

OFFICE FOR COMBATTING TERRORISM

Summary

An Office for Combatting Terrorism has existed in the Department of State since 1972. The Director of the Office has been head of the inter-agency working-level committee charged with addressing the problem, and the Department of State has been regarded as the lead agency. The Office has been attached to the Office of the Secretary (S/CCT, 1972-1976), the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Management (M/CT, 1976-1979), the Office of the Deputy Secretary (D/CT, 1979-1982), and the Office Under Secretary for Management (M/CT, since 1982). The Director, Office for Combatting Terrorism, has rank equivalent to an Assistant Secretary. The position carries with it the rank of Ambassador, requiring Presidential nomination and Senate confirmation. The position of Special Assistant or Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism has usually been filled by a very senior career Foreign Service Officer serving for a limited period of time. There have been seven permanent and two acting incumbents in twelve years.

Historical Antecedents

On September 25, 1972, 20 days after the terrorist attack on Olympic athletes at Munich, President Nixon established the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism (CCCT). The Committee included the Secretary of State (Chairman), the Secretaries of Defense and Transportation, the Attorney General, the Ambassador to the United Nations, the Directors of Central Intelligence and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs. At its first and only meeting October 2, 1972, the Cabinet Committee created a Working Group, to be chaired by a designee of the Secretary of State. To meet its responsibilities, the Department of State established the position of Special Assistant to the Secretary and Coordinator of the Office for Combatting Terrorism (S/CCT).¹ The first Special Assistant to the Secretary was Armin Meyer, former Ambassador to Lebanon, Iran, and Japan.

In 1973, Ambassador Lewis Hoffacker was appointed to the S/CCT position. The Department of State continued in its lead agency role within the Working group of the CCCT in 1974 and

1975. Upon the retirement of Ambassador Hoffacker on January 31, 1975, John N. Gatch, Jr. assumed responsibilities as Special Assistant to the Secretary and Chairman of the CCCT Working Group on an acting basis. In April 1975 Ambassador Robert A. Feary was designated as the new Chairman of the Working Group and Special Assistant to the Secretary.

The duties of the Special Assistant to the Secretary and Coordinator for Combatting Terrorism were defined as follows in mid-1976: serves as the Secretary's adviser on international terrorism as it may affect U.S. interests and personnel and is chairman of the working group in support of the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism which is chaired by the Secretary; serves as the principal U.S. point of contact with foreign governments on terrorism matters; has primary operational responsibility for addressing foreign terrorist incidents involving U.S. citizens or interests; develops countermeasures against terrorism; insures coordination of interagency counter-terrorism intelligence activities; has special responsibility for carrying out the President's mandate to consider "the most effective means to prevent terrorism here and abroad;" and serves as the focal point for presentation of the U.S. Government's counter-terrorism program to foreign and domestic audiences.² These terms of reference for the position remained virtually constant through 1982 except for redefinition of duties relating to changing interdepartmental arrangements.

Establishment of the Office for Combatting Terrorism

The Office for Combatting Terrorism was established within the purview of the Deputy Under Secretary for Management on August 1, 1976. Ambassador L. Douglas Heck, then Special Assistant (S/CCT), was appointed Chairman of the Working Group/CCCT and Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism (M/CT). The position of Special Assistant to the Secretary and Coordinator for Combatting Terrorism was abolished. The intent of the Department in this organizational realignment was to provide a more effective link between the policy and operational aspects of efforts to combat terrorism.³

The functions of the Director of M/CT remained those of the Special Assistant (S/CCT) with the exception of the revision of the first paragraph of the governing Foreign Affairs Manual section to read:

Serves as Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism, with the rank administratively equivalent to an Assistant Secretary. Under the immediate guidance and supervision of the Deputy Under Secretary for Management, provides advice to the Secretary on international terrorism as it may affect U.S. interests and personnel abroad. Also serves as

chairman of the working group in support of the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism, which is chaired by the Secretary.⁴

In 1976 M/CT had a total authorized staff of five officers and one Secretary. The Director reported directly to the Deputy Under Secretary for Management. Close and constant coordination was maintained between M/CT and the M front Office.⁵

Development of the Office for Combatting Terrorism, 1977-1981

In June 1977, John E. Karkashian became Acting Deputy for Combatting Terrorism and Chairman of the Working Group/CCCT, and served until October when Heyward Isham was appointed permanent incumbent. Dissatisfaction with the level of activity of the Cabinet Committee for Combatting Terrorism, which had not met since 1972, led the Carter Administration to abolish it in September 1977. The CCCT Working Group became a Working Group of the Special Coordination Committee of the National Security Council (NSC/SCC). The NSC/SCC was chaired by the National Security Adviser. State retained its working level lead-department function through chairmanship of the NSC/SCC Working Group, formally established on September 16, 1977. In addition to the Working group there was also established an Executive Committee on Terrorism (ECT), its membership to be determined by the National Security Council. State's Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism was named Chairman of both the NSC/SCC Working Group and the Executive Committee.⁶

Ambassador Anthony C.E. Quainton, who became Director of M/CT in July 1978, determined that the NSC/SCC Working Group, with representatives from some 28 Departments and agencies, was too large to operate effectively. He therefore divided the Working Group into seven committees, including the Research and Development Committee, the Public Information Committee, the International Initiatives Committee, the Foreign Security Policy Committee, the Domestic Security Policy Committee (now defunct), the Domestic Crisis Management Committee (defunct), and the Foreign Crisis Management Committee (defunct).

On October 17, 1979, the Office for Combatting Terrorism was placed within the jurisdiction of the Deputy Secretary and designated D/CT. Ambassador Quainton remained Director of the Office and Chairman of the NSC/SCC Executive Committee and Working Group on Terrorism.⁷ D/CT played a role in the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-1981.

In 1981 Ambassador Robert M. Sayre became Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism. On January 15, 1982, the Office was returned from the jurisdiction of the Deputy

Secretary to that of the Under Secretary for Management, and again became designated as M/CT. The Director of M/CT retained chairmanship of the NSC/SCC Executive Committee and Working Group on Terrorism.⁸

The Reagan Administration introduced new interdepartmental arrangements for combatting terrorism, governed by a classified National Security Decision Directive of 1982. The Director of M/CT retains important interdepartmental responsibilities. The Department of State is the lead agency for dealing with terrorism abroad.

The principal vehicle for policy coordination is the Interdepartmental Group on Terrorism. Chaired by the Department of State (Director, M/CT), it includes representatives from the Departments of Justice/FBI (deputy chairman), Defense/JCS, Energy, Treasury, and Transportation; Central Intelligence Agency; National Security Council; and the Office of the Vice President.

When a terrorist incident occurs overseas, the Office for Combatting Terrorism convenes a task force to manage the U.S. response. Generally located in the Department's Operations Center, the task force includes representatives from the appropriate bureaus of the Department and other agencies.⁹

The present Office for Combatting Terrorism remains a lean unit directed by an Assistant-level official. It is staffed by Foreign Service Officers, and is divided into three branches: crisis management, security policy, and a training program. The most recent entry for the Director, M/CT in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) delineates the duties of the Director as follows: serves as the Director of the Office for Combatting Terrorism; under the immediate guidance and supervision of the Under Secretary for Management, provides advice to the Secretary on international terrorism as it may affect U.S. interests and personnel abroad; serves as chairman of the NSC/SCC Interdepartmental Executive Committee on Terrorism and Working Group on Terrorism (new interdepartmental arrangements now exist); and performs other duties regarding dealing with international terrorism that have been part of the FAM description since 1976.¹⁰

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