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IOB Evaluation Report

Eyes and ears on the ground

An evaluation of the network of Regional Security Coordinators

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List of abbreviations

AQIM	Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb
AQIS	Al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
AS	Al-Shabaab
CT	Counterterrorism
CVE	Countering violent extremism
DAF	Sub-Saharan Africa Department
DAM	North Africa and Middle East Department
DAO	Oceania Department
DEU	Europe Department
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DSH	Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid
DVB	Security Policy Department
DVB/TN	Counterterrorism and National Security Division
EU	European Union
FTF	Foreign terrorist fighter
GCCS	Global Center on Cooperative Security
GCTF	Global Counterterrorism Forum
HoM	Head of Mission
IED	Improvised explosive device
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JAD	Jamaah Ansharut Daulah
KST	Parliamentary paper
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (of the Netherlands)
NCTV	National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
P/CVE	Preventing and countering violent extremism
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
RSC	Regional Security Coordinator
RST	Regional Security Team
Stabco	Regional Stability Coordinator
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America



Synthesis and recommendations

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) formed a network of Regional Security Coordinators (RSCs) in 2015 to assist with the Dutch government's efforts to reduce the international terrorist threat.¹ The RSCs have been posted to six embassies covering six different regions (see below). Although the RSCs are formally members of the staff of the embassy in question, for policy purposes they are members of the MFA's Counterterrorism and National Security Division (DVB/TN). Their objective is to analyse and report on country-specific and regional threats, and on trends in counterterrorism (CT) and in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). The RSCs are also expected to promote the Dutch approach² to CT and P/CVE in international forums, and to identify and monitor CT and P/CVE projects in their countries of operation.³

¹ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken en Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid. *Kamerbrief Versterking veiligheidsketen*. Parliamentary paper KST 29 754-302. 27 February 2015; and Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, *Parliamentary paper KST 34 550-V-7*, 15 November 2016: p. 24.

² DVB/TN describes the Dutch approach as 'a balance between counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in an inclusive manner, taking account of civil society, human rights and root causes'. RV Network Factbox (internal document). For further information, see Policy and Operations Evaluation Department. *Changing needs – need for change: integrating responses to extremist threats*. 2021.

³ Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal: 24; and *Preventie aan de Bron, Goedkoper & Duurzamer – Het BZ CT-netwerk*. Raamwerk BZ-aanpak radicalisering en terrorisme. (Internal Ministry of Foreign Affairs document).



Table 1 The RSCs and the regions they cover

Post	Region ^a
Bangkok ^b	South East Asia
Amman	Mashreq
Nairobi	Horn of Africa
Addis Ababa ^c	Sahel
Tunis	Maghreb
Sarajevo	Western Balkans ^d

a When the RSC network was formed in in 2015, an RSC was posted in Doha to cover the Gulf region. This post was scrapped in 2019.

b Relocated from Jakarta in 2018.

c Scheduled to move to Ouagadougou in 2021.

d This region was added to the RSC network in 2018.

This evaluation report assesses the added value of the network of RSCs for the MFA and the Dutch government more broadly – in terms of information position, diplomatic influence and project portfolio – and what lessons can be learned from the experience thus far. This synthesis first presents the key findings, which are discussed in more detail further on in the report. We then present a number of recommendations, including two possible scenarios for the consolidation of the network:

1. retain the current model, leaving the current structure of the RSC network intact, but sharpen its focus; or
2. form regional multi-disciplinary security teams, made up of the RSCs together with other embassy staff.



Key findings

There is no clearly articulated overall strategy to direct the activities of the RSC network.

When additional funds were made available in 2015 to counter radicalisation and terrorism, a deliberate choice was made to focus on implementation rather than on strategy development. As a result, the RSCs' activities (i.e. job description) and goals are formulated in fairly broad terms, and the way in which the network operates varies from one region to another, depending on both the context and the personality of the RSC in question. Nevertheless, we found that the RSCs make a favourable impression, are knowledgeable and well-connected, and act as sources of expertise and support for the embassies. The RSC network has proved to be a strategic model for building up a relatively high profile in CT and P/CVE with relatively few resources. Not many other countries use a model similar to the Dutch RSC network. The Netherlands is clearly a respected partner for stakeholders such as the USA, the EU, the UK and others in their regions of operation. The effectiveness of the RSC network would benefit from a clearly articulated strategy formulated by DVB/TN.

The wide-ranging nature of the RSCs' job descriptions,⁴ coupled with the large number of countries covered by some of them, hampers a shift towards more political reporting and analysis.

The start of the network was regarded as a pilot period, and the RSCs were given a great deal of freedom to set their own priorities. Despite recent efforts to streamline and harmonise the network, there is a great deal of variance in the way in which the RSCs operate in practice. Overall, the RSCs have four main objectives:

⁴ This key finding is not new. It was also one of the key findings of a 2018 internal MFA report on regional policy roles at foreign missions. The study showed that, with one exception, the job descriptions for all regional roles were far too wide-ranging and that no terms of reference had been prepared in advance. See: M. Gonggrijp and Kleinjan, M. *Regionale beleidsfuncties op posten: Van open deur naar deur op een kier*. 2018: p. 5.



1. to establish and maintain a network of national CT authorities, local stakeholders and counterparts from other diplomatic missions;
2. to analyse country-specific and regional security threats and trends, and inform the MFA both comprehensively and in good time;
3. to promote the Dutch approach to CT and P/CVE internationally;
4. to identify and monitor CT and P/CVE projects in their countries of operation.

As a result of this wide-ranging brief, several RSCs have found it hard to focus more sharply on political reporting and analysis, and have experienced what they have felt has been a lack of guidance from The Hague.

There is scope for improving the systematic articulation of information needs by and from clients in The Hague, as well as cooperation in the field with partners in the Dutch security chain. The ambition of the RSC network is to provide information to MFA staff, as well to other partners in the Dutch security chain, including the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), the Royal Dutch Military Constabulary, the Ministry of Defence and the security services. While there is some exchange of information with officials from other ministries, no systematic attempt has been made to identify the information needs of potential clients and to formulate specific questions for RSCs in the field. Cooperation between RSCs and liaison officers at embassies often depends on an RSC or an ambassador taking the initiative. The Hague (i.e. the MFA and other ministries) does not provide any guidance about cooperation with or the division of responsibilities with government staff stationed in embassies who are also working on security-related issues. Where there is coordination in the field between RSCs and liaison officers from other ministries, the focus lies on establishing a clear division of responsibilities rather than on cooperation between different subject specialists and the exchange of information and analyses.

The selection of the RSC country portfolios and duty stations is not always a strategic choice based on a threat analysis and information needs. The strategic use of resources and staff is unnecessarily hampered by bureaucratic obstacles. Preferred duty stations for RSCs have been opposed by embassies and other policy departments over concerns about logistical support and the division of responsibilities with other staff with a regional or security focus.

RSCs are spread too thinly, particularly those posted in South East Asia and Africa. An in-depth knowledge of in-country trends in radicalisation, access to trust networks and familiarity with realities on the ground are all essential prerequisites if RSCs are to make a difference in terms of CT and P/CVE. Without these, analyses remain superficial, projects cannot be monitored closely enough and effective local networks are hard to set up and maintain.

The coordinated, strategic management of the RSC network is hindered by HRM considerations as line responsibility for HRM lies with the Head of Mission (HoM) in the country in which the RSC is stationed. DVB/TN is responsible for the job descriptions, the posting of RSCs and overall policy guidance. The department coordinates with the HoM on job applications and the selection of RSCs. Ultimately, however, the line manager is formally responsible for the selection of RSCs as well as their performance assessment. Obviously, an RSC also performs certain duties formulated by his or her line manager. Although this helps to embed the RSC as a member of embassy staff, it does not encourage regional involvement. Moreover, the situation results in wide variance in the ways in which RSCs operate and limits the DVB/TN's span of control.

The RSC network has had some measure of success in promoting the Dutch approach to CT and P/CVE. RSCs identify and support projects that translate the Dutch approach to local contexts. RSCs also use their position to foster cooperation among regional authorities, national security coordinators and NGOs in their countries of operation. However, it is not clear how effective this approach has been and how easily the Dutch experience can be transferred to other contexts, such as the Sahel, Maghreb or Mashreq. Overall, no clear definition of 'the Dutch approach' has been given, and its interpretations range from multi-disciplinary consultations, with intensive cooperation and coordination between national and local levels, including both security-focused and non-security-focused actors, to the inclusion of human rights and civil society in CT activities.



The projects supported by RSCs come with different objectives: 1) to promote the Dutch approach to CT and P/CVE, as mentioned in the previous paragraph; 2) to improve the MFA's information position; 3) to pilot innovative approaches to P/CVE; and 4) to address violent extremism and its causes.

- **Projects can be used more effectively for the purpose of political reporting and analysis.** A number of projects have yielded specific information or have helped the Netherlands to build up a network position giving it access to wider CT-relevant information in a particular country. Nonetheless, the project portfolio and the RSCs' contacts are a valuable source of information that could be put to greater use than is currently the case. Given that the RSCs wish to use projects to bolster their information position, they are increasingly likely to support projects that help to establish connections with government offices. While this may certainly support their position vis-à-vis government agencies, relevant security information may also be gathered from other parties, including civil-society organisations and universities.
- **RSCs have supported pilot projects, particularly those promoting the Dutch approach to PVE. While some pilot projects have been followed up, overall learning and sustainability has been limited.** Implementers are positive about the fact that the DVB has funded small-scale pilot projects, given that many donors require larger programmes involving complicated tender procedures. However, monitoring and evaluation is often poor, making it hard to ascertain whether or not a pilot project has worked and what lessons can be learned for future programming. Moreover, donors operating in the field of P/CVE often prefer to support new projects rather than provide follow-up support for existing activities. As a result, both learning and the sustainability of P/CVE projects and results are very limited.
- **Projects have had a very limited impact on the prevention and countering of violent extremism, and need to be connected with longer-term development.** Those projects that have received funding are relatively small-scale and at best produce positive outcome results at an individual level. For this reason, any positive results have no more than a negligible direct or indirect impact on Dutch security. Moreover, a literature review commissioned by IOB⁵ focusing on the MFA's three most commonly funded interventions (i.e. youth engagement; national government and law enforcement capacity-building; and the reintegration of violent extremists) shows that there is hardly any evidence available for the effectiveness of projects in the field of CT and P/CVE.

The PVE toolkit can help to connect short-term security programmes targeting the symptoms of violent extremism with longer-term prevention strategies addressing wider socio-economic issues. Although the toolkit has helped to improve the PVE sensitivity and conflict sensitivity of development projects taking place in a context of violent extremism, this success has been limited to a small number of individual projects.



Recommendations

Formulate a clear strategy and milestones for the MFA's CT and P/CVE policies and the role played by the RSC network in this connection. Translate key policy priorities into *smart* objectives for specific geographic focal areas of the RSC network. Policy priorities for the RSC network – and a strategy with milestones based on them – should draw on a broader strategy for CT and P/CVE and its linkages with wider security and development issues, as formulated by DVB/TN.⁶ A clear strategy for the RSC network would give more guidance to the RSCs and improve the coherence of DVB/TN policy by better connecting the RSCs' work with the department's overall activities.

⁵ Available from the IOB website: <https://www.iob-evaluatie.nl/publicaties/deelstudies/2021/02/01/literatuurstudies-%E2%80%93-contraterrorisme-en-voorkomen-and-tegengaan-van-gewelddadig-extremisme>.

⁶ See Policy and Operations Evaluation Department. *Changing needs – need for change: integrating responses to extremist threats*. 2021.



Invest in analytical capacity in order to feed policy development. DVB/TN's analytical role is crucial for the development of policies and strategies, both for the MFA and for partners in the Dutch security chain. The RSC network plays a vital role in the Dutch information position on CT and P/CVE. During the past two years, DVB/TN has shifted the focus of the RSC network from the implementation of pilot activities to political reporting and analysis. This analytical role could be further strengthened to include a contribution to independent analysis, threat assessments and need-driven policy development. In concrete terms, we propose the following:

- DVB/TN should engage with other policy departments at the MFA, partners in the Dutch security chain and the RSCs to set information priorities for each geographic region. Assess what kind of information is needed and from which regions this information can best be gathered, and better instruct RSCs about the topics on which, when and to whom they should report.
- Establish and expand working relations with other MFA departments and with associated Dutch ministries, and coordinate and cooperate with other embassy liaison officers⁷ on a more systematic basis, with support from ministries in The Hague.
- RSCs should keep an eye on policy developments and priorities in The Hague and report in good time on potentially relevant developments in their own regions.

Line responsibility for the RSCs should be transferred to the DVB/TN, so that it can play a more important role in the strategic coordination of the RSC network. The RSCs are vital assets: their added value should be fine-tuned with regional and national security trends in their areas of operation, and with their linkages with the Netherlands. This requires a more hands-on management of the RSC network in terms of setting targets for products and results, and sharing best practices and lessons learned. In order to prevent a situation from arising in which the RSCs operate as lone workers in their host embassies, DVB/TN should also coordinate with the HoMs. An ability to work in conflict settings, build networks and play a bridging role are vital characteristics for the RSCs.

Invest in coordination and cooperation with interlinking fields that are essential in order to understand and address security issues. Security is not a silo issue. The nexus with other related fields is key to achieving impact. While hard security responses to perpetrators of violence may be a necessity in countering violent extremism and terrorism, they cannot succeed without a soft approach that addresses marginalisation and other factors that fuel support for violent extremist groups. Short-term security programmes targeting the symptoms of violent extremism should be better aligned with longer-term prevention strategies targeting wider social, economic and psychological factors.

The number of countries in an RSC's portfolio should be limited, and should be based on the region-specific information priorities described above. Country and regional assessments of security threats and trends and their links with the Netherlands should inform RSC postings and their span of control. The current situation, in which some RSCs are required to cover a relatively large number of countries, which may also be geographically dispersed, is not ideal. The analysis of threats and trends should support policy development and the prioritisation of geographic areas and topics to be covered by Dutch CT and P/CVE interventions. A broadly informed analysis can support the formulation of clear policies and programme priorities and give them a clear geographic focus. It should also guide the focus of RSCs, while at the same time giving them clear criteria for flexible responses to emerging security threats to the Netherlands and its interests abroad.

Make systematic use of local 'spokes' and/or dedicated embassy staff in every country of operation. This applies particularly to high-priority countries. The use of 'spokes,' i.e. locally recruited staff, greatly extends the RSCs' outreach. Cases such as the Western Balkans show that these experts often have better access to local stakeholders, and supply intelligence and network connections that go deep beneath the surface. The added value of local spokes also lies in their ability to identify activities and monitor projects more closely, as they are able to pay regular visits to the field and are therefore better placed to assess the potential gap between actual achievements and the reported outcomes (i.e. the reality on paper).

⁷ The staff of some Dutch embassies and foreign missions include liaison officers from other Dutch ministries and government agencies.



Base the selection of projects on the specific priorities set for each region, and monitor project effectiveness with reference to the objectives set for them. If the main objective of a project is to enhance the MFA's information position, the selection of projects should be guided by region-specific information priorities (see above). Where the primary objective is to pilot an approach and directly address violent extremism, a greater effort should be made to evaluate the project's effectiveness and share lessons both within and beyond the RSC network. Projects can do both good and harm, and it is essential to better understand the effects of interventions in this sensitive field.



Scenarios for implementation

The context of CT has changed since the launch of the RSC network. As a result, DVB/TN needs to reconsider its geographic and thematic priorities. IOB defined two vital geographic areas where there have been developments pertaining to violent extremism and terrorism as having potential linkages to the security of the Netherlands and Dutch interests: a southern and an eastern security arena.

Developments in these arenas directly affect stability and security in and around Europe. The MFA's Integrated International and Security Strategy emphasises that the clout and sphere of influence of violent extremist groups in regions around Europe, and the resultant terrorist threat and irregular flows of migration towards Europe, will continue to require considerable attention in the years to come.⁸ For this reason, the RSC network should focus its efforts on these two areas:

- **The southern security arena:**
 - The terrorist threat in West Africa has increased considerably over the past few years, destabilising vast territories. Jihadist groups have spread from the north to central and southern Mali, displacing residents and wreaking more violence. Extremists are causing havoc in Niger and have killed hundreds of civilians in Burkina Faso. Boko Haram and Islamic State's West African Province operate from safe havens in the Lake Chad basin. Jihadist militant groups are also threatening coastal states such as Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast. Overall, the security situation in the Sahel is rapidly deteriorating. Terrorist and violent extremist groups are using transnational organised crime to finance and logistically support their activities, for example by trafficking goods (such as drugs, weapons, motorcycles and cattle) selling natural resources (gold and diamonds), and engaging in human trafficking and migrant smuggling.
 - There are clear security-related linkages between the Sahel and the Maghreb. Violent extremist groups from the Maghreb can easily cross borders into the Sahel, destabilising the region and causing migrants and refugees from the Sahel to try and make their way towards more stable regions such as Europe. Violent extremist groups often benefit from criminal networks that facilitate migration and smuggling to Europe. A meaningful response to the growing extremist threat in the Sahel should focus on the southern security arena and make an explicit connection between the Sahel and the Maghreb.

⁸ Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. *Kamerbrief tussenrapportage Geïntegreerde Buitenland- en Veiligheidsstrategie*. April 2020. Available in Dutch at <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/04/17/kamerbrief-tussenrapportage-geintegreerde-buitenland--en-veiligheidsstrategie> (last retrieved on 22 June 2021).



- **The eastern security arena:**

- Terrorist and extremist linkages between countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and the Balkans pose a threat to stability in and around Europe.
- Although the Balkans have not witnessed major terrorist incidents or attacks in recent years, Islamic and ethno-nationalist radicalisation remains a transnational security risk. The MFA should also monitor foreign influence in Balkan countries exerted by Middle Eastern countries, for example, especially since the Balkan borders the EU.
- There is a clear threat of terrorism and violent extremism emanating from the Mashreq (particularly from countries such as Syria, Iraq and Lebanon) and Iran. As part of the 'ring of instability' around Europe, the Mashreq is an important area of focus for the MFA. Although South Asian countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan do not directly border Europe, they pose undisputed terrorist and violent extremist threats to Europe. Terrorist organisations such as Al-Qa'ida have targeted Europe from South Asia.

Based on these two security arenas, IOB proposes **two scenarios for the implementation of the recommendations**. Both of them require a rigorous assessment of security contexts, stakeholders and information needs as a basis for decisions on country portfolios, information needs and project priorities. It is a matter of choosing from the following alternatives:

1. **retain the current model, leaving the current structure of the RSC network intact, but sharpen its focus; or**
2. **form multi-disciplinary regional security teams, made up of the RSCs together with other embassy staff.**

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In this first scenario, the current RSC model remains broadly intact. The primary aim of the RSC network is to establish trust networks that allow RSCs to act as brokers between stakeholders in their countries of operation and to build up a strong information position. A stakeholder analysis (of the presence of key organisations) and a security assessment (of key actors and risk areas) should be used to identify duty stations at vital policy and operational choke points. This could result in the redeployment of certain RSCs (such as those for South East Asia and the Horn of Africa). Information priorities should be based on a needs assessment conducted among MFA departments and partners in the Dutch security chain. The RSCs should adopt an in-depth approach, thus necessarily limiting the number of countries in any RSC's portfolio. Closer cooperation and coordination among the RSCs should be fostered, in order to reveal connections between different countries and regions.

1. **Form multi-disciplinary regional security teams, made up of the RSCs together with other embassy staff.**

In the second scenario, RSCs set up and coordinate regional security teams (RSTs) to oversee and operate in the above-mentioned southern and eastern security arenas. These RSTs should be composed of the RSCs and other embassy staff, including development experts, other regional coordinators (for example, for stability, rule of law and migration), local 'spokes' and liaison officers from other ministries. They should work on an interdisciplinary basis, adopting a holistic perspective on security issues.

- Based on an assessment of the security context in interrelated countries and regions, the RSTs inform embassies and the MFA in The Hague about opportunities for interventions. They gather evidence on successful methods of capacity-building for state institutions and bottom-up approaches that improve the security situations of affected communities and enhance the social contract between the state and citizens in the region.
- Each RST operates from a regional hub and connects with local 'spokes' and embassy staff.
- Regional policy departments could improve the coordination of security dossiers and cross-regional issues between the Maghreb and the Sahel (viz. the North Africa and the Middle East Department (DAM) and the Sub-Saharan Africa Department (DAF), and between Eastern Europe, the Mashreq and South Asia (viz. the Europe Department (DEU), the DAM and the Asia and Oceania Department (DAO)).

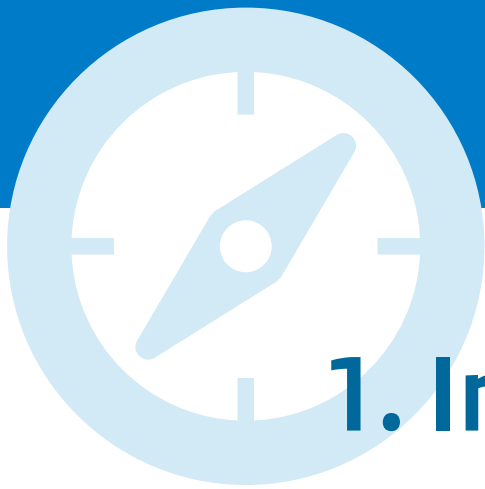


- Closer cooperation among RSTs at the embassy level would follow if locally based liaison officers working for partners in the Dutch security chain were clearly instructed to assist RSTs from their headquarters in the Netherlands.
- A broader area of operation enables the RSTs to concentrate on vital interlinkages and respond more rapidly and flexibly to new security threats.

The development and formation of these teams should be a cooperative effort on the part of DVB/TN, policy departments at the MFA (including the regional departments and the Department for Stabilisation and Humanitarian Aid (DSH)) and relevant embassies. Moreover, the presence of liaison officers in these RSTs means that relevant partners from the Dutch security chain (such as the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Defence) should also be involved.

Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows. This synthesis presents recommendations and a summary of findings. Chapter 1 describes the background of the evaluation and the methodology used. Chapter 2 looks at the operation of the RSC network, drawing on the views of the network's stakeholders, and assesses the operational management of the RSCs. The country portfolios are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 analyses the objectives set for the network's operation and the results that have been achieved. Region-specific findings and conclusions are presented in chapter 4.



1. Introduction

The MFA's Policy Operations and Evaluation Department (IOB) is currently conducting an evaluation of the MFA's counterterrorism policy.⁹ This report on the MFA's RSC network is one of the building blocks for this evaluation. Given the broad nature of the MFA's areas of operation in the field of CT and P/CVE, the evaluation focuses on a selected set of subjects which function as building blocks. Based on these building blocks, IOB will be producing a synthesis report containing an assessment of the MFA's objectives for CT and P/CVE, and setting out a number of lessons and recommendations for future policy and programming. This evaluation of the RSC network is one of the building blocks.¹⁰

⁹ For the full terms of reference of this evaluation, see: <https://english.iob-evaluatie.nl/in-progress/publications/terms-of-reference/2020/02/20/evaluation-counterterrorism-policy>.

¹⁰ The other building blocks are a Delphi study performed by IOB; a policy reconstruction performed by IOB; a literature review by RUSI of the effectiveness of CT and P/CVE activities (and the conditions needed for their effectiveness); and a study of the Dutch role in the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) carried out by a consultancy firm (the Glocal Connection).



Given the large amounts that DVB/TN has invested in the RSC network, IOB feels that an evaluation of the network is both relevant and opportune. Moreover, DVB/TN is currently in the process of assessing the network and sharpening the focus of its objectives and activities. This evaluation seeks to contribute to this process.

1.1 Methodology and limitations

The evaluation used qualitative research methods to answer the research questions set out in the terms of reference. These research questions were translated into guidelines for semi-structured interviews with more than 110 interviewees. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, most of these interviews were conducted online with the aid of MS Teams. Interviews were conducted with MFA staff in The Hague and Dutch embassies around the world, other Dutch government officials, and staff from implementing organisations and partners in the field. In most cases, all three researchers from the IOB evaluation team were present during the interviews. The evaluation team decided to structure the interviews geographically, which meant that separate sets of interviews were conducted for each RSC and region. The evaluation team conducted the first digital interviews with stakeholders in South East Asia, and then worked its way from the Western Balkans to the Maghreb, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, finishing in the Mashreq. These interviews provided the evaluation team with valuable information on the RSC network, including both general and region-specific material. In order to structure the findings for each individual region, the evaluation team undertook a series of regional analyses. Also, once all the digital interviews had been completed, each individual member of the evaluation team formulated a set of key findings and conclusions on the RSC network. The analyses were triangulated with the aid of desk reviews and analyses of public policy documents, internal documents, project documents and communications made available to the evaluation team. The team also took part in a number of online RSC network events.

This study was severely limited by the travel restrictions imposed to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. These forced us to cancel planned project visits and live interviews that were foreseen with key stakeholders in the field. We could not therefore independently assess the results of specific projects supported by the RSCs. We had to rely on project reports and meetings with a small number of policy officers and staff from implementing organisations. Most interviews were conducted using videoconferencing. Despite these impediments, the evaluation team was nonetheless able to conduct a large number of interviews with key stakeholders. The openness of interviewees was beyond our expectations: our impression was that people spoke freely during the interviews.



2. General operation of the RSC network

The first section describes the regions and country portfolios covered by the RSCs, and how the network is embedded in the MFA. The second section looks at the overall operation of the RSC network, drawing on the views of its stakeholders.

The formation of the RSC network was funded by the ‘capacity-strengthening funds’ allocated by the Dutch cabinet on 27 February 2015 to a number of ministries and government agencies, including the MFA. The government justified this funding on the following grounds: ‘In view of the expected long-term nature of the current threat, the government has decided to substantially strengthen the security chain in a number of areas.’¹¹

¹¹ Ministerie van Algemene Zaken en Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid. *Kamerbrief Versterking veiligheidsketen*. Parliamentary paper KST 29 754-302. 27 February 2015. Our translation.



2.1 The RSCs' country portfolios

The RSCs were attached to six embassies covering six different regions. All RSCs have their own country portfolio, which consists of a number of 'focus countries' and, in some cases, a number of 'flexible countries' that are also included on account of their potential links with focus countries. Although priority is given to the focus countries, the idea is that flexible countries should not be overlooked and RSCs are entitled to identify CT and P/CVE projects in these countries as well.

Table 1 *The RSCs and their country portfolios*^a

Post	Region ^b	Focus countries	Flexible countries
Bangkok ^c	South East Asia	Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore	Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and the Maldives
Amman	Mashreq	Iraq (including Kurdish territories), Jordan and Lebanon	
Nairobi	Horn of Africa	Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda	
Addis Ababa ^d	Sahel	Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria	Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mauritania and Sudan
Tunis	Maghreb	Algeria, Libya and Tunisia	
Sarajevo	Western Balkans ^e	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia	

- ^a Regional CT network factbox and multiannual CT and P/CVE results frameworks for all the regions (internal documents).
- ^b When the RSC network was formed in 2015, an RSC was posted in Doha to cover the Gulf region. This post was scrapped in 2019.
- ^c Relocated from Jakarta in 2018.
- ^d Scheduled to move to Ouagadougou in 2021.
- ^e This region was added to the RSC network in 2018.

Somewhat surprisingly, there is no policy on or clear strategy for the use of RSCs. The selection of their country portfolios and duty stations is not always the result of a strategic choice based on a threat analysis, but is also influenced by more practical or bureaucratic considerations. For instance, the composition of the Mashreq countries does not follow from a needs assessment, but is based primarily on the fact that the three countries in the portfolio are high-priority countries for Dutch development cooperation in general. This is why countries such as Syria, Iran and Turkey are not included. The decision to transfer the RSC for South East Asia from Jakarta to Bangkok is another example. While Indonesia is a high-priority country, Thailand is not even one of the countries in the RSC's country portfolio. The transfer stemmed from purely practical arguments such as logistics. Preferred duty stations for RSCs have also been opposed by embassies and other policy departments due to concerns over logistical support and the division of responsibilities with other staff with a regional or security focus.

At present, there is considerable disparity in the number of countries covered by RSCs, with some RSCs covering three countries and others as many as six (in the case of the RSC for the Western Balkans) or even nine (the RSC for South East Asia) or ten (the RSC for the Sahel). In the latter cases, the RSCs are spread too thinly: they have been assigned too many countries to be able to genuinely understand the local dynamics and security contexts. An in-depth knowledge of in-country trends in radicalisation, access to trust networks and familiarity with realities on the ground are all essential prerequisites if RSCs are to make a difference in terms of CT and P/CVE. Without these, analyses remain superficial, projects cannot be monitored closely enough and effective local networks are hard to set up and maintain. For example, the RSC for South East Asia stationed in Bangkok needs to cover Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia and Bangladesh (these are the focus countries), as well as 'flexible countries' in South Asia such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and India.¹² The RSC for the Sahel (also referred to

¹² See multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the South East Asia region (internal document).



internal documents as the 'RSC for sub-Saharan Africa') focuses on the wider Sahel region, in particular the Liptako Gourma region (i.e. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger) and the Lake Chad region (i.e. Nigeria, Niger and Chad). However, he or she is also required to keep track of possible spill-over effects from the Sahel to the coastal states, as well as to be available for ad-hoc responses to situations arising in Benin, Mauretania, Cameroon, Sudan and Ethiopia.¹³

The ability of the RSCs to build functional networks and acquire an information position depends very much on their ability to be active and regularly present in their countries of operation. In other words, their networking abilities and information position depend on:

- the number of countries in their portfolio;
- the logistical opportunities (and difficulties) for regular travel to and between these countries;
- the support they receive from embassies (i.e. from local spokes or other staff). The support given to an RSC also depends on the embassy's perception of their added value;
- the extent to which a country's culture allows relationships and trust to be built (or prevents them from being built), and the RSCs' understanding of cultural norms and values.

Where RSCs are less able to be regularly active in the countries in their portfolio, they become more involved in the country in which they are stationed, while their work in other countries tends to focus more on project identification (as opposed to building networks). The fact that the ambassador is responsible for the RSC's personnel management has the effect of boosting his or her operational allegiance and hence the likelihood of his or her becoming involved in the embassy's day-to-day affairs. Thus, the more countries are included in an RSC's portfolio, the less able he or she is to undertake political reporting.

2.2 The operation of the RSC network

The general picture of the performance of individual RSCs is a positive one. Overall, IOB found that the RSCs make a favourable impression, and are knowledgeable, approachable and well-connected. The RSCs are able to ensure that relatively unconventional topics such as CT and P/CVE are placed firmly on the agenda and provide embassy staff in their regions with invaluable advice and support in implementing this agenda. They excel as 'brokers' when working in a country affected by CT and P/CVE, linking up previously isolated silos such as regional authorities, national security coordinators and local NGOs. The particular way in which a network operates varies from one region to another, however, depending on both the context and the RSC's personality.

The past year of Covid-19 restrictions has severely limited the ability of RSCs to travel and build and maintain their information position with the aid of in-country networks. The restrictions have also affected the added value an RSC can bring to an embassy; only so much can be done from a distance via videoconferencing. Despite these circumstances, the RSCs have continued to operate as well as they can, and colleagues and partners are invariably positive about their work.

Apart from variations in the regions covered by the RSCs, there is also variation among the countries in the RSCs' portfolios. In particular, the added value an RSC brings to an embassy differs from one country to another. Some embassies in the regions where the RSCs operate do not have any capacity for CT and P/CVE (this applies, for example, to the embassies in Colombo, Manilla, Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Maputo). The RSCs can offer these embassies a specific form of expertise and clearly represent added value in these instances. However, other embassies already have in-house knowledge of and capacity for security and CT and P/CVE issues, and regard these as forming part of their work (this applies to the embassies in Baghdad, Erbil, Bamako and Jakarta, for example). As a result, the RSC's contribution is more limited.

¹³ See multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel) region (internal document).



When the interviewees were asked about the RSC's regional and cross-border perspective, the reactions were mixed. In some cases, the RSC's regional perspective proved to be useful (for example, in the case of the Horn of Africa, the RSC's judgement of the situation in Somalia-Kenya and Cabo Delgado). In other instances, however, the specific national context (as in Albania or Bosnia and Herzegovina) or the size of the country portfolio (as in South East Asia) made it difficult to move beyond a bilateral perspective. And in the case of the Mashreq region, there did not appear to be any regional perspective at all.

Cooperation between RSCs and liaison officers at the embassies often depends on an RSC or ambassador taking the initiative, and may include ad-hoc exchanges of information and/or participation in regular meetings of the embassy's 'security cluster'. However, neither the MFA nor other ministries have issued any guidance on cooperation or the division of responsibilities among different government staff working on security-related issues, such as defence attachés, members of the Royal Dutch Military Constabulary and members of the security services.

In all countries in which the RSCs are active, like-minded donors are engaged in similar activities. Only a small number of donors use a model similar to the RSC network, even though it has been demonstrated to be a strategic model that has enabled the Netherlands to build up a relatively high profile with relatively few resources. As a result, the Netherlands is a respected partner of key stakeholders such as the US, the EU and the UK. The level of coordination and cooperation with other donors depends on the country in question. In several countries, the RSC plays or has played a coordinating role in a donor group (e.g. in Jordan, Somalia and Tunisia) or has organised regular meetings with like-minded donors on CT and P/CVE (e.g. in Kenya). In other countries, engagement with other donors is more informal and ad hoc. This coordinating role in donor groups is seen as a strength, as it allows a relatively small financial player to play a leading role in the field.

2.3 The operational management of the RSCs

Line responsibility for each RSC lies with the Head of Mission (HoM) in the country in which the RSC is stationed (see section 2.1). The HoM is also responsible for the selection of the RSC. Obviously, an RSC also performs certain duties requested by his or her line manager, which may or may not be consistent with DVB/TN's focus. RSCs receive policy guidance from DVB/TN, which is responsible for the RSCs' job descriptions and postings. Other embassies in an RSC's region of operation are not always involved in the selection and posting procedure; this appears to depend mainly on the responsible HoM. We also found that, in some cases, other embassies in the RSC's region of operation were not consulted or did not provide input for the RSC's annual performance reviews, even though the RSC operated in their country.

The HoM's line responsibility helps to embed the RSC as a member of embassy staff. The RSC's host embassy is in closest contact with the RSC, and therefore appears best placed to assess his or her performance. On the other hand, this hampers the coordinated, strategic management of the RSC network by DVB/TN. At the outset, the RSCs were allowed to shape their own roles and portfolios. This made sense, since the regions in which the RSCs were posted came with their own specific circumstances and dynamics in terms of extremism and terrorism. After three years, DVB/TN tried to provide more guidance by producing a 'multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework' for each RSC. In addition, greater emphasis was placed on strengthening the Dutch information position and political reporting. However, despite these efforts, there is no evidence of any systematic form of reporting and DVB/TN has not produced any clear instructions or information requirements, apart from on the RSCs' contributions to the threat assessment reports produced by the NCTV.¹⁴

¹⁴ Terrorist Threat Assessments for the Netherlands. See <https://english.nctv.nl/topics/terrorist-threat-assessment-netherlands>.



The RSCs in a number of regions are also required to coordinate with other regional coordinators working on related subjects. For example, DEU has appointed a ‘regional stability coordinator’ (stabco) for the Western Balkans, and DAF has a Sahel coordinator in Dakar. In practice, much of the cooperation and coordination is left to the regional coordinators themselves. It makes sense not to manage the division of responsibilities among regional coordinators on a top-down basis, given that the best solution is highly context-specific. The downside is that the effectiveness of cooperation is heavily influenced by the personal relationship between individual regional coordinators.

2.4 Local spokes

The RSC for the Western Balkans has six countries in his portfolio, and operates in close cooperation with the stabco, who covers the same countries. The RSC and the stabco also share a system of local spokes: a local member of staff¹⁵ who is available to support the RSC and the stabco. These local staff members usually have a background in security, speak the local language and understand the local security context and culture. In short, the evaluation team found that:

- Spokes act as an RSC’s eyes and ears on the ground when he or she is not in the country. Local spokes also offer added value in that they can identify activities and monitor projects (more closely) as they are able to pay regular visits to the field and are therefore better placed to assess the potential gap between actual achievements and the paper reality.
- Spokes can take on part of the RSC’s workload, allowing the RSC to deal with more strategic issues. At the same time, managing a local spoke also means extra work for the RSC.
- Local spokes may sometimes find it more difficult (or even impossible) to gain access to government institutions or the diplomatic network, as compared with accredited diplomatic staff. On the other hand, local spokes are sources of contextual knowledge and have access to sources of local information that foreign staff do not possess.

A similar system does not operate in other regions, although some embassies do have local staff available to assist the RSC. Overall, the support of local staff enables an RSC to cover more ground and work more effectively.

¹⁵ This applies to the embassies in Belgrade, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje and Tirana, so there are five local spokes in total.



3. The RSCs' job descriptions

This chapter examines the RSCs' job descriptions, analysing the objectives set for the RSC network in relation to the way in which the network operates and the results it has achieved.

DVB/TN strengthened its CT network in 2015. It consisted of the Regional Security Coordinators (RSCs), Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) liaison officers and staff seconded to international organisations. One year after the CT network was launched, DVB/TN produced a framework document for the operation of the network¹⁶ that identified the following four 'result areas':

- **Connecting** developments and efforts in an RSC's country and region of operation with demand in the Netherlands. Cooperation with other ministries and partners in the Dutch security chain is vital in this respect.

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Preventie aan de Bron, Goedkoper & Duurzamer – Het BZ CT-netwerk. Raamwerk BZ-aanpak radicalisering en terrorisme*, 2016/17. Internal DVB/TN document.



- **Looking ahead:** Dutch agencies or bodies are fully informed in good time about topical issues with a direct or indirect impact on Dutch security. The focus is on the network's analytical tasks, so that reports can be linked to (future) information needs emanating from the security chain and international forums. The more active detection of trends in threats (i.e. early warning) is an example of this.
- **Strengthening:** The authorities in non-EU countries as well as the international CT forums are familiar with the Dutch integrated approach and the unique Dutch areas of expertise thanks to active promotion by the network. Using Dutch expertise to step up the fight against terrorism in other countries also helps to mitigate the threat to the Netherlands.
- **Achieving:** Projects are initiated and implemented that support policy measures in the Netherlands and implement international good practices (as identified by the GCTF), thereby contributing directly or indirectly to Dutch security.

Drawing on this framework for the diplomatic CT network, the RSCs may be said to have four main objectives:

1. to establish and maintain a network of national CT authorities, local stakeholders and counterparts from other diplomatic missions;
2. to analyse country-specific and regional security threats and trends, and inform The Hague comprehensively and in good time (see section 3.1 on page 23);
3. to promote the Dutch approach to CT and P/CVE internationally (see section 3.2 on page 24);
4. to identify and monitor CT and P/CVE projects in their countries of operation (see section 3.3 on page 24).

The ideal profile for an RSC is someone who has many talents and whose overall performance is outstanding. An RSC is expected to analyse country-specific and regional security threats and trends, and inform The Hague comprehensively and in good time. He or she is also required to identify and monitor CT and P/CVE projects in their countries of operation, and use such projects to test innovative approaches. Moreover, projects should serve to improve the RSC's information position on contextual matters and his or her local networking ability. This is a daunting task, bearing in mind that a single RSC could be responsible for up to ten countries. It also has consequences for the impact of an RSC's work.

The first few years after the launch of the network in 2015 were regarded as a period of 'pioneering' and 'learning by doing'. This meant that individual RSCs were given plenty of latitude to shape their own position and portfolio, and decide which objectives to prioritise and how to achieve them. This enabled the RSCs to adapt to their local contexts: there are differences from one region to another in terms of specific extremist threats, what these imply for Dutch policies, what is possible in terms of networking (e.g. cultural differences), the needs and opportunities for projects, and so on. This pioneering period also created space for RSCs to shape an individual position, depending on their personalities and particular preferences. It also allowed RSCs to build on their personal strengths. At the same time, it also resulted in heterogeneity in the RSCs' position, roles and tasks. As a result of the limited amount of guidance from The Hague, the RSCs and their counterparts at the Security Policy Department (DVB) operated on a fairly loose-knit basis.

Following this start-up period, the DVB/TN tried to streamline and harmonise the RSC network. Result frameworks were developed for each region based on a common format, and additional emphasis was placed on the objective of strengthening the Dutch information position and political reporting. The RSCs were also instructed to produce personal annual plans and had weekly calls with their contacts at DVB/TN in The Hague to discuss project portfolios and political reports. DVB/TN also began to organise annual team meetings and, more recently, initiated monthly videoconference meetings with all RSCs.



Nonetheless, some RSCs have found it hard to sharpen their focus on political reporting and analysis, and have experienced what they feel is a lack of guidance from The Hague. As far as the latter is concerned, three factors have hampered DVB/TN in managing the RSC network in a coordinated, strategic fashion:

1. First, the wide-ranging nature of the RSCs' job descriptions, coupled with the large number of countries covered by some RSCs, does not help to bring about the desired shift towards a greater emphasis on political reporting and analysis. Apart from political reporting, RSCs have to travel regularly to each focus country in order to build and maintain a network, and follow-up on project results and reports. Heavily invested as they are in their operating context, they tend to prioritise tasks depending on what they feel is most important in that context.
2. The strategic, coordinated management of the RSC network is also hampered by the fact that the HoM in which an RSC is stationed bears line responsibility for the RSC in question. Even though DVB/TN is responsible for the RSCs' job descriptions, the posting of RSCs and overall policy guidance, the line managers are ultimately responsible for the selection of RSCs as well as their performance assessments. The RSCs naturally also perform duties set by their line managers. Although this helps to embed each RSC as a member of embassy staff, it produces great variance in the ways in which the RSCs operate and limits DVB/TN's ability to coordinate and manage them.
3. IOB found that political reports on CT and P/CVE prepared by the RSC for one region did not always coincide with the broader views on bilateral relations held by the embassies in the RSC's focus countries. RSCs sometimes have to spend a great deal of time discussing the contents of their reports with embassies, at the expense of focus and speed.

3.1 Information position and political reporting

In the past few years, DVB/TN has increasingly prioritised improving the information position, and political and security reporting. DVB/TN wants the RSC network to provide useful information to MFA staff as well to other partners in the Dutch security chain, such as the NCTV, the Public Prosecution Service and possibly the Ministry of Defence and the security services.

The MFA's added value stems from its reports on security trends and from the fact that its reports are public – as opposed to reports produced by the security services, for instance. The degree of interest taken by Dutch security chain partners in reports emanating from the RSC network is mixed, however. In some cases, their interest is limited to specific countries or lies in topics other than CT and P/CVE. Yet, in view of the 'glocal' and 'networked' nature of CT and P/CVE – which may include ties to global criminal networks and involvement in human trafficking and drug and arms smuggling – there is a great potential for coordination and information-sharing among partners in the Dutch security chain. Although DVB/TN has taken steps to map the information needs of Dutch partners, there is scope for improving both the systematic articulation of information needs by and from clients in The Hague, and cooperation among partners in the Dutch security chain.

Several of the embassies where the RSCs work also employ liaison officers from other ministries and entities, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Royal Dutch Military Constabulary and the police force. Cooperation between RSCs and these liaison officers often depends on an RSC or an ambassador taking the initiative, and may include ad-hoc exchanges of information and/or participation in regular meetings of the embassy's 'security cluster' (as is the case in Bangkok and Tunis). However, neither the MFA nor other ministries issue any guidance on cooperation or the division of responsibilities among different government staff working on security-related issues. Where there is coordination between RSCs and liaison officers from other ministries, this generally appears to focus on demarcating tasks rather than on cooperation and the creation of synergy from the exchange of information and analyses.



One factor that affects the relevance of the reports shared by the RSCs is that they focus exclusively on what is a niche in overall security policy, i.e. CT and P/CVE. The advantage is that the RSCs can provide specific expertise on this topic, particularly for embassies. Another advantage of operating in a niche is that work can be attuned specifically to the needs of the target audience. There is plenty of scope for improvement here, particularly by articulating more specific information needs for the RSCs to address. However, the downside of operating in a niche is that an RSC's added value is limited to issues related to terrorism, and that his or her information is therefore only generally of interest to a small audience. For example, several policy officers from the MFA's regional departments said that they had only limited contacts with RSCs in order to obtain information from the ground.

3.2 Promoting the Dutch approach

Another key objective of the RSC network has been to promote the Dutch approach to CT and P/CVE abroad. DVB/TN describes the Dutch approach as 'a balance between counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in an inclusive manner, taking account of civil society, human rights and root causes.'¹⁷ However, there is no explicit definition of a Dutch approach, and its interpretations range from a multidisciplinary stakeholder approach to the inclusion of civil society and human rights. In essence, promoting the Dutch approach involves sharing Dutch experiences and the methods used in the Netherlands, and adapting these to the contexts of other countries. There are severe limitations to this, however: the experiences with the rehabilitation of a very small number of FTFs backed by the coordinated efforts of police forces, detention centres and social services are not easily transferred to settings involving large numbers of FTFs and limited state capacity. Nonetheless, the Netherlands – together with a number of like-minded European countries – has provided a counterweight to the hard security approaches favoured by most countries, by promoting a softer, more social approach in addition to the primarily hard security approach to countering violent extremism.

The RSCs use two strategies to promote the Dutch approach:

1. funding projects;
2. building networks and connecting silos.

First, a number of projects have drawn explicitly on the Dutch approach to the prevention of violent extremism. These include projects bringing together a range of stakeholders in a whole-of-government approach, and projects promoting community policing or the rehabilitation of former members of violent extremist groups. Secondly, RSCs build local networks in their countries of operation and use their positions to connect silos that have not previously been working together, such as regional authorities, national security coordinators and local NGOs. Moreover, the RSCs help countries to devise CT and P/CVE action plans and try to incorporate Dutch aspects of CT and P/CVE (such as human rights and a soft approach) in these plans.

3.3 Project support and promoting impact

One of the RSCs' objectives is to identify and monitor CT and P/CVE projects in their countries of operation. The RSCs identify projects either themselves through their networks or (as in some cases) with the support of an embassy. Before a project receives funding, the RSC in question consults the relevant policy departments in The Hague (i.e. DVB/TN or a regional department). The RSCs do not have a budget of their own and make use either of DVB/TN's funds for CT and P/CVE¹⁸ or of the ministry's Stability Fund.¹⁹

¹⁷ DVB/TN. Regional CT Network Factbox. Internal DVB/TN document.

¹⁸ Part of the capacity-strengthening funds.

¹⁹ The Stability Fund was set up in 2003 to support activities at the intersection of peace, security and development in countries and regions threatened by conflict or in which conflicts have taken place. The aim of the Fund is to finance demand-driven activities that contribute to stability, reconstruction and state formation in conflict and post-conflict countries.



Although the framework document states that projects need to support policy measures in the Netherlands and implement the GCTF's good practices, our own findings do not suggest that this is the case. Although DVB staff and RSCs share project documents when they are published, there is no requirement to focus on certain best practices when funding projects. Projects may have different objectives: they may be designed to try out a new approach to CT & P/CVE, to achieve specific results or outcomes in relation to CT & P/CVE, or to gain access to networks and information on trends in CT & P/CVE. We found that, at the outset, the RSCs were asked to identify innovative projects that could act as pilot projects and, if successful, be scaled up and promote the Dutch approach to P/CVE (with an emphasis on community policing or human rights, for example). However, during the past two years, DVB/TN has been more interested in identifying projects that could help the RSCs gather information or intelligence on CT, P/CVE or other security-related issues. For this reason, RSCs are increasingly likely to support projects that help to establish connections with government offices. These include projects involving the prison or border services or community policing.

A number of projects have yielded specific information or have helped the Netherlands to build up a network position giving it access to wider CT-relevant information in a particular country (for example, information supplied by other governments about the identities or whereabouts of FTFs). In most cases, however, projects do not directly shape Dutch policy choices or positions. Rather, projects are used to illustrate the Dutch approach in different contexts, to act as pilot CT or P/CVE projects, or to provide more general information (e.g. to answer questions raised by members of parliament). Moreover, full use is not always made of projects in order to gather information on security, CT or P/CVE issues. This differs not only from one RSC to another, but also from one project to another. While RSCs often develop a close relationship with operational staff and pro-actively question them about the project and wider security concerns, we also encountered a number of projects in relation to which staff said they had had only limited contacts with the RSC in question.

IOB found that implementers were positive about the fact that DVB funded small-scale pilot projects. They said that there were not many opportunities for funding relatively low-cost projects piloting a new approach; donors often favoured large-scale projects funded through tender procedures. However, in general, the risk with one-off projects is that sustainability could be an issue, especially if they are not embedded in broader institutional settings and if there is no prospect of long-term funding. A few projects started as small-scale pilot projects and were subsequently continued and scaled up, some with MFA funds and others using funds from other donors. At the same time, there is a general tendency among donors in the field of P/CVE to favour new initiatives. This tendency to focus on small-scale projects makes it difficult to connect short-term security programmes targeting the symptoms of violent extremism with longer-term prevention strategies that address wider socio-economic factors. Individual projects can make positive contributions, for example by supporting children who have been abducted by a terrorist group, provide training in awareness-raising or communication. However, such small-scale projects do little to prevent violent extremism and hence have a very limited impact on Dutch security (i.e. the impact objective stated in MFA's framework for the CT network).

Moreover, funding small-scale projects in a number of different countries could make it more difficult for the RSCs to undertake effective guidance, monitoring, assessment and follow-up. If the RSCs do not have enough time to make frequent visits to these projects, this could result in a paper reality creeping into the implementers' reports. Our overall finding is that the monitoring and evaluation of P/CVE projects is often poor, making it hard to ascertain whether or not a pilot project has been effective. Furthermore, the literature review conducted by RUSI focusing on the MFA's three most commonly funded interventions, i.e. youth engagement; national government and law enforcement capacity-building; and reintegration (disengaging violent extremists) shows that there is hardly any evidence for their effectiveness.²⁰

²⁰ White, J. *Interventions Targeting Youth Engagement. A systematic literature review*. RUSI. February 2021; Zeuthen, M. *Reintegration: Disengaging Violent Extremists. A systematic literature review*. RUSI. February 2021; Glazzard, A. *National Government and Law Enforcement Capacity Building. A systematic literature review*. RUSI. February 2021.



3.3.1 The PVE toolkit

DVB/TN and DSH have designed a toolkit to align P/CVE with longer-term prevention strategies and development cooperation in general. In Africa in particular, RSCs have supported the introduction of the PVE toolkit by organising workshops and discussing the toolkit with embassy staff and local implementers. The toolkit is not yet in use in other regions, such as the Maghreb, the Mashreq, the Western Balkans and South East Asia.²¹

Launched in November 2018, the main objectives of the PVE toolkit are:

1. to assess (at entry) the possible PVE relevance of development projects;
2. to ensure PVE-sensitive programming in contexts involving violent extremism;
3. where relevant, to include project indicators for monitoring activities that could contribute to the prevention of violent extremism.

Training workshops on the toolkit were organised for policy staff in The Hague and, with the assistance of RSCs, at a number of embassies for both embassy staff and implementing NGOs. There have been a number of instances in which the toolkit has helped to improve the PVE sensitivity and conflict sensitivity of development projects operating in a context of violent extremism. However, this has been limited to a small number of individual projects, most of which have been funded by a small number of Dutch embassies.

²¹ Because the toolkit targets development projects, its relevance is limited to countries in which the MFA supports development projects.



4. Region-specific findings



4.1 The RSC for the Horn of Africa

Box 1 *The RSC for the Horn of Africa*²²

Posting: Nairobi

Number of RSCs appointed to date: One

Operational since: 2016

Country portfolio: Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda

Regional security issues:

Violent extremism and radicalisation are a threat to peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab (AS) in particular poses a constant threat to East Africa in general and **Somalia** in particular. Since AS was founded in Somalia in 2004, it has sought to establish an Islamic state in Somalia by force. Somalia has not been the only target of attacks: Kenya (most recently in 2019) and Uganda (2010) have also suffered terrorist attacks perpetrated by AS. Although the threat of AS is essentially regional, it also poses a threat to Western countries. According to the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands, AS is planning to attack Western countries and is trying to develop the resources required for such an attack.

The security situation in **Kenya** is influenced greatly by internal conflicts (the results of ethnic and economic differences) and cross-border terrorist attacks. Kenya has suffered terrorist attacks in recent years. Kenyan nationals are now joining extremist groups such as AS or affiliated groups. In other words, radicalisation is a topical issue in Kenya.

Although **Tanzania** has not suffered any major terrorist attacks, the border region between Tanzania and Mozambique is a security concern for both countries. According to the US Department of State, Tanzania is a 'recruitment and transit point for terrorist and criminal organisations'.²³ Home-grown radicalisation is a problem, as has been confirmed by the discovery of terrorist training camps founded by Tanzanian returnees from AS territory.

There is no specific terrorist threat in **Uganda**. According to the DVB/TN's multiannual results framework, there is a relatively low risk of radicalisation among Muslims who regard themselves as the victims of government discrimination. There is a certain level of distrust between the government and the Muslim community in Uganda, especially in the socially isolated Salafi community.

The current RSC is a pivotal figure for CT and P/CVE in the region. Apart from identifying and monitoring CT and P/CVE projects, the RSC also connects silos that have not been working together in the past. These include regional authorities, national security coordinators and local NGOs. The RSC plays an important role coordinating donor groups in Somalia and Kenya.

In addition, the RSC for the Horn of Africa recently also looked at developments in the Cabo Delgado region in the north of Mozambique. Although the region is not a priority for DVB/TN and is not included in the RSC's country portfolio, it is nevertheless a priority region for the Dutch embassy in Maputo, which has welcomed the RSC's support. Since developments in Cabo Delgado can affect or spill-over into the wider region (including South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Tanzania) and impact Dutch interests (such as gas production in Cabo Delgado and development cooperation projects in the region), it makes sense for the RSC to monitor this threat.²⁴ However, in combination with his other tasks this is quite a challenge.

²² Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the Horn of Africa region (internal document); NCTV. *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland* 54. April 2021: pp. 24-25; US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2019*. 2020: pp. 7-41 and 204-205.

²³ US Department of State: 28.

²⁴ NCTV, April 2021: 25.



4.2 The RSC for the Sahel

Box 2 *The RSC for the Sahel*²⁵

Posting: Addis Ababa, scheduled to move to Ouagadougou

Number of RSCs appointed to date: Two

Operational since: 2016

Country portfolio: Focus countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Flexible countries: Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mauritania, and Sudan.

Regional security issues:

The greater Sahel region is part of what the MFA's Integrated Foreign and Security Strategy refers to as the 'ring of instability'. Terrorist groups and violent extremist groups in this region are capable of destabilising the region and making it even more unsafe than it already is, thereby exacerbating poverty and producing further migrant and refugee flows both within the region and towards Europe.

According to the multiannual results framework, and based on the security situation in the region, the RSC for the Sahel should focus on the **Liptako Gourma region (i.e. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger)** and the **Lake Chad basin (i.e. Chad, Niger and Nigeria)**. The distinction between jihadist and ethnic violence in the Liptako Gourma region is growing more and more blurred. Violent attacks are on the rise and are becoming more ethnically motivated, thus causing a deterioration in relations between the various communities. Violent extremist groups use these ethnic differences as one of the mainsprings of their recruitment activities. Boko Haram and Islamic State's West African Province have maintained limited safe havens in parts of Northeast Nigeria and on islands in Lake Chad, from which they have sought to prevent the re-establishment of state government, service delivery and humanitarian relief in the broader territory surrounding Lake Chad.²⁶

Overall, the situation in the Sahel remains troubling. The security situation in countries such as **Mali** and **Burkina Faso** is tending to worsen rather than to stabilise. There is a risk of spill-over from the Sahel to African coastal states as Benin, Ghana and Ivory Coast. There are also links with the Maghreb, where violent (extremist) groups can easily cross borders into the Sahel. However, the border is also porous in the other direction – for example, for migrants and refugees trying to make their way to Europe.

The focus countries for the RSC for the Sahel were based on these issues. DVB/TN also identified a number of 'flexible countries' that are also relevant to CT and P/CVE. The inclusion of **Ethiopia** on the list of flexible countries is an anomaly, however. The reason for its inclusion (despite a lack of relevance) appears to lie in the fact that the RSC for the Sahel operates from Addis Ababa.

The evaluation team found that the country portfolio is too large for one person to be able to cover. The number of countries and the geographic distribution are such that it is impossible to gain a full understanding of the local dynamics and security context, or to build up and maintain relationships and pay regular visits to projects. Moreover, a number of interviewees claimed that the RSC's posting to Addis Ababa was rather odd. The only advantage of Addis Ababa is that it is an important travel hub, but it harbours very few organisations or donors working on CT or P/CVE in the Sahel. Nor is Ouagadougou the best possible choice as the RSC's new host embassy. Even though Burkina Faso is part of the Sahel and is experiencing a growing terrorist threat, all the respondents said that Ouagadougou does not make much sense from logistic viewpoint. Dakar is a regional hub for international organisations and NGOs working in the Sahel and for this reason would be more suitable. It would seem that the decision to post the RSC

²⁵ Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel) region (internal document) and US Department of State: 7-41 and 205.

²⁶ US Department of State: 205.



in Ouagadougou was more a result of internal bureaucratic preferences than a strategic choice. Moreover, since Ouagadougou is a small post, there is a risk of the RSC being dragged into bilateral affairs.

We also found that the current RSCs for the Maghreb and the Sahel are not looking at the links between North Africa (i.e. the Maghreb countries) and the Sahel, even though these are mentioned in the multiannual results framework for the Sahel.²⁷ There has not been much cooperation or contact between the two RSCs. This is mystifying, given the expanding security chain between Sahel, the Maghreb and Europe. DVB/TN is currently trying to encourage contact and cooperation between the RSCs for these regions.

4.3 The RSC for the Maghreb

Box 3 *The RSC for the Maghreb*²⁸

Posting: Tunis

Number of RSCs appointed to date: Two

Operational since: 2016

Country portfolio: Algeria, Libya and Tunisia

Regional security issues:

The Maghreb region has become more instable since the Arab Spring. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey are all trying to increase their influence in the region. In addition to geopolitics, the large numbers of FTFs returning home from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan with combat experience, and even from within in the Maghreb itself (i.e. Libya), poses a threat to the region. From **Tunisia** alone, an estimated 3,000 to 6,000 mainly young people travelled to Iraq, Syria or Libya (the neighbouring country) to join extremist groups such as ISIS. At least half of these people have since returned to Tunisia, where dealing with them remains a challenge. Apart from the returnees, the Tunisian security forces need to deal with terrorist groups or cells affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

There has been a rise in the prevalence of violent (jihadist) groups in **Libya** since the uprisings and the fall of Muammer Qaddafi. The conflict between the internationally recognised Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar is also still ongoing. As a result of this conflict, Libya's vast, sparsely populated desert areas, particularly in the centre and south of the country, remain safe havens for AQIM and the Libyan branch of ISIL.²⁹ The combination of conflict and the lack of economic prospects means that radicalisation is a serious problem in Libya, too.

Algeria is continuously seeking to prevent terrorist activities within its borders and is therefore seemingly a difficult operating environment for terrorist groups. In recent years, the Algerian government has stepped up arrests of terrorists or terrorist supporters and has undertaken a comparable number of operations to destroy arms and terrorist hideouts. Although groups such as AQIM and ISIL's Algeria branch have remained in the country, they are now operating under considerable pressure from the Algerian security services. Terrorist activity in Libya, Mali, Niger and Tunisia – as well as human, arms and drug smuggling – are contributing to the overall level of threat, particularly in the border regions.³⁰

²⁷ Multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the sub-Saharan Africa (Sahel) region (internal document).

²⁸ Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the Maghreb region; and US Department of State: 109-148 and 207-209.

²⁹ US Department of State: 208.

³⁰ US Department of State: 111.



As we mentioned in the section on the RSC for the Sahel, there has been little or no cooperation or contact between the RSCs for the Maghreb and the Sahel, despite the clear links in terms of extremism and terrorism, as well as people, arms and narcotics trafficking, between the Maghreb and the Sahel (i.e. between Algeria or Libya in the Maghreb and Mali or Niger in the Sahel). DVB/TN is currently trying to encourage contacts and cooperation between the RSCs for the two regions.

The first RSC for the Maghreb left Tunis in October 2019, after building up a large network and project portfolio. A new RSC did not start until March 2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, he was unable to travel to Tunis until July 2020. In other words, there was no RSC at work in the field between October 2019 and July 2020. Some of the work in Tunis was taken over by local staff. The current RSC moved to a new post early in 2021, which meant that a new coordinator had again to be recruited. Personal relationships are vital in Tunisia – and indeed throughout the Maghreb. By not having an RSC constantly present in the region, DVB/TN is at risk of losing the network and information position it has built up.

The RSC plus a number of liaison officers from several Dutch authorities and other government agencies are all members of what is known as the ‘security cluster’ at the Dutch embassy in Tunis. Although they try to share their information with each other, they appear not to work closely together, but rather as separate silos. For example, if the RSC tries to initiate capacity-building projects requiring the assistance of one of the Dutch liaison officers, the impression is that such projects do not get off the ground easily, if indeed they get off the ground at all. This is unfortunate because such projects could strengthen the information position of both the RSC and the liaison officers.

4.4 The RSC for the Mashreq

Box 4 *The RSC for the Mashreq*³¹

Posting: Amman

Number of RSCs appointed to date: One

Operational since: 2016

Country portfolio: Iraq (including Kurdish territories), Jordan and Lebanon

Regional security issues:

Following the collapse of the Caliphate, remnants of ISIL in Iraq and Syria have reverted to clandestine tactics (i.e. terrorist attacks) to disrupt society in Iraq. Beyond Iraq and Syria, ISIL branches, networks and supporters have remained active across the Middle East and North Africa and are still planning to commit attacks in Europe as well. Moreover, Al-Qa’ida and its affiliates, as well as the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iran-backed Shia militias have also remained active throughout the region.³²

ISIL’s insurgency activities have focused on **Iraq** in particular, which also harbours the above-mentioned groups. At the same time, Iraq is also having to cope with the aftermath of ISIL. Liberated territories need to be reconstructed and displaced people need to return home. Iraq is also affected by other issues, such as sectarianism in Iraq and concerns about the position of minorities such as the Yezidis and Christians. Moreover, the situation in Iraq is constantly affected by regional developments such as Turkish attacks on Kurdish (PKK or affiliated) targets in northern Iraq, the presence of large numbers of Syrian refugees in Iraqi camps containing ISIL combatants and their families, as well as tensions between Iran and the USA.

³¹ Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the Mashreq region (internal document); NCTV, April 2021: 18-23; and US Department of State: 109-148 and 207-209.

³² US Department of State: 109.



Compared with its neighbours (i.e. Syria and Iraq), **Jordan** is a relatively stable country. However, since the uprisings in the Arab world and the war in Syria, Jordan has seen its economy take a turn for the worse. This has raised the risk of radicalisation and of people joining extremist groups. Radicalisation is a serious issue in Jordan. At least 2,500 Jordanians travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight. Jordan also harbours at least 2.2 million Palestinian refugees, and this also affects its stability.

There is a great deal of social dissatisfaction in **Lebanon**, due to the weak state of its economy, coupled with corruption, poor public services and the enormous number of refugees in the country. This dissatisfaction could feed radicalisation. Lebanon is also a very sectarian country, with a terrorist group (i.e. Hezbollah) forming part of its political infrastructure. Despite the Lebanese government's official policy of disassociation from regional conflicts, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah group continues to play an important military role in the region.³³

Although the RSC's country portfolio makes sense in terms of manageability, it seems to be based solely on the fact that Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon are focus countries for Dutch foreign policy and development cooperation. Regional developments and geopolitics (such as developments in the security situation in Syria and the influence exerted by Iran and Saudi Arabia) play an important role in the Mashreq, which is why it is worth wondering whether information from these three countries alone would be enough to provide the RSC and DVB/TN with a comprehensive regional picture.

The evaluation team found that the RSC would benefit from a system of local spokes and/or dedicated embassy staff in each country of operation, especially since these three countries are focus countries for the MFA. As far as local spokes are concerned, however, a number of interviewees said that local spokes can sometimes find it more difficult (or indeed impossible) to gain access to government institutions or the diplomatic network, as compared with accredited international diplomatic staff. Moreover, a rigorous security check would be required in order for them to work for the embassies. Sectarianism is also an important aspect of society in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, and this might make it more difficult for the RSC to find a suitable local spoke. Nevertheless, the evaluation team acknowledged the added value offered by local spokes, since they can supply contextual knowledge and access to sources of local information that international staff do not have. They would lighten the RSC's workload and act as his or her eyes and ears on the ground.

4.5 The RSC for South East Asia

Box 5 *The RSC for South East Asia*³⁴

Posting: Bangkok

Number of RSCs appointed to date: Two

Operational since: 2016

Country portfolio: Focus countries: Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. Flexible countries: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Regional security issues:

According to the US Department of State, there has been constant terrorist activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, South Asia saw (in 2019) 'a volatile mix of insurgent attacks punctuated by major incidents of terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and in Sri Lanka.

³³ US Department of State: 129.

³⁴ Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the South East Asia region (internal document); Maulia, E. *Fears grow over Indonesia's terrorism threat after recent attacks*. NikkeiAsia. April 2021. Available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Terrorism/Fears-grow-over-Indonesia-s-terrorism-threat-after-recent-attacks>; and US Department of State: 41-59, 149-151, 206 and 209-210.



Although Al Q'aida in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been seriously degraded, key figures among Al Q'aida's global leadership, as well as its regional affiliate al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), continued to operate from remote locations in the region that historically served as safe havens.³⁵ Moreover, Central Asian countries are concerned about the potential spill-over of terrorism from Afghanistan, as well as the potential threat of returnees who travelled to Iraq or Syria to fight with terrorist groups such as ISIL.³⁶

The potential threat of returnees also affects South East Asia. The porous borders of many countries in the region make South East Asia an attractive destination for former fighters from the Caliphate. South East Asian governments fear that these returnees might use their operational skills, connections and experience to launch domestic attacks. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's financial influence in the region could potentially be problematic. There has been a steep rise in the number of madrassas and mosques in the region and hence an increase in Saudi influence. Wahhabism (a conservative Islamic school of thought) is gaining in prominence. The rise in religious conservatism in Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh could be at the expense of moderate, pluralistic forms of society.

Although the **Bangladeshi** government has denied that Bangladesh-based terrorists have meaningful ties with transnational terror groups such as ISIL or AQIS, ISIL claimed six attacks in 2019, most of which were directed against the police. ISIL's media platform also released videos outlining its campaign against the Bangladeshi government. Moreover, both ISIL and AQIS have sought to benefit from the Rohingya crisis by using propaganda and infiltration to feed radicalisation. Despite this, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) poses more of a threat to Bangladesh and Myanmar than ISIL and AQIS. ARSA has been responsible for a number of attacks at border crossings.

Indonesia is applying sustained pressure with a view to detecting and disrupting terrorist groups operating within its borders and denying them a safe haven. However, it acknowledges that a lack of resources is hampering its ability to monitor remote, maritime areas of the country, including the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. Moreover, the ISIS-affiliated Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and its offshoots have continued to target the police and other symbols of state authority, as well as non-Islamic religious symbols such as churches. For example, JAD-affiliated terrorists carried out a suicide attack last March outside a church in Makassar.³⁷

The **Philippine** government is tracking terrorist groups that continue to operate, particularly in the south of the country. The government has undertaken aggressive military and law enforcement operations to deny safe havens to such groups and prevent the flow of FTFs through its territory. Nonetheless, groups affiliated with ISIL-Philippines, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, have continued their efforts to recover from battlefield losses, recruiting and training new members, and staging suicide bombings and attacks with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and small arms that have targeted both the security forces and civilians. The Philippines remain a destination for FTFs from Indonesia, Malaysia, and countries in the Middle East and Europe. The Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have made progress towards agreeing on a political settlement of long-running insurgencies. At the same time, the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army has continued its attacks on security forces and civilians, and the government has sustained military and law enforcement operations against the group.³⁸

Although **Malaysia** has not witnessed any major terrorist attacks in the recent past, the country remains 'a source, a transit point, and, to a lesser extent, a destination country for terrorist groups including ISIS, the Abu Sayyaf Group, Al-Qa'ida, and Jemaah Islamiyah'.³⁹

³⁵ US Department of State: 149.

³⁶ US Department of State: 149-151.

³⁷ US Department of State: 49, 206; Maulia, available at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Terrorism/Fears-grow-over-Indonesia-s-terrorism-threat-after-recent-attacks>.

³⁸ US Department of State: 53, 206.

³⁹ US Department of State: 51.



Singapore is an important hub for digital information on the activities of criminal, extremist and terrorist networks worldwide. Singapore continues to identify CT as its top security policy priority and its ability to detect, deter and disrupt threats remains effective.⁴⁰

The RSC's country portfolio and geographic territory is excessively large (see section 2.1 and Box 5 The RSC for South East Asia). Moreover, there is no clear division between focus and flexible countries. For example, the extremist or terrorist threat in and from Pakistan would appear to be more substantial than that in Malaysia or Singapore. Even though the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the South East Asia region goes some way to explaining the choice of countries, it is not the result of a (written) strategic decision based on a threat analysis and information need.

The RSC moved from Jakarta to Bangkok in 2018. This move was the result of a logistical rather than a strategic decision. Although, compared with Jakarta, it is relatively easy to travel from Bangkok to the countries in the RSC's portfolio, Thailand is not part of the portfolio. It is doubtful whether it makes sense to station the RSC in a country with seemingly no clear link with terrorism.

The RSC uses an organisation called the Global Center on Cooperative Security (GCCS)⁴¹ to manage projects, thereby reducing his workload. However, using the GCCS as an intermediary could adversely affect the RSC's information or network position, since the RSC has either limited or no direct contact with the organisations on the ground that are feeding him with information. The use of local spokes could render the GCCS superfluous.

The evaluation team found that South East Asia appears to be less a priority for DVB/TN compared with the other regions where RSCs are stationed. The MFA is interested primarily in what it calls a 'ring of instability' around Europe, including the Sahel. Moreover, the terrorist threat in South East Asia is less tangible for Europe in general, and the Netherlands in particular. This is borne out by the fact that, since 2016, the NCTV's threat assessments have mentioned either South East Asia or East Asia only twice.⁴² South Asia (notably Afghanistan and Pakistan), on the other hand, is mentioned in a number of assessments. Understandably so, due to the presence of a number of major terrorist organisations in this region (e.g. ISIS (Khorasan Chapter) and Al Q'aida). Although South Asian countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan do not directly border Europe, terrorist organisations such as Al Q'aida have in the past targeted Europe from South Asia. Moreover, it is clear from both past (Al Q'aida) and present (ISIS) experiences that there are terrorist links between the Middle East (i.e. the ring of instability) and South Asia.

⁴⁰ US Department of State: 55.

⁴¹ The arrangement with the GCCS is currently under review. This review was commissioned by DVB/TN.

⁴² NCTV. *Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 41*. 2016: p. 6; and NCTV. *Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 53*. 2020: p. 24.



4.6 The RSC for the Western Balkans

Box 6 *The RSC for the Western Balkans*⁴³

Posting: Sarajevo

Number of RSCs appointed to date: One

Operational since: 2018

Country portfolio: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Regional security issues:

Although the region has not witnessed any major terrorist incidents or attacks in recent years, Islamic and ethno-nationalistic radicalisation remains a transnational security risk. Home-grown terrorism and extremism are also distinct possibilities in the Balkans. Jihadist Salafi groups, for example, try to spread messages that could lead to radicalisation, while simultaneously ethno-nationalistic and right-wing extremist ideologies are openly supported by both politicians and church leaders. This could be fuelled by a spiral of hate and potentially violence inflicted by radical Islamic groups on the one hand and right-wing extremist groups on the other. In addition, a substantial proportion of the more than 1,000 FTFs who left the region to fight in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine have now returned home. These returnees pose a security risk, especially due to the absence of sufficient reintegration programmes.

The terrorist threat in **Albania** is posed by FTFs returning from Iraq and Syria. Terrorist organisations such as Al Q'aida gained a foothold in Albania in the 1990s, creating a risk of young Albanians being radicalised and turning to terrorism.

The situation in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is characterised by political, social and economic differences along ethnic lines. The effects of a frozen conflict have created a vulnerable context that could be a seedbed for radicalisation processes. Returning FTFs currently form a big challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Violent extremism in **Kosovo** poses a threat. After the war with Serbia in 1998-1999, external religious groups roamed the country, creating extremist groups who remain active today. In 2019, Kosovo repatriated four suspected FTFs and 106 family members from Syria. Limited resources and capacity continue to impede the Kosovar government's ability to provide returnees with adequate services and assistance.⁴⁴

The threat of violent extremism and radicalisation in Montenegro is relatively low compared with the other countries in the region. However, there are concerns about radicalisation in right-wing extremist and orthodox communities. Moreover, a number of FTFs from Montenegro travelled to Ukraine to fight alongside pro-Russian groups.

The main terrorism threat in **North Macedonia** is also posed by FTFs returning from Syria and Iraq. Islamic radicalisation is also a threat in several municipalities in relatively poor areas with an ethnic Albanian majority population.

The main risk of extremism in **Serbia** is nationalistic in nature and linked to organised crime. Right-wing extremism has been on the rise in Serbia in recent years, potentially fuelling racially and ethnically motivated terrorism. Moreover, FTFs who had travelled to Ukraine, Iraq and Syria are now on their way back to Serbia. Finally, the movement of money and weapons through the region poses a threat to the stability and security of both Serbia and the region as a whole.

⁴³ Based on information from the multiannual CT and P/CVE results framework for the Western Balkans region (internal document); and US Department of State: 60-109.

⁴⁴ US Department of State: 87-88.



The MFA has three regional coordinators stationed in the Western Balkans: one for the rule of law, another for stability, and a third for security. These roles sometimes overlap, stability and security in particular. However, the RSC and the regional stability coordinator (or ‘stabco’) work together where possible. The two coordinators also work in close harmony with DVB/TN (which is responsible for the RSC) and the Europe Department (DEU), which is partially responsible for the Rule of Law Coordinator and the stabco. According to DEU, all issues relating to CT and P/CVE are the responsibility of DVB/TN and hence the RSC, while DEU is responsible for all other issues relating to the coordinators’ work. Whether this division is as clear as it seems on paper is debatable, since stability and security are often intertwined. However, the cooperative relationship between the two coordinators has the effect of avoiding any duplication or clashes. The effectiveness of future regional coordinators depends on the continued maintenance of this cooperative relationship, both between the coordinators themselves and between DVB/TN and DEU.

IOB found some tensions with regard to political reporting on the part of the RSC. The RSC reports on regional developments, whereas the embassies in the region report on bilateral developments. A number of interviewees said that coordination between the RSC and the embassies in the region with regard to the content of these reports could sometimes be difficult.

Acting in conjunction with the stabco, the RSC has set up a system of local spokes in the Western Balkans. In Belgrade, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje and Tirana, local staff have been hired by the embassies in the region to act as the RSC’s and the stabco’s eyes and ears on the ground. They identify activities and closely monitor projects, as they are able to pay regular visits in the field, and are therefore well-placed to assess the potential gap between actual achievements and the paper reality. The spokes also take on part of the RSC’s and the stabco’s workload, allowing them to deal with more strategic issues. In conclusion, the local spokes can supply the RSC with contextual knowledge and access to local sources of information that non-local staff do not have. The evaluation team found that this system appears to work fairly well, and stands as a useful example for other RSCs to follow. However, it is important to note that local spokes do not work solely for the RSC, but also work for the stabco and the Dutch embassies in the region. The question of the line of authority is another important matter to bear in mind. Although the spokes are recruited by the RSC and stabco acting on behalf of the relevant embassy, the HoMs in the region are ultimately responsible for the personnel management of local staff.

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