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INSTITUTE for STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

Government Engagement and Communication Strategies with Communities

Introduction

It has long been recognised that government has an imperative role to play in enhancing community resilience to violent extremism through coherent and consistent engagement with communities. One of the key pillars of this engagement relies on the development and streamlining of effective communications strategies by government and its local institutions.

This is driven by the notion that communication has the potential to play a vital role in undermining some of the factors that have been identified as drivers in the radicalisation process. More importantly, misguided communications by government or local partner agencies have the potential to reinforce pre-existing grievances and weaken entire government efforts designed to limit the appeal of extremist ideologies within vulnerable communities.

The most obvious example of the value afforded by government communications in undermining the appeal of violent extremism is predictably found before, during and after major political crises or key events that risk feeding into the narratives of extremist movements. However, previous cases have demonstrated that effective government engagement and communication strategies with communities required long-term resourcing and investment.

Government needs to develop a coherent communications strategy on a whole range of relevant subjects to counter the appeal of extremism at both national and local levels. This includes proactively articulating government positions, policies and practises, whether domestic or foreign; addressing the political grievances of disenfranchised individuals and groups; or even directly challenging the divisive narratives of violent extremist movements looking to exploit such grievances.

This report focuses on the increasing role of government communications to counter violent extremism, and examines some of the key projects, programmes and policies activated by government to counter violent extremism at both national and local levels. This report draws on best practices and lessons learned from series of case studies from Europe and beyond, particularly from North America and Australia.

- **Section 1** looks at the initial shortcomings in crisis-driven government engagement with communities, highlighting some of the key challenges in early efforts.
- **Section 2** focuses on the relatively new strategic communications activities developed by central governments to counter violent extremism.
- **Section 3** examines more tailored local government communications efforts by local authorities and law enforcement.
- Finally, **Section 4** offers a series of conclusions and recommendations for governments based on existing best practices and lessons learned.

I. From crisis communications to strategic communications

The role of communications within the context of countering violent extremism is traditionally most pronounced before, during or after an event or crisis which has had significant potential of feeding into the single narrative of violent extremist ideologies.

Whether events such as those triggered by the Satanic Verses affair in the United Kingdom; political debates around the scarf and veil in France; the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark; or the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands; such events have - in their own specific ways - produced important strains in each of those societies that would be exploited by violent extremist movements to further their ideological aims and objectives.[1]

Despite their divisive nature, such events have also provided unique avenues for furthering good relations and facilitating ways of limiting support for ideas and perceptions that risked being fed into the single narrative of violence and extremism.[2] Yet most early attempts by government to engage with communities during such crises were characterised by a number of key shortcomings:

- **Audience awareness**: government was often unable to anticipate what would often turn out to be relatively foreseeable strains on community relationships.
- **Dissemination mediums**: clear channels of communication between government and communities lacked structure which made government messaging harder to access.
- **Institutional coordination**: a lack of cooperation between different national and local government stakeholders resulted in incoherent and conflicting messaging.
- **Community partnerships**: pre-existing partnerships with key community leaders would often be lacking which undermined the credibility of the message.
- **Responsive messaging:** bureaucratic constraints resulted in unresponsive and diluted messaging by central and local government communicators.

Recognising these failings, a number of governments - including those within the European Policy Planners Network (EPPN) - have gradually explored the need to move beyond purely *ad-hoc* and reactive communications practices that are crisis-driven, towards more strategic, institutionalised approaches.

The development of these new capabilities has been accelerated by a number of emerging threats facing the European Union. The growth of extreme right-wing protest groups and radicalised foreign fighters (two threats which government has struggled to address through law enforcement approaches alone), have emphasised the need for more subtle methods that limit the appeal of extremist narratives.

The use of 'strategic communications' by authorities is taking on an increasingly central role in this space.[3] This is being forged at all levels of government, from large central units designed to oversee strategic communication activities that feed into national-level counter-terrorism policy objectives, through to localised engagement by local authorities that aim to complement national efforts.

Today a whole range of activities have been developed that aim to strengthen the use of communications to ensure that government has a more 'proactive role in shaping perceptions and effecting behavioural change' in communities vulnerable to narratives of extremist groups.[4] The following sections explore the development of both national and local-level communications projects, programmes and policies, drawing on key best practices and lessons learned where appropriate.

II. Communications: the role of central government

A number of countries have established strategic communications units designed to oversee communications activities in the context of tackling violent extremism. These units have helped to systematise once fragmented and highly reactive efforts of public diplomacy, strategic communications and information operations that feed into national counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policy objectives.

In the United Kingdom the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) established in 2007 and based within the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), was set up to streamline research and communications linked to counter-terrorism and to coordinate government-wide strategic and crisis communications activities - both domestic and foreign - to counter the appeal of violent extremism and to strengthen inter-community relations at the grassroots level.

Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU)
United Kingdom

Established in 2007, the Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU) is a cross-departmental strategic communications body based at the Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT) at the

Home Office. It is a trilateral unit owned jointly by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

One of the most developed cross-departmental strategic communications units in Europe, RICU is composed of research and communications specialists and divided into a number of areas of focus. The Monitoring and Coordination Team is responsible for providing analysis and insights of media and audience reactions. The Domestic and International Campaigns Team is charged with the implementation of strategic communications activities - including digital campaigns - targeted at vulnerable communities. Finally, the Insights and Analysis Team conducts research and analysis of target audiences both on and offline.[5]

Designed to coordinate, support and implement strategic communications activities, RICU had initially been tasked with advising government partners on their counter-terrorism-related communications (at home and overseas), exposing the weaknesses of violent extremist ideologies and brands while supporting credible alternatives at the grassroots.[6] This has included the production of communications guides and toolkits.[7] RICU has also invested in audience research, such as the online behaviours of young Muslims, media consumption patterns, the role of blogs in radicalisation and broader efforts to understand how language used by government is received and understood by target audiences.[8]

In 2010 reports indicated that existing or projected activities within RICU included expansion into digital communications and social media, the development and dissemination of documentary materials on British Islam to overseas audiences, the maintenance of links with conventional media outlets to inform and advise on reporting that will impact on the counter-terrorism agenda, and communications support and capacity building.[9] The traditional activities of RICU have recently been supplemented with a more targeted focus on the direct challenge of extremist narratives online through the 'road-testing' of 'proactive role in shaping.[10]

In the United States, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) is an inter-agency unit based in the US State Department. Established in 2010, the CSCC is the most developed strategic communications unit aimed at countering violent extremism and terrorism. Its primary objective is to systematise US strategic communications to counter the appeal of violent extremist ideologies among foreign populations, particularly those related to al-Qaeda and its global affiliates.

Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC)

United States

Established in 2010, the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) is an inter-agency unit based at the US State Department.[11] The CSCC steering committee is chaired by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy.[12] The CSCC's primary objective is to systematise US strategic communications to counter the appeal of violent extremist ideologies among foreign populations, particularly those related to al-Qaeda and its global affiliates.

The core priorities of the organisation include; monitoring and evaluating extremist narratives both on and offline; developing and disseminating strategic communications throughout the executive branch; identifying trends in extremist messaging providing thematic guidance to government agencies and departments; facilitating the use of a wide range of communications technologies; collecting relevant information and data from other US agencies and identifying gaps in capabilities in any areas relevant to the CSCC and its priorities.[13] The CSCC is composed of three streams of work.

The Intelligence and Analysis work stream systematises intelligence gathering through leveraging analytical and operational capabilities, guiding strategic communications activities through intelligence and academic insights of target audiences. This has included an 'analysis project to codify al-Qaeda master narratives as perceived by different local audiences… particularly… in Yemen and Algeria', and an 'opinion survey in Somalia seeking to understand local perceptions of al-Shabaab'.[14]

The Plans and Operations component designs and implements non-digital communications activities. As part of this, it designs toolkits and templates used by US government officials. This has included 'A Plague of Locusts: CT Messaging Against AQIM and Ansar al-Din'; 'One Path to Address CT Concerns in Syria without Helping the Regime or Alienating the Opposition'; and 'al-Qa'ida and al-Shabaab Merger: A Counter-Messaging Opportunity'. The Digital Outreach Team (DOT) performs direct engagement through the Internet and social media to counter extremist propaganda and misinformation.[15]

The key characteristics of these government units are that they adhere to a cross-departmental structure and fulfil a critical role in coordinating government-wide communication strategies with communities, analysing key target audiences and the ways in which government messaging resonates across different target groups.

These units often work in an advisory capacity, providing much needed guidance to government communicators - particularly high profile politicians - on what and what not to say and ensure that such messaging remains consistent and coherent across different departments and agencies.

For example, the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) has developed a 'Language Guidance' toolkit offering advice to government communicators on how certain terms can be interpreted

and misinterpreted by different audiences, and the risks associated with their use. The below table provides four examples of key terminologies often raised in public debates about extremism:

Terminology	Benefits	Risks	Recommendations
Winning 'hearts and minds'	In common usage by the Government and media to describe the complicated set of processes that aim to stop individuals being radicalised to violence and eventually becoming terrorists.	Risks promoting the idea that those whose hearts and minds we are engaging are somehow separate from mainstream society and need 'winning over'. Can be misunderstood as promoting an 'us and them' or 'West versus Islam' agenda. Can be twisted or exploited by propagandists to claim that we are asserting the superiority of 'Western values' over Muslim or Islamic values.	Try to avoid: 'hearts and minds' has suffered from overuse and can mean very different things to different audiences. **Avoid** using 'battle', 'struggle' or 'fight' for hearts and minds. Instead, the idea of shared values works much more effectively.
Islamophobia	A clear and concise term when it is used and understood correctly, e.g. the government is committed to tackling Islamophobia and all types of prejudice or discrimination.	It is not always understood, which risks the term being counter-productive. It is heard by some as "anti-Islamic" or misunderstood as a slur on Islam. Use of the term by government can lead some to think Muslims are being singled out for unwelcome attention, even when used to demonstrate that government is attempting to positively address their concerns.	Instead terms like "discrimination" are more widely understood by the general public.

Takfiri/Taqfir	The practice of declaring another group of Muslims as apostates (i.e., no longer Muslims); a tactic used by some extremist groups. Some have tried to use this term in order to tackle the glamorous or cool brand issue (usually in relation to al-Qaeda) by associating those being labelled as narrow-minded and marginalised.	The term is not widely understood and is particularly unsuited to a UK Muslim audience not familiar with Arabic. It has limited potential outside a scholarly context.	Not suitable for official communications to the general public.

Table 1: *Extract from Research, Information and Communications Unit (2010), 'Prevent: A Communications Guide'.*[16]

While these units have a key role in advising government communicators behind the scenes, they also take the lead on articulating government policy on key issues of relevance to countering violent extremism. This has been particularly visible in the context of the Syrian crisis where a number of countries have sought to develop discrete strategic communications campaigns to limit the appeal of travel to Syria.

The key objectives of these campaigns have been to reframe the appeal of travel; show active and effective government involvement in the crisis and provide avenues through which citizens can get involved legally. In Australia, the need to better inform citizens of the risks associated with travelling to Syria has led to the development of a series of 'fact sheets' tailored specifically at vulnerable communities;

'Ongoing Violence in Syria: Important Information for Australian Communities'
Australia

The government fact sheet 'Ongoing Violence in Syria: Important Information for Australian Communities' produced by the Attorney-General's department packages key information and advice aimed at those vulnerable to travelling to Syria to fight in the ongoing Syrian civil war.

The fact sheet includes information on what the Australian government is doing to counter the Syrian regime while highlighting the humanitarian assistance provided to the Syrian people which includes 'more than $24 million in humanitarian aid to date, including food, medicines, and emergency care for thousands of families and children, including those that have fled across Syria's borders'. [17]

It also outlines illegal practices that Australians should avoid, including 'fighting for either side; funding, training or recruiting someone to fight; supplying or funding weapons for either side', which could result in fines or maximum of 10 years imprisonment. Additional fact sheets also provide further information on the illegality of providing support for al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as Jabhat Al-Nusra (JN) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).[18]

Finally, the document advises how individuals can get involved to help the Syrian people. This includes making donations to international agencies providing humanitarian assistance in and around Syria; participating and engaging in peaceful legal protest activities; writing to a politician and other government representatives in Australia; and using the internet and social media responsibly to voice concerns and to challenge the Syrian regime.[19]

These resources aim to provide a positive 'call to action', such as practical ways through which individuals concerned about Syria can legally oppose the Syrian regime and assist the Syrian people. Ensuring that these messages are accessible to communities most affected by the crisis and often least aware of government policies towards it is critical, and as a result government has funded the translation of these resources into Arabic, Dari, Dinka, Farsi, Hindi, Indonesian, Somali, Turkish and Urdu.[20]

The Security and Prevention Department and the Belgian Ministry of the Interior has developed similar strategic communications campaigns looking to encourage Belgian communities to contribute positively to the Syrian crisis. Its pamphlet 'Helping the Syrian Population? Yes, But How?' provides guidance to Belgians looking to travel to Syria;

'Helping the Syrian Population? Yes, But How?'

Belgium

Published by the Security and Prevention Department at the Belgian Ministry of the Interior, the document 'Helping the Syrian Population? Yes, But How?' provides practical guidance and information dissuading Belgian citizens looking to travel abroad to Syria.[21]

The pamphlet highlights reasons why people should reconsider travel to Syria. [22] These include; the Syrian population does not want foreign fighters but international aid and humanitarian relief; travelling abroad poses a serious risk to the life and wellbeing of those who travel; they will become a burden to Syrian society; they will bring suffering to their own families; it is difficult to return to Belgium and lead a normal life; and there are religious justifications for not travelling to Syria.

The resource also explores how Belgians can become involved in the humanitarian relief effort domestically, such as through organising charity events or supporting existing international humanitarian agencies working to improve the conditions of Syrian refugees.

The need to articulate government positions more proactively to communities vulnerable to narratives of violent extremism has led to even more comprehensive engagement strategies by the United States government. The Digital Outreach Team (DOT) of the Centre for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) carries out direct engagement with audiences online to contrast objective facts and analysis with the often emotional and conspiracy-laden arguments of US critics.[23]

Digital Outreach Team (DOT)

United States

Established in 2006, the Digital Outreach Team (DOT) had been initially activated to counter misinformation surrounding US foreign policies through direct online engagement. Since its incorporation into the activities of the CSCC the initiative has combined public diplomacy communications with more direct efforts to counter the propaganda of al-Qaeda and its affiliates, through the dissemination of text, still images and audio-visual content.

The DOT is made up of approximately 20 staff, including 10 Arabic, five Urdu and two Somali-speaking writer-analysts who work mainly on mainstream platforms through overt engagement that is clearly branded as State Department communications. The DOT designs its engagement strategy based on the new media consumption patterns of its foreign target audiences.

Previous reports have indicated that its messaging has aimed to do such things as challenge negative perceptions of US involvement in the Middle East; advocate for a multicultural society and religious tolerance; state the desire to withdraw from Iraq; undermine myths or conspiracy theories; and stressing that the US is not at war with the Muslim world.[24] The DOT operates through targeted campaigns and has recorded 17,000 separate engagements since its creation in 2006, 7,000 of those since joining the CSCC.[25]

Measuring the effectiveness of these types of engagement strategies remains particularly challenging, and greater investment needs to be made into understanding how government messaging among vulnerable groups is affecting attitudes and behaviours. Considerations around the effectiveness of these strategies remain particularly important if government is to invest further resources into strategic communications.

There is also the growing challenge of recognising the 'say-do' gap within government engagement, where state-led strategic communications regarding certain key policy issues (whether domestic or foreign policy

related) are 'out of touch' and fail to correspond with the day-to-day realities and experiences of communities on the ground. This has led to accusations and suspicions from target communities that large, shadowy central government units represent little more than well-oiled, propaganda machines.

There is the need for a more discrete engagement strategy by government partners that are practiced on a day-to-day basis and tailored by local agencies and departments more attuned to the realities of their communities. While these projects are often aimed at complementing existing national-level communications activities, often they have been seeded as a result of local-level initiatives, drawing on partnerships with communities to increase credibility.

III. Communications: role of local authorities and police

There have been a number of attempts by government to develop more informed communications by its local partners in the context of countering violent extremism. This is based on the recognition that the development of tailored communications plans and partnerships by local authorities will complement national-level strategic communications objectives.

In the United Kingdom RICU has developed a number of tools with support from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) aimed at supporting local delivery partners to develop and implement more informed and effective communications on the ground.[26] This includes local authorities and partner agencies.

This toolkit provides a series of ideas, templates and communications principles, and aims to provide partner agencies with good practice guidance on how to develop and implement communications that are strong and effective. The aim of the guide is to apply broad communications principles that are tailored using local narratives, grievances and concerns, giving them a specific resonance with local communities. The five stage communication guidelines are roughly detailed in the case study box below:

Setting the context: examining specific issues in the local area and how are these being addressed; need to link the local level to the national/international levels, recognising the impact that other levels may have on the local area and ways in which to respond to such events.

Developing the strategy: mapping key stakeholder communities and agreement on communication; clarity around what can be achieved through communications; how can outcomes be quantified; stakeholders are aware of roles and responsibilities in communications process; that objectives are achievable within resource constraints; and that they take place within an agreed timeframe.

Developing the communications plan: includes tailoring the message by identifying the communications needs of different target audiences; from top-line communications for the general

population, tailored messages according to key sub-audiences or target geographies, through to messages designed to appeal to a specific individual.

Implementing the communications plan: includes thinking of communication channels and mediums through which to reach target audiences; considerations around credibility around the delivery of the message (including on and offline media); and timing the messaging appropriately.

Evaluation: includes measuring changes in awareness, perceptions or behaviour and achieved intended communications objectives; including the use of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Much of the value of involving local authorities in the development of communications to counter violent extremism lies in their ability to forge key partnerships with local community stakeholders with credibility among target audiences. The communications strategy developed by Luton Borough Council in the United Kingdom has sought to use such long-term partnerships building to develop its own tailored communications approach to limit the negative impact of extremist movements at a local level.[27]

Its Community Cohesion Hub works as a central coordinator through which to source up-to-date information on emerging community tensions before, during and immediately after potentially violent public events. It also identifies positive community stories to disseminate via social media and a text service; dispelling myths and misinformation that risk fuelling grievances; and working with key community leaders to disseminate positive alternative narratives at a grassroots level.

Community Cohesion Hub
United Kingdom

Luton Borough Council's community approach towards far-right demonstrations places emphasis on proactive communications with communities to limit the appeal of extreme right-wing protest groups.[28]

The key strategic and community intentions of the initiative are to reduce tension and promote community cohesion; foster positive community activism; promote public safety before and during events; provide community reassurance; increase the resilience of young people; provide credible alternative activities; and aid the recovery following a crisis or key event that has the potential to undermine community cohesion.

The initiative is based on strong partnership working with local community groups. Through these partnerships it has the ability to horizon scan key issues that risk undermining community resilience and to respond effectively and quickly to emerging intelligence on inter-community tensions.

Many of these initiatives have been seeded in the context of improving grassroots policing - 'smart policing' - of public demonstrations that risk undermining community cohesion locally, specifically through the increased use of communications. This includes methods to 'divert supporters attendance at far-right events through awareness of the penal code, and active communication to those who are at risk of getting involved; liaising with key influencers (e.g. social workers and teachers) to encourage them to discourage individuals from attending; and diversionary activities planned to coincide with the events'.[29]

In Sweden the emergence of the innovative Dialogue Police, which attempts to combine strategic communications activities with conventional policing to control sensitive events including localised public demonstrations by extremist movements, has proved particularly valuable. This specialist unit is designed to encourage dialogue, de-escalation and non-confrontation at public demonstrations, such as those organised by extreme right-wing movements, xenophobic groups and animal rights activists.

Dialogue Police

Sweden

Following widespread violence and disorder at the 2001 EU Summit in Gothenburg, a special committee established by the Prime Minister - known as the 'Gothenburg Committee' - highlighted severe deficiencies in Police crowd management training in Sweden. This led to the creation of the Special Police Tactic initiative established by the National Police Board in 2004. [30]

The SPT fostered the creation of a police negotiation unit known as the Dialogue Police (Dialog Polis) in 2002, a special crowd-management unit that encourages 'dialogue, de-escalation and non-confrontation'. As one interviewed representative of the initiative observed: 'You have to go out and talk to people, you have to be aware of what is happening in the society, you cannot be reactive all the time, you need to be ahead and be there among them and see and observe people'.

Dialogue Police units have been deployed in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, challenging the securitised approach of crowd management during large demonstrations and street protests through a proactive, non-violent strategy that emphasises 'interaction between the police and the crowd to maintain order' in situations identified as prone to escalate into violence.

Particularly effective within the context of managing demonstrations of extreme left-wing movements, xenophobic groups and animal rights activists, Dialogue Police act as a communication link between organisers and police coordinators 'attempting to solve or minimise problems' while encouraging protesters to self-police during demonstrations. The goals of the unit are described as 'negotiation, mediation, suggesting, communication and sensing'.

Beyond situational techniques, key to the success of the initiative is the maintenance of longer-term relationships between organisers before, during and after demonstrations to ensure on-going cooperation between protesters on the ground, local authorities and the police. This allows the Dialogue Police intermediaries to foster a greater understanding of these protests groups and their aims, while being seen to work to ensure freedom of speech and the right to protest.

They therefore serve as an invaluable point of reference for the wider force policing these events on the ground; 'One of the tasks of the Dialogue Police is to talk to the police officers at the demonstration site and give them information on the groups they are dealing with. This changes their approach dramatically. The officers shape their expectations in advance'.

From the point of view of the protesters and interest groups, the day-to-day local community impact of the Dialogue Police has not gone unnoticed either; 'Surprisingly, most will be interested to talk to the Dialogue Police, and are interested to hear what they do and what they can help them with. When the group realises that the Dialogue Police is a way to reach into police services and to put pressure on authorities, they are interested in keeping the Dialogue Police as a contact'.

Although the initiative has not been independently evaluated, preliminary assessments of the Dialogue Police have revealed numerous tensions between these innovative policing tactics and institutionalised approaches to policing in Sweden. This includes ethical considerations surrounding the roles of police/community intermediaries, the willingness of commanders to use Dialogue Police units as intelligence gatherers, and their limited discretionary powers.

Such units are challenging conventional securitised approaches to crowd management during large demonstrations by extremist groups through negotiation, mediation and engagement. The key to their success lies in maintaining long-term relationships between protest organisers before, during and after demonstrations to ensure on-going cooperation between activities on the ground, local authorities and law enforcement officials, thereby limiting the potential for violence.

In Finland, the *Virtual Community Police Team* has gone even further in its use of new technologies to communicate with key target audiences. Initiated in 2008 to communicate with key target groups through the internet and social media through maintaining publicly-known profiles on social media sites in which people can communicate with local law enforcement representatives. The Virtual Police unit now includes three full-time police officers and the head of the Virtual Police unit was voted Police Officer of the Year, and currently has around 25,000 followers on Facebook.[31]

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

Effective community engagement by government requires its institutions to become more strategic about communicating its message. Moving from purely defence, crisis-driven messaging to the development of proactive and sustained communications activities needs to be a priority for European countries.

This report focused on the increasing role of communications in government engagement with communities, and has identified and examined some of the key projects, programmes and policies activated by government at both national and local levels to use strategic communications to counter violent extremism. While a number of governments - notably the United Kingdom - have been quick to respond, other European countries still lag behind in leveraging the full potential of communications. More needs to be done to streamline and sustain these activities;

- Government must be able to anticipate key events, crises or strains within communities and be able to communicate on these issues in a real-time, responsive way.
- Government must establish channels of communication between government and communities, providing structure and coherence to government messaging.
- Messaging by different government communicators needs to be coordinated across government departments but also between the national and local levels.
- Government needs to establish long-term partnerships with key community leaders to ensure their messaging resonates within target communities.
- Government must ensure that it streamlines its messaging infrastructure to make its communications nuanced in content but assertive in delivery.

To achieve this, government needs to establish communications infrastructure at all levels. Cross-departmental units need to be developed to coordinate strategic communication activities that feed into national-level counter-terrorism policy objectives. These units must work in both communicating proactively but also in an advisory capacity, providing much needed guidance to government communicators on what and what not to say - particularly to high profile politicians - and ensuring that such messaging remains consistent and coherent.

These must be combined with more localised engagement strategies by government partners that are attuned to the realities of local communities, particularly through the ability to forge key partnerships with local community stakeholders with credibility among target audiences. The role of engagement before, during and after key events that risk undermining community cohesion are a prime opportunity to further good relations and facilitate ways of limiting support for ideas and perceptions that risked feeding into the single narrative of extremist ideologies. Local government must learn to capitalise on the advantages offered by communications resulting from these crises.

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