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RELEASE IN FULL

Discussion Paper on Countering Violent Extremism

Introduction:

While the United States and its partners have implemented effective counterterrorism measures since 9/11, mitigating the drivers of terrorist recruitment continues to challenge the international community. The primary terrorist threat to the United States arises from al-Qaida and its affiliates. Their recruiters prey on young Muslims by exploiting uncertainties and grievances, offering a global narrative that appeals to a desire to belong to a larger cause, and providing social networks of similarly aggrieved or isolated young people. Many young Muslims have identity vulnerabilities exacerbated by technology-enabled information, well-funded efforts to indoctrinate them with extremist ideologies, and unresolved geo-political crises. Extremists maximize the appeal of their "us-versus-them" message by exploiting local grievances that may stem from broad perceptions of injustice toward self, family, or ethnicity; corruption; lack of upward mobility; repression; absence of social services; insecurity; or antipathy to U.S. foreign policy. Despite these obstacles, the United States has opportunities to facilitate activities that can interrupt this cycle and offer better ideas.

International developments

The deaths last year of Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki deprived al-Qaida of charismatic figures but did not change the conditions and dynamics that give rise to violent extremism. The establishment in September 2011 of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and its Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Working Group provided the international community with a counterterrorism collaboration mechanism. At the GCTF launch event, the United Arab Emirates offered to establish the first-ever international Center of Excellence for CVE.

Interagency policy and planning developments

The past year has witnessed a number of important policy developments in the CVE arena. In June 2011, the National Strategy for Counterterrorism was released, providing regional and thematic guidance for CVE. The first-ever National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States followed in August. In November, the interagency identified five countries for priority engagement in the CVE Abroad Framework. Together, these policy documents define the U.S. government's broad CVE

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approaches at home and abroad. Also in September, USAID rolled out its policy on the Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency, detailing how the agency would tackle these distinct but related challenges.

The interagency Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) was formally established in September by E.O. 13584. CSCC coordinates, orients, and informs U.S. government-wide, public communications directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist groups – especially al-Qaida, its affiliates, and adherents. Housed at State, CSCC has State, DoD, and IC personnel. CSCC provides tools to U.S. government communicators working with foreign audiences, including supporting 13 “core posts” this year. An analysis section integrates the latest intelligence, including sophisticated target-audience analysis methodologies from the private sector. CSCC’s digital outreach team engages directly online in Arabic, Urdu, and Somali, to confront and counter messages from al-Qaida and affiliates.

State Department initiatives and programming

CT’s CVE program has three objectives: (1) provide positive alternatives to populations most at-risk of radicalization and recruitment; (2) counter the violent extremist narratives of al-Qaida, its affiliates, and adherents; and (3) build partner CVE capacities. Illustrative activities include youth mentorship, life skills and leadership training; message development for victims, survivors and former militants; prison disengagement and radicalization prevention; and training for providers of services to at-risk youth. As drivers of radicalization and recruitment tend to be highly local, programming will be tailored to national and sub-national settings. Since FY 2008, CT has awarded small grants to posts for law-enforcement-related CVE activities; FY 2011 is the first year CT received ESF funding for CVE.

The Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities (S/SRMC) is charged with engaging Muslim communities in every corner of the world, focuses explicitly on populations under the age of 30, and provides leadership and guidance in developing and deploying CVE programs worldwide. S/SRMC is actively involved in building networks of agents for positive change within Muslim communities around the world, through programs such as:

- Generation Change; which networks, trains, and highlights young leaders to carry out projects that change the narrative of what it means to be young and Muslim in a post-9/11 world.

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- Social media campaigns against violence by finding influencers and equipping them with strategies to confront violent extremism.
- The Muslim Portal Project, an online portal developed in coordination with third party old and new media journalists from around the world that aggregates information, stories, and creates positive narratives in a culturally appropriate context, targeting young Muslims.
- Working with embassies on the ground, S/SRMC seeks to present new narratives to push back against extremism, focus on identity issues, and link like-minded thinkers.

A number of Missions are already engaged in CVE programming. Ten embassies in Europe are implementing a community engagement pilot, pioneering diplomatic engagement and community outreach strategies to vulnerable populations. USAID Missions in several other countries are also managing targeted at-risk-youth, community-development and local media programming.

Discussion questions

This session will be an opportunity to hear your perspectives on key issues and approaches in reaching CVE goals and objectives. Questions for discussion include:

- What are the drivers of radicalization and recruitment? Does your Mission have an evidence-based knowledge of drivers, areas of radicalization and recruitment, and at-risk populations?
- Does your Embassy have CVE goals and/or objectives? What is your Mission doing to engage populations most at-risk of radicalization and recruitment – especially young people?
- Have you found success working through host governments or dealing directly with at-risk groups and civil society?
- How does your Mission measure the effectiveness of CVE efforts?
- Do you see CVE-specific communications opportunities in your host countries?
- How might the Department support your efforts?
- What are some of the most successful strategies to date?
- What trends are we missing that can result in a new or different kind of extremism?

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