Securing Our Borders against Traveling Terrorists:
Challenges, Best Practices, and Recommendations

Global Counterterrorism Alumni Community of Interest (COI) Workshop
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Recommendations from Program on Terrorism and Security Studies (PTSS) Alumni

What can countries do to make sure that borders are barriers to terrorists, but bridges to cooperation? Among the many challenges in today's fight against terrorism are the issues of how to detect, deter and detain terrorists who seek to cross international borders. Whether the concern is citizens returning home from a conflict area, suspected terrorists traveling for indoctrination or training, or known terrorists crossing land, sea and air borders, the establishment of effective border security and functional border management is crucial for every country and has myriad wide-ranging, long-term global impacts. Proper border security and management can significantly reduce the threat of the traveling terrorist and must be part of every nation's Counter Terrorism Strategy.

The George C. Marshall Center hosted its latest COI on 22 - 25 January 2019 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, inviting ten alumni and a FRONTEX representative to provide presentations on the topic "Securing Our Borders against Traveling Terrorists" to a group of fifty-six alumni participants from forty-three counties. Each presenter focused on his or her nation's or organization's efforts to counter the threat of traveling terrorists. Representing ten countries, the speakers outlined preventative and protective measures taken by governments to counter this threat and identified best practices and lessons learned during the efforts. Following the presentations, alumni participants met in smaller groups to formulate consolidated recommendations for today's governments as they work to eliminate the threat of traveling terrorists. While acknowledging all countries have developed different border-security systems, the presentations and seminar discussions led to the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. **Information and intelligence sharing is essential.** Frontline border police must have access to information on the traveling-terrorist threat in order to successfully combat it. Some of the best practices for ensuring information is available at the right time and place include establishing multi-agency fusion centers, assigning interagency liaison officers, training practitioners at all levels to prevent over-classification, and establishing, utilizing and updating effective databases.

2. **Anti-corruption measures must be a priority.** Corruption at the border remains a key vulnerability. Recommendations for preventing corruption include taking measures to ensure that frontline border guards are adequately paid, passing and enforcing legislation to discourage corrupt practices, implementing technological solutions such as CCTV coverage of border posts, and establishing whistleblower programs to bring corruption to the attention of authorities.

3. **Cross-border cooperation must be improved.** To effectively prevent traveling terrorists from crossing borders, it is essential that governments work closely with regional and international partners and, most importantly, that they enable frontline border guards to coordinate across the border. Specific recommendations include empowering frontline practitioners to engage with their counterparts on the other side of the border, working to ensure the interoperability of border technologies, and establishing regional pools of interpreters available for in-person or virtual translation of documents and conversations at border-crossing points.

4. **Border management integration achieves results.** The numerous separate governmental agencies working to secure the border can be a challenge to coordinate. Recommendations for improving integrated border management include conducting regular multi-agency exercises, utilizing risk analysis tools for resource allocation decisions, establishing clear, standardized procedures for all border posts, and providing sufficient resources for remote border posts which are often under supported.

5. **Border community engagement enables security.** Citizens who live and work along the border can provide a robust network for detecting terrorists. Recommendations for engaging with communities along the border include raising awareness of possible terrorist travel, establishing a reward system for useful information, and creating an anonymous hotline to facilitate suspicious-activity reports while protecting individuals from possible retribution.

6. **Investment in personnel development is important.** A well-trained border guard is often the critical link in preventing terrorists from crossing a border. Border guards should be provided with effective training on legal rights and responsibilities, opportunities to improve language skills, and a clear understanding of risk indicators used to identify suspicious travelers.

7. **Investment in new technology remains vital.** While participants warned against fixating on technology as a "magic bullet," they realize that the continuous advancement of technology can provide tools that mitigate vulnerabilities and improve detection. Recommendations in this area include utilizing drones, CCTV, infrared sensors, and satellite technology to monitor remote land and maritime borders, using advanced biometrics to firmly establish the identity of travelers, and incorporating advanced digital tracking systems for cargo containers, alongside the traditional low-tech solutions. Additionally, the COI participants recommend improving security measures for long-distance train and bus travel and more effectively monitoring social networking sites to detect border vulnerabilities.

8. **Legal regime for investigating cell phones should be clear and permissive.** The COI participants recommended establishing a clear legal basis for investigating cell phones and providing border guards with the technical capability to quickly investigate mobile technology.

9. **Further international cooperation would pay dividends.** While much has been done in the international arena to improve coordination of border security, COI participants saw a need for further action. The participants' recommendations include implementing worldwide biometric standards for travel documents, establishing standardized regional terrorism alert systems, and creating a forum to bring NGOs and security practitioners together to create a more comprehensive understanding of border challenges.

About the COI

The Global CT Alumni COI workshops support and engage over 2000 alumni of the Marshall Center's premier Program on Terrorism and Security Studies, as well as CT-focused alumni from other U.S. Regional Centers. COI events provide a forum for active networking (and renewed friendships/relationships) for alumni who are current security leaders serving in counterterrorism (CT)-related positions around the world. Deliverables during COI events directly inform upcoming PTSS programs, ensuring the overall program's continuous currency and relevance.

About PTSS

The Program on Terrorism and Security Studies is a four-week resident program that supports the Marshall Center's increasing emphasis on transnational threats and challenges. The PTSS provides advanced professional education to those charged with understanding and then reducing the scope and capability of terrorism threats. Recognizing the global nature of terrorism and its disdain for international borders, today's PTSS attracts participants from all corners of the globe. The PTSS builds a network of security professionals dedicated to the mission of combating terrorism by helping their countries cooperate in the global struggle against terrorism.

About the Author

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