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Countering Violent Extremism *a primer*

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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM PRIMER 2.0

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Literature on countering violent extremism often concludes with hypotheses.

Measures of effect for counter-violent-extremism programs are rare. It is especially challenging to analyze why and whether counter-radicalization and mobilization-prevention strategies have succeeded with so many elements external to such programs possibly playing a role. For example, it is difficult to understand with accuracy why someone did not join an extremist group—likely a complex multitude of reasons different for each individual.

However, there are some case studies of strategies that may have effectively helped to counter or collapse some violent extremist organizations. Perhaps such case studies may inform current and future strategies.

Violent Extremist: An extremist has an unpopular, fringe, or ‘radical’ view according to the observer. Violence is an act or acts intended to physically harm a person and/or damage property. The term violent extremism is often subjective and pejorative.

Terrorism: Politically it is often a subjective pejorative term for maligned acts by maligned actors. One terrorist may be another’s freedom fighter. History may judge a once-labeled terrorist a patriot.

Professionally, understand your government as well as allied government and international and regional organization definitions, which differ.

As a strategist and scholar, you may study terrorism as a tactic as old as Homo sapiens to imbue fear beyond an action itself. The tactic normally involves violence or the threat of violent, sometimes but not necessarily with a view towards a political goal. A ‘war on terrorism’ or a war on any common martial tactic is, literally speaking, irrational.

To date, no ideology, no belief system appears to have a monopoly on terrorism.

Counterterrorism: Some use the term to focus only on offensive kinetic attacks against violent extremists. Others use the term to include all possible strategies—kinetic and non-kinetic—to degrade, counter, and/or defeat groups or people a government considers terrorists.

Antiterrorism: This term often denotes defensive measures against terrorist attacks to include protecting infrastructure and populations, foiling terrorist plots, minimizing the damage and harm of terrorist attacks, and reacting to terrorist attempts.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Some use the phrase to mean counter-ideology, counter-recruitment, or radicalization prevention, while others look to a full range of non-kinetic strategies and tactics to undermine violent extremist presence, influence, and recruitment.

Still others use the term to mean efforts to defeat violent extremist organizations holistically, enduringly, and by every appropriate means appropriate—to include kinetic counterterrorism and non-kinetic counter-radicalization approaches.

Ideology: *The set of ideas and beliefs of a group or political party; a systematic body of concepts especially about human*

life or culture; a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture; the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program (Merriam-Webster 2016).

Radicalization: Some analysts define this highly contentious term as the process of someone becoming radical. Some researchers emphasize extreme beliefs—focusing on a cognitive transformation. Others choose to study mobilization (the behavioral steps towards someone becoming a radical) instead or in addition. As a scholar and strategist, it may be wise to study all behavioral, psychological, grievance-based, familial, social, geographic, economic, narrative, ideological, and religious context and motivation behind what some deem radicalization or mobilization.¹

De-radicalization: The undoing of radicalization also dubbed de-mobilization, defection, de-escalation, desertion, desistance, reintegration, reinsertion, and rehabilitation with varying and overlapping definitions and implications. Such campaigns do not necessarily mean total ideological surrender—there could be a complete renunciation, conditional recantation, or short-lived pragmatic martial surrender, for example.²

Government counter-violent-extremist initiatives may include the following:

- **Enable/Support/Amplify:** Support movements and individuals already against violent extremism. Such individuals and movements use rhetoric, education, defensive vigilance (populations reporting violent extremist activities to authorities, for example), defensive violence, and offensive violence, for example.

Specific cases of those against violent extremism include some persuasive anti-extremist religious and community leaders, youth group organizers, education facilitators, and Pasthun arabakai and lashkars.

- **Inoculate:** Inoculate apathetic communities from violent extremist influences. This prevention approach may include education, community outreach, and narrative campaigns exposing violent extremism's ideological weaknesses and inhumanity as well as practical shortcomings.
- **Activate:** Motivate otherwise apathetic communities to counter or undermine violent extremists with words, programs, or weapons.

Apathetic communities may include majorities of some populations too focused on accessing potable water, food, and shelter for their families—obviating the luxury to join some transnational ideological revolt. Others may include those not focusing on violent extremist threats and intentions on seeking power until it is too late perhaps; those who do not feel violent extremists pose a threat; those who fear extremists; those who feel impotent against violent extremist strength and influence; those that wish to take advantage of extremists' rise to power by, for example, selling goods to them; and those that feel vicariously vindicated in their otherwise repressed discontent with the status quo (Greenblatt 2016).

- **Dissuade:** Identify and then stop those especially susceptible to violent extremism from joining a radical group.

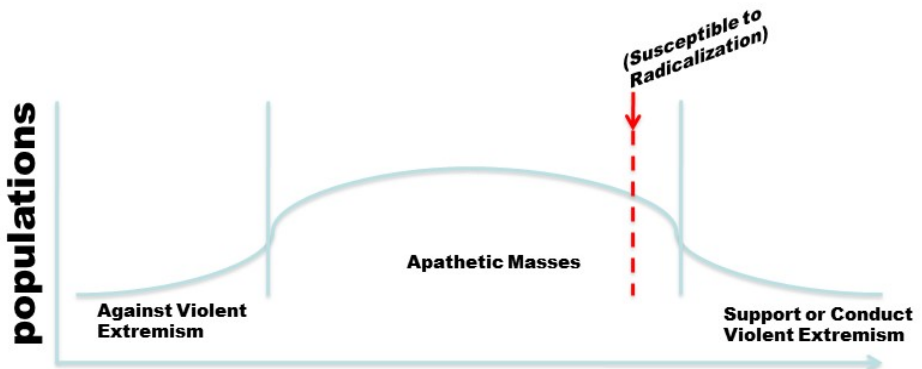
It must be noted that there is no behavioral, psychological, familial, societal, economic, education, ideological, ethnic, cultural, criminal, religious, or political profile of someone susceptible to violent extremism. At least one common

profile or set of profiles has not been uncovered yet. However, some studies suggest violent extremists of some groups are overall better educated and wealthier than the majority in the communities from which they come.

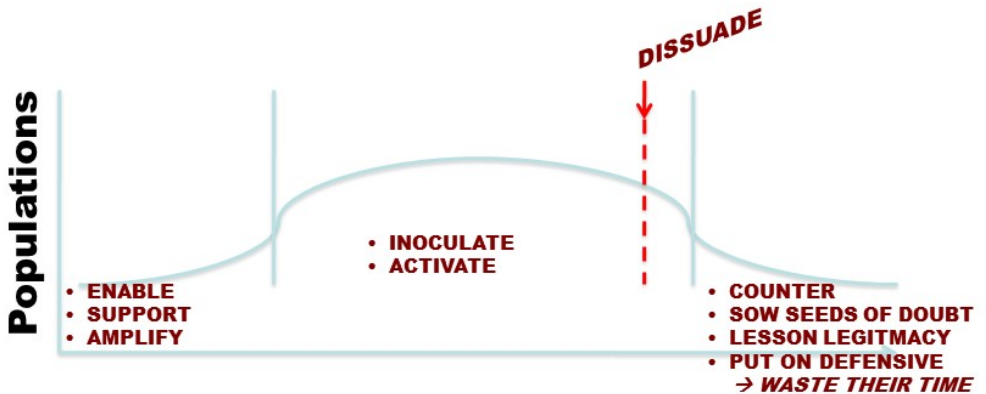
- **Undermine:** Force violent extremist leaders and ideologues on the rhetorical defensive. Approaches include employing revered critiques against violent extremist incompetence and ideological weaknesses to instigate an adversary's reaction that makes the enemy seem weak—perhaps forcing them to repeat weak justifications for violence.
- **Demobilize:** De-radicalize or disarm violent radicals to lessen or erase their threat to society.
- **Kill/Capture:** Directly dismantle malign groups and their networks until they can no longer function and/or people fear joining or supporting them. Governments often call this counterterrorism.

In summary:

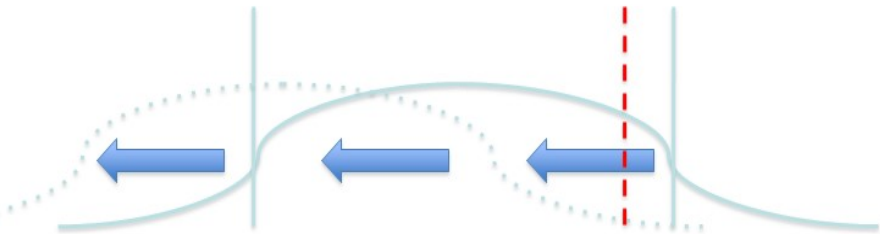
Simplified CVE audiences in civil society—'y' axis represents 'level' of 'extremism' (USSOCOM 2009):



Some CVE actions perhaps:



Simplified holistic CVE goals perhaps:



Some CVE campaigns may consider one or more of the following common themes perhaps:

- Disenchantment of members or possible would-be members:
 - Extremists' violence is impious and without merit—they are unlearned and unduly confident
 - Violent extremists are criminals foremost

- Violent extremist leaders lack ideological authority
 - Violent extremist leaders are poor strategists
 - Violent extremists are not true believers
 - Violent extremist groups are too bureaucratic
- Public Backlash:
 - Violent extremists wield foreign/alien influences
 - Violent extremists gratuitously kill innocents
 - Violent extremists aim to destroy clans/informal governing apparatus
- Instability:
 - Violent extremists may cause societal instability and may be, by definition, destabilizers
 - Violent extremists may spur inevitable government suppression of society writ large
- Governance:
 - Violent extremists govern ineffectively
 - There is no perfect violent extremist state—the promise is unattainable and intra-extremist-group factions may compete for power if a radical group succeeds in becoming an enduring government
- Liberation Versus Occupation:
 - Who are the liberators, and who are the oppressors? Is it better to employ top-down counterinsurgency-type or more bottom-up insurgency/revolt/guerilla-type strategies to counter or defeat violent extremist groups?
 - How can a strategist leverage anti-extremist resilient grassroots ‘immune systems?’

In history there are some cases of violent extremist groups ceasing operations to include 1) groups that imploded because people stopped supporting them (no more safe haven, no more recruits), 2) groups that were wiped out completely by a government that waged absolute war for a century or more, 3) peace processes that allowed a political or ideological outlet along with de-mobilization of former militants, and 4) groups that self-moderated into governing structures and even formal moderated constructive governments.

The following approaches are often used in countering violent extremism and counterterrorism (internationally understood doctrinal concepts are in *italics* for precision for real world application—not representative of the author’s views):

Guerilla Warfare: *Military and paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held or hostile territory by irregular, predominantly indigenous forces* (FM1-01 2013).

- Some historians have argued that guerrilla warfare is as old mankind. What is popularly considered “conventional warfare” of army pitted against army is a relatively new concept. But even after armies of the first societies of Egypt and Mesopotamia stood up, militaries throughout history have had to contend with irregular warriors. And guerrillas have continued to fight one another to this day.³
- Raid then retreat. Avoid direct fights. Dissipate before armies. Transform from seemingly hidden ghosts to governing bodies over bits of land and back again without notice. Patiently prick an enemy for years or decades until she loses will or collapses. Turn an army’s strengths—such as large numbers, strong

forts, complex integrated logistics, bias for action, initiative, and targeted aggression—into weaknesses through stretching the army thin, baiting them into hasty traps, and baiting the army to radicalize populations. This is not fourth-generation warfare. This is the oldest style of warfare. Some may argue that this is ‘the usual way.’⁴

- Unless armies seize absolute control of cross-border territories for over a generation—or more than forty years—or somehow ‘kill all members’ and ‘salt the fields,’ a counterinsurgency is unlikely to succeed easily. There appears greater precedence for guerrillas to fight guerillas if the friendly guerillas have greater will and ability than the enemy guerrillas. Perhaps a useful way to view the fight against violent extremists in war-torn areas is a battle against a violent-extremist governing body—incumbents—or those violent extremists who intend to govern. The paradigm then shifts to an insurgency against violent extremists, who are the oppressors.⁵

Insurgency: *An organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through use of subversion and armed conflict (JP3-05 2014). It is a protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, a military occupation government, an interim civil administration, or a peace process while increasing insurgent control and legitimacy (JP3-24 2013).*

Resistance Movement: *An organized effort by some portion of the civil population of a country to resist the legally established government or an occupying power (JP1-02 2013).*

Legitimate Governance: *The authority to govern is dependent upon the successful amalgamation and interplay of four factors:*

mandate, manner, support and consent, and expectations. When the relationship between the government and those governed breaks down, challenges to authority may result (JP3-24 2013). This definition is highly contested.

Irregular Warfare: *A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will...It encompasses insurgency, counterinsurgency, terrorism, and counterterrorism (JOC IW 2007).*

Unconventional Warfare: *Enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerilla force in a denied area...with a scope that frequently exceeds the capabilities of the [military] alone...[through] indirect, direct, and combat support (TC18-01 2010).*

Foreign Internal Defense: *[The] participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats. The focus is to support the host nation's internal defense and development (JP 3-22 2012).*

Contemporary Targeting: *Find, fix, finish, exploit and analyze (F3EA) the enemy faster than it can evolve itself. There is no evidence that this tactic helps to strategically defeat any contemporary violent extremist organization or insurgency.*

Information Operations focuses on the integration of numerous capabilities and aligning them with other lines of

operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the ability of enemy decisions, strategies, and operations. Information operations also protect friendly information and friendly forces. Information operations' core capabilities may include psychological operations, military deception, operations security, public affairs, and combat camera.

Psychological Operations (a sub-discipline of information operations) convey information to adversaries to influence their decision-making and behavior. They are normally considered a force multiplier in concert with other security activities—whether full-scale war, stabilization missions, or other contingencies. Strategic psychological operations may attempt to persuade general or targeted audiences.

- **White** psychological operations products/actions are attributable to the real source, such as an official statement.
- **Grey** psychological operations have purposefully abstruse attribution—may seem to derive from any benign or seemingly anonymous source.
- **Black** psychological operations products/actions purposefully appear to disseminate from a fictional or actual source concealing the identity of the true source.

Public Diplomacy aims to support a government's foreign policy aims, advance its interests, and strengthen its national security by influencing and informing foreign populations. It also aims to improve the relationship between a government and its citizenry with other populaces. Public diplomacy may involve strategic communications, scholarly grants, cultural events, and university exchanges.

Narrative, Master Narrative, and Counter Narrative have multiple differing definitions. Very often analysts and strategists consider four themes: 1) a **story** or set of stories, 2) an expression of **identity**, 3) storytelling that holds **meaning** for

a people especially in a time of crisis, 4) and storytelling that has a **purpose** normally to persuade.

High Value Target (HVT) is a person or resource that if killed/destroyed, captured, or influenced may weaken an enemy. Analysis of an adversary's critical vulnerabilities, capabilities, and requirements can inform intelligence identification of recommended HVTs.

Clandestine Operations conceal actions.

Covert Operations emphasize concealment of the identity of those conducting the action.

Sabotage considers the act(s) of deliberately obstructing, slowing, disrupting, damaging, or destroying a group, network, system, or apparatus often for military or political advantage.

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⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Primarily, see LOC, USCO ECO 1-4290425701, 20161228



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