

**Anti-Terrorism Task Force (ATTF)
Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI)
Regional Center For Combating Transborder Crime**

Background

The SECI Center ATTF was established in February 2003, after establishing a working group and organizing a workshop within the previous one and a half years. It was initiated shortly after the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 by a Declaration on the Suppression of Terrorism. The Declaration was meant to encourage the exchange of information among SECI Center Member States on criminal organizations that are closely tied with terrorism, including financial resources and other support.

Further, two other related task forces – for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)- merged together. With this structure, the combined task force is committed to investigation of terrorist groups and control of illegal trafficking of SALW and WMD in the region. Each task force has been coordinated by one member country; namely, Turkey, Albania and Romania, respectively, and are sub-groups within the ATTF.

The Task Force deals with legislative and training issues and also with facilitating operational possibilities between and among the countries of the region. It is a regional instrument of the implementation of Resolution 1373, as well as other UN Conventions and relevant international acts. It is open to all the member and observer countries and international organizations that have competency for combating terrorism.

Action Plan for 2004

In this regard, operational meetings would be held in February, March and April 2004 for the three sub groups. During 26-27 February 2004, the 2nd meeting of Anti-Terrorism Sub Group was held in the premises of the SECI Center, Bucharest. A debriefing session on November bomb attacks in Istanbul was performed in this meeting, as well as a discussion session on assisting in the prevention of terrorist attacks and other serious crimes during the Olympic Games in Greece in August 2004. For the SALW sub group there will be an evaluation of last year's operation (Ploughshare) and an action plan for its new version for 2004. The meeting of the WMD sub group will be devoted to the preparation of the One-Time Action for monitoring the movement of nuclear and strategic materials in the region.

In May 2004 there will be a one-week Basic Anti-Terrorism Training Course in The Turkish Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC), on the topics of Terrorism, Strategies in Combating Terrorism, Investigations of Terror Events, Counter Terrorism and Intelligence. In August 2004 another training program is planned on Bomb Disposal Techniques for six-weeks duration.

Due to the need for an adequate legislative reform that develops legislative tools for combating terrorism there will be also a joint working group meeting in September 2004 for legislative issues. The task force has already started to collect all related legislation from the member countries. It will be studied together seeking the common points, weak points, and needs based on regional facts in order to reach the harmonization of the laws. This working group has the technical support and contribution from UNODC, Stability Pact for Southeast Europe, as well as other relevant international institutions.

Previous Achievements

In October 2001, at the request of the U.S. Secret Service and in an effort to obtain the financial profiles of suspected terrorists, the then Anti-terrorism Working Group disseminated an FBI watch list containing some three hundred names among the Southeast European countries. As a result of this operation, suspicious bank accounts and transactions were detected in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey.

The Working Group was also formed to provide information on the movement of refugees and illegal migration from conflict areas through Southeast Europe and to provide assistance to SECI Center Member States on the development of their counter-terrorism strategies. The Working Group's report on the first regional evaluation of illegal migration following the military campaigns in Afghanistan was issued and distributed to SECI Center member states in February 2002.

A regional workshop on terrorism was held at the SECI Center in July 2002 in order to identify plausible and feasible law enforcement actions against terrorism. Out of that workshop evolved the realization that a two-pronged approach to counter-terrorism in the region was necessary; and also concentrated on facilitating operational endeavors in the fight against terrorism. It was also recommended in the workshop that a task force on counter-terrorism should be established within the SECI Center to ensure country commitments.

Istanbul Bombings and ATTF assistance

In November 2003, one of the SECI member countries, Turkey, had been attacked by the terrorists in a new mode of international terrorism. This meant that the ruthless and murderous attacks of international terrorism were in the region from then on, proving one of the general characteristics of terrorism as "choosing targets randomly".

Shortly after the attacks, the Head of Operational Department and the ATTF Project Manager paid a working visit to Istanbul. They met with the senior investigators of the relevant units, who were in charge of the case. In those meetings, the connection of the perpetrators with the countries in the region was interrogated, and it was agreed to hold a debriefing meeting at the end of February 2004, in order to exchange this unfortunate fresh experience and to develop preventive measures. A confidential report had been disseminated to the member countries based on the facts that were provided the professionals. This report helped the countries to see the facts out of the speculations turning around in public opinion and mass media of their respective countries.

The investigation determined that the devastating twin attacks on November 15 and 20, 2003 in Istanbul, Turkey were the first Al-Qaida style attacks not only in Turkey, but also in Southeast Europe. Suicide bombers exploded trucks loaded with explosives, targeting two synagogues, the British Consulate, and a London-based bank in Istanbul, killing 59 people and wounding 753. 57 persons were arrested out of 230 detainees, and 3 persons out of the 57 arrested ones were brought from neighboring countries. 6-7 subjects are still at large.

Conclusion

The Anti Terrorism Task Force of the SECI center is committed to the exchange of information, professional knowledge and experience among the Southeast European Countries, with a view to preventing production, usage, and transportation of SALW and WMD, as well as disrupting of the international terrorist groups.

Since it is recognized by all that open communications, support for operational techniques, training, exchange of best practices, and improvement legal instruments are necessities, close cooperation with the SECI member and observer countries is provided.

The SECI Center is an appropriate tool for law enforcement, having the will and operational means to contribute to prevention of regional and global trans border crimes, including terrorist activities.

Coordinates

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