – Helping Neither to Integrate Nor Look East*, (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2005), 69.

⁶² Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, "2004 Summit Declaration," http://www.bimstec.org/downloads/bimstec_summit/1.pdf (accessed May 7, 2008).

⁶³ Ibid.

the convention, which is scheduled to be finalized at the November BIMSTEC Summit, an “important tool” to deal with the regional threat of terrorism.⁶⁴

Following the 2004 Summit meeting, BIMSTEC established a Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime Sector (CTTCS) responsible for coordinating the sub-region-wide response. Each member country was assigned a focal point to facilitate communication between governments, and several sub-sectors were established to address specific crime-terror issues. Thus far, sub-sectors have been created for issues regarding intelligence sharing, terrorist financing, legal and law enforcement issues, and drug trafficking.⁶⁵ While these programs are still in their infancy and currently lack the resources and experience necessary to affect change, they represent a promising start towards a more comprehensive counter-terrorism program. Moving forward, BIMSTEC should strengthen the CTTCS by engaging with international organizations and civil society groups to implement a more action-oriented plan to combat terrorism.

Civil Society

Civil society groups, especially in the form of think tanks and academic centers, have an important role to play in analyzing and disseminating scholarly research on regional cooperation, economic integration, and counter-terrorism. Working in conjunction with regional and sub-regional bodies, civil society groups can bring together a wide range of stakeholders in an effort to improve regional capacity and influence policy decisions.

Among the many think tanks in South Asia, the Institute of Foreign Affairs and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (FES), both located in Nepal, have teamed up to provide a forum for experts to exchange ideas on the future of SAARC. In 2005, they sponsored a conference entitled, “New Life within SAARC,” which focused on ways to improve regional cooperation and counter-terrorism.⁶⁶ FES has also partnered with the Coalition for Action on South-Asian Cooperation

⁶⁴ “Draft Bimstec convention to combat terrorism, crime,” *Bangladesh News*, August 30, 2008, <http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2008/08/30/draft-bimstec-convention-to-combat-terrorism-crime/> (accessed October 19, 2008).

⁶⁵ BIMSTEC Counter-terrorism and Trans-national Crime Sub-Sector, http://www.bimstec.org/counter_terror.html (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁶⁶ For a list of papers presented at the conference, visit: <http://www.ifa.org.np/saarcpapers.php> (accessed November 29, 2008).

(CASAC), an "...independent non-profit, public policy network of South Asian opinion and policy makers committed to the promotion of regional co-operation."⁶⁷ CASAC works closely with SAARC to provide policy advice and hosts a number of workshops and seminars to help influence and shape the opinions of decision-makers.

Other important centers include the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) located in Islamabad and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies in New Delhi (IPCS). PIPS produces publications and reports on the terrorist threat in addition to hosting seminars and workshops for researchers and analysts, including a March 2008 seminar on the topic of developing a holistic approach to "de-radicalization."⁶⁸ IPCS has engaged with numerous regional and international actors to improve regional integration in South Asia, co-sponsoring "SAARC: Towards Greater Connectivity," a 2007 conference committed to charting a new course of action for the regional organization. The conference voiced a concern about the need to develop "...effective measures to implement relevant provisions of SAARC Conventions against terrorism, arms-smuggling, narcotics trade, human trafficking, and illegal financial transactions."⁶⁹ Participants at the conference stressed the importance of increased regional trade in this respect, especially trade across the India/Pakistan Line of Control, which can act as a confidence-building measure for the entire region.

The Role of the UN

The cross-border dimension of the security threats facing the region amplifies the need to implement a regional response. Thus far, efforts by regional and sub-regional organizations to build a coordinated counterterrorism framework have failed to move forward with action-oriented plans, despite the lofty agenda put forth at summit meetings and in written documents. The inability of these regional bodies to move beyond rhetoric increases the role that the UN should play in facilitating a regional approach to counterterrorism.

⁶⁷ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Website on Regional Cooperation, http://www.fesnepal.org/activities/regional_cooperation.htm (accessed November 29, 2008). CASAC is in the process of building its own website (<http://www.casaonline.org/>), but it is not yet operational.

⁶⁸ Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies website, <http://san-pips.com/> (accessed May 10, 2008).

⁶⁹ SAARC: *Towards Greater Connectivity Conference Report*, 3.

In September 2006, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (hereafter referred to as the Strategy), marking the first time that all UN member states agreed on a common framework for addressing the terrorist threat.⁷⁰ Its four-pillar plan of action consists of measures to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, measures to prevent and combat terrorism, capacity-building, and ensuring a human rights and rule of law-based approach to countering the threat. As a holistic approach, the Strategy enlists the help of numerous UN actors, including non-traditional counterterrorism organs such as the United Nations Development Program, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which houses a small Terrorism Prevention Branch. Despite the unanimous adoption of the UN Strategy, however, regional organizations in South Asia have steered clear of officially endorsing it in subsequent summit meetings and conventions.

Since the adoption of the Strategy, the UN has sought to increase coordination between the various facets of the UN system and regional and sub-regional bodies. For instance, the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTC/CTED) were assigned to "...reach out to international, regional, and sub-regional bodies to encourage them to become more involved in the global counterterrorism campaign..." through the development of "...counterterrorism action plans, best practices, capacity-building programs, units within their secretariats, and urging their members to join the international terrorism-related treaties."⁷¹ Together, the CTC and the CTED form the backbone of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (Task Force), which is charged with overseeing the realization of the provisions of the Strategy.

As a comprehensive framework, the Strategy is not region-specific; it lays the groundwork for enhancing counterterrorism ef-

⁷⁰ United Nations General Assembly, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/288, A/RES/60/288, September 8, 2006.

⁷¹ Eric Rosand, et. al., "The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Regional and Subregional Bodies: Strengthening a Critical Partnership," *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, October 2008: 22, http://www.globalct.org/images/content/pdf/reports/strengthening_a_critical_partnership.pdf (accessed November 29, 2008).

forts, but leaves it up to each region to devise plans that are best suited to address problems within the necessary regional context. While progress has been slow and results difficult to measure, the Strategy and the Task Force are still in their infancy, and the mandates of the various UN organs are still being defined. With that said, the UN, owing to its position as a politically neutral player in world affairs, may stand a better chance of facilitating cooperation between states in South Asia, as opposed to extra-regional actors, such as the U.S. or U.K., which are less palatable to certain political leaderships. The UN, therefore, may be in the best position to bring together a wide-range of stakeholders, acting as an arbiter between regional and sub-regional organizations, governments, and civil society in order to build a region-specific response to terrorism.

The Way Forward

Progress in counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia has been painstakingly slow. Despite the political instability, insufficient resources, and capacity gaps inherent in the region, there are several prospects for change. This section presents four recommendations for how to expedite a coherent regional response.

Establish a Regional Counter-Terrorism Center in Bangladesh. Although SAARC and BIMSTEC have created small units to monitor terrorist activity and conduct workshops, both organizations would benefit from a more centralized structure. To encourage more cooperation between the countries of South and South East Asia, the center should be placed in Bangladesh, which as a member of SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, will be able to connect and pool together resources from two geographic regions. This location has also taken on more importance since the emergence of Bangladesh as a destination country for fleeing Taliban and al-Qaeda militants as well as the reported plan of the leader of Jemaah Islamiya (JI), an Indonesian terrorist group, to move JI operations to Bangladesh in 2003.⁷²

The center should be modeled after the Jakarta Law Enforcement Center (JLEC), which has served as the regional center on transnational crime and terrorism for countries in South East Asia. JLEC has actively worked to build the capacity of ASEAN member states through increased cooperation with international actors, workshops,

⁷² Kronstadt and Vaughn, *Terrorism in South Asia*, 35.

training exercises, and mutual evaluations of ASEAN countries. A similar structure placed in South Asia would be able to present a coordinated and visible program that would be a marked improvement over the skeletal structure currently in place within SAARC and BIM-STEAC.

Establish an Interpol-Affiliated Network of Regional Police Chiefs. Currently, Interpol has an Asia-Pacific bureau office in Thailand. Although this office technically has jurisdiction over SAARC countries, the South Asia region would benefit from having its own bureau modeled after the current set-up of the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO).⁷³ When created, SARPCCO was solely a police chiefs' organization, but was later integrated into Interpol, wherein the SARPCCO Secretariat now doubles as the Interpol sub-regional bureau. This structure has the dual benefit of 1) increasing cooperation between the two organizations, and 2) granting a regional police network access to Interpol resources. SAARC's Expert Group on Police Authorities would be a likely fit for this role, as they already host regional meetings. Establishing an Interpol presence within this framework would help build the institutional capacity of member states and give the Expert Group on Police Authorities access to the tools and resources available at Interpol. In addition, lower level meetings among police chiefs, operating in a less politicized arena, may stand a better chance of implementing practical solutions – technical cooperation, information sharing, border security, etc. In the process, they may be able to undermine the political hurdles at the higher levels of government.

Economic integration and development should be promoted to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. While a host of factors can contribute to the spread of terrorism, including poor governance, extremist ideology, and the abuse of human rights (all of which are present in South Asia), the primary cause for concern should be the region's economic stagnation. As regional economic communities and free trade agreements proliferate around the globe, South Asia has been largely left behind, and although India has shown remarkable

⁷³ SARPCCO began as an independent police chiefs organization in southern Africa and was later integrated into Interpol wherein the Secretariat of SARPCCO serves as the sub-regional bureau of Interpol. For information on SARPCCO, see the Interpol website at:

<http://www.interpol.int/public/Region/Africa/Committees/SARPCCO.asp> (accessed October 20, 2008).

growth since the early 1990s, the region remains mired in poverty. Corruption and poor governance certainly deserve part of the blame, but the primary limiting factor for South Asian development is its lack of intra-regional trade. Since 1991, trade between countries within South Asia has hovered between 3-4%.⁷⁴ Compared to intra-regional trade in other economic communities, this figure is remarkably low.⁷⁵ The shortage of trade has more to do with political divisions than lack of resources. Pakistan, for instance, imports iron ore from Canada and Brazil rather than India, which would offer a much lower cost and delivery time.⁷⁶

The focus of regional trade in recent years has been on the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which was signed in 2004 and came into effect on January 1, 2006. This agreement called for a gradual reduction in tariffs between SAARC countries, but has had several setbacks. Shortly after its inception, Pakistan temporarily sidelined the treaty by claiming that a free trade agreement between India and Pakistan would have to wait until a resolution of the dispute over Kashmir.⁷⁷ Since that time, SAFTA has gained some momentum with significant tariff reductions between member states, but a number of non-tariff barriers continue to pose obstacles.⁷⁸

BIMSTEC has emerged as a promising alternative to SAFTA by promoting increased trade between its members from South and South East Asia. Moving forward, BIMSTEC's success as a regional economic community is of central importance. If BIMSTEC can build a model for economic development, it may serve as the catalyst for increased cooperation in SAFTA. Moreover, it may induce Pakistan to delay resolution on Kashmir to avoid being "left behind" by other South Asian economies.

Promote inter-cultural exchanges between South Asia countries. Economic ramifications aside, closed borders and lack of intra-regional trade have also negatively impacted the exchange of ideas and culture

⁷⁴ Dipankar Banerjee, *SAARC – Helping Neither to Integrate Nor Look East*, 57.

⁷⁵ The 2007 World Trade Organization statistics on International Trade lists intra-regional trade in South Asia at 3.9% as compared to NAFTA's 7.8%, the EU's 31.4%, and ASEAN's 14.1%. Statistics can be found online at: http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2007_e/its2007_e.pdf (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁷⁶ Prabir De, *Cooperation in the Regional Transportation Infrastructure Sector in South Asia*, 268.

⁷⁷ Dipankar Banerjee, *SAARC – Helping Neither to Integrate Nor Look East*, 58.

⁷⁸ SAARC: *Towards Greater Connectivity Conference Report*, 5.

across countries and peoples. As a result, attitudes about and knowledge of neighboring states in South Asia tends to be myopic. Some scholars, such as Shamsul Islam have suggested that political elites have deliberately exploited divides in order to build nationalism.⁷⁹ The misperceptions, apprehensions, and tensions normally present between and among nationalities, Islam says, were exacerbated, creating deeper divisions along ethnic and religious lines.⁸⁰ Whether or not elite predation played a role in creating mistrust, more cultural exchanges need to be initiated in order to counter the prevailing trend.

The recent announcement of a South Asian University, which was initiated by SAARC, is a step in the right direction.⁸¹ Set to open in 2010, the University will be located in New Delhi and will give students from throughout the region a chance to interact and foster better cross-cultural understanding. To aid the development of the University, the 15th SAARC Summit announced plans to institutionalize a SAARC scholarship program.⁸² Other cross-cultural exchanges may come in the form of arts and entertainment. At the 10th SAARC Summit in 2000, SAARC leaders recognized the importance of culture in "...sustaining harmonious relations among the peoples of the region."⁸³ To that end, SAARC has regularly held cultural festivals and has sponsored numerous regional sporting events and competitions.⁸⁴

Increased film screenings have also helped bridge divides between cultures. In April 2008, for instance, the New York Times ran

⁷⁹ Shamsul Islam, *Combating Terrorism in South Asia*, 135.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Cabinet nod for South Asian University," *The Economic Times*, April 3, 2007, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/News_By_Industry/Services/Cabinet_nod_for_South_Asian_University/articleshow/1848434.cms (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁸² SAARC, "15th SAARC Summit Declaration," <http://www.saarc-sec.org/data/summit15/summit15declaration.htm> (accessed November 29, 2008); the SAARC sub-committee of the inter-governmental steering committee has also been engaged on the development of the University, helping to "...expedite and design the academic structure, administration, and business plan." See, "Four Conveners Appointed for SAARC University," *The Hindu*, October 20, 2008, <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/002200810201832.htm> (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁸³ See SAARC website on Culture, Sports, and Arts, <http://www.saarc-sec.org/main.php?t=2.9.1> (accessed November 29, 2008).

⁸⁴ SAARC has worked to promote regional sporting events and other competitions, including a golf tournament and an annual bridge competition. See "Pakistan to Host SAARC Golf," *Pakistan Dawn*, March 29, 2005, <http://www.dawn.com/2005/03/29/spt15.htm> (accessed November 29, 2008).

an article about a Pakistani-made film that was being shown in India. In the context of the India-Pakistan dispute, the film's debut was monumental because it marked the first time that a Pakistani-made film had been shown in India in over four decades.⁸⁵ Cultural exchanges, such as these, may seem far removed from the issue of terrorism, but they have the potential to break down stereotypes and allay fears, and over the long-term, they can undermine the base of support for terrorist movements or stem the tide of radicalization. Most importantly, they represent an avenue towards building a more holistic approach to counter the threat of terrorism, one focused on political, economic, and cultural factors.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to shed light on the prospects for enhancing counter-terrorism cooperation in South Asia. By providing an analysis of current counter-terrorism efforts, it identified weaknesses and offered recommendations for how to improve the regional cooperative approach. A South Asian approach to combating terrorism should include both short- and long-term solutions aimed at preventing terrorist acts through increased capacity building, the promotion of good governance and rule of law, and the facilitation of cross-cultural understanding. The UN Strategy provides a useful framework that regional organizations and state governments should strive to implement. If enacted, these measures will simultaneously combat the supply side of terrorism by alleviating some of the conditions conducive to its spread. Success will not be defined here by the complete cessation of terrorist violence – the tactic of terrorism is unfortunately here to stay – but significant strides can be made to undermine terrorist movements. Political hostilities and cultural cleavages have long-served as barriers to progress, but increased trade and cultural connections combined with the awareness that the region, as a whole, will benefit from a more stable environment, may be a harbinger that South Asia will be able to implement the solutions presented here and enhance its collective counter-terrorism capacity.

⁸⁵ Amelia Gentleman, "Now Playing in India: A Rare View of Pakistan," *New York Times*, April 16, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/16/world/asia/16india.html?emc=eta1> (accessed November 29, 2008).

