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Countering Violent Extremism in Fragile and Conflict Affected States

Report

Stabilisation Unit

Stabilisation Unit
December 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Research points to violent extremism in fragile and conflict affected states as being a process consisting of up to four overlapping components or 'steps':**

  o **The existence of core vulnerabilities;**
  o **The creation of an ideological narrative;**
  o **Group or social interaction; and**
  o **The experience of 'being' a violent extremist.**

- **Core vulnerabilities usually arise as a result of structural drivers such as political marginalisation or injustice which, in turn, are linked to (unmet) basic human needs including safety, belonging and status. These are 'exploited' by extremist ideological narratives, many of which offer a means of addressing those human needs. Ideological narratives are then socialised and communicated via a process of group or collective interaction, which *may* result in individuals becoming violent extremists. However, individuals may support violent extremist groups for many reasons, including out of opportunistic or pragmatic calculations or under duress.**

- **Countering violent extremism (CVE)-related activities can be delivered at the macro (transnational and national), meso (sub-national and group) and micro (individual) levels. Macro-level responses tend to require longer-term, cross-regional and sometimes multi-generational change aimed at eroding the international appeal of a specific ideology using all available levers of power (including soft power). As a result, the focus of most CVE activities in conflict-affected contexts tends to be primarily at the sub-national level (although these may well be delivered by national-level institutions or partners). These are typically aimed at undermining the support base and cohesion of violent extremist non-state actor groups. Cumulatively, this focus may support macro-level CVE aims by challenging local-level manifestations - and therefore, the 'evidence-base' for - overarching, transnational extremist narratives.**

- **Notwithstanding psychological and behavioural consistencies in extremist processes, the group focus of CVE in Fragile and Conflict Affected States implies that interventions may be slightly different to CVE programmes in the West or in non-conflict-affected states, which often focus on vulnerable individuals as opposed to groups.**

- **Deconstructing the different components of the extremist process as well as the levels at which it manifests itself (as outlined above) can help to conceptualise as well as place boundaries around CVE. It can also provide the basis for an analytical and programmatic framework: a means of identifying potential entry points for programmes and interventions. For example, the four components of the violent extremism process, combined with the implied aim of undermining violent extremist groups, offers a mechanism for generating key analytical and planning questions which, in turn, can also be integrated into wider processes such as the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability. Illustratively, these might include questions such as "what are the specific vulnerabilities or (unmet) needs exploited by group 'x' in geographic area 'y'?" which would logically lead to the planning question: "what opportunities or levers do HMG or partners have to address those particular vulnerabilities?"**

- **Unsurprisingly, general guidelines for countering violent extremism in fragile and conflict affected states loosely resemble those relating to wider stabilisation activity. These include ensuring interventions are context-specific, drawing linkages to wider activity and**

bolstering existing sources of resilience to violent extremism. More tangibly however, CVE can be divided into two categories: CVE-relevant (or 'indirect') activities and CVE specific (or 'direct') activities. CVE-relevant activities largely address the context which allows extremism to take hold. These include improving governance, countering corruption, security and justice initiatives, addressing unemployment, encouraging independent media sectors and education. CVE-specific activities are those activities that are aimed at tackling violent extremist ideologies and groups head-on. These include strategic communications and alternative-narrative efforts, defector programmes, de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes and political deals and negotiations.

OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

1. This note provides a summary of the evidence base on countering violent extremism (CVE) in fragile and conflict-affected states. It draws on available academic and literature reviews, cross-government (including DFID, Home Office and FCO) reports and related Stabilisation Unit fieldwork and analysis. Where possible, it highlights **behavioural trends.** The findings in this note are organised under two broad headings: **the process of violent extremism** and **countering violent extremism.** It also suggests a framework for understanding the drivers of violent extremism and potential entry points for interventions in contexts that involve violent (extremist) groups. It should be noted that the wide-ranging nature of violent extremism as a term[1] makes it vulnerable to sweeping generalities and confusion. In turn, this note primarily focuses on different variations of **violent religious extremism** such as ethno-religious or nationalist-religious extremism. [2]

VIOLENT EXTREMISM AS A PROCESS

2. The evidence base[3] on CVE suggests that, whilst the context is everything, the 'journey' to becoming a violent extremist consists of a reproducible *social pathway, process* or *system.*[4] This involves (at least) four fluid and overlapping components:

    a. The existence of **core vulnerabilities;**
    b. An **ideological narrative;**
    c. (Group) **interaction;**
    d. The experience of **'being' a violent extremist**.

3. Different elements of each component are recognisable at the macro (national or transnational), meso (sub-national or group) and micro (individual) levels. In some, but by no means all, circumstances, these components can also loosely be described as the 'steps' of radicalisation.

Component 1: Core Vulnerabilities

4. A growing body of evidence[5] suggests that violent political ideologies consistently rely upon key structural ('push') **factors** such as political, ethnic or religious marginalisation, the absence of justice, a breakdown in governance or the lack of fair access to economic opportunities.[6] These drivers, in turn, are directly related to the absence or denial of **basic human needs**. These needs may be: safety-related (such as a need for protection); status-related (a need for esteem, position and fairness); relational (a need for belonging); existential (a need for meaning); or epistemic (a need for understanding) to name but a few. [7] [8] [9] Clearly, specific drivers are likely to be more relevant or pervasive than others within any given conflict or instability-related context such as, for example, the perception of social injustice amongst supporters of Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria.[10]

5. The existence of structural drivers and unmet needs enables and expedites the emergence of core social, psychological and political (henceforth referred to as 'cor*e*') **vulnerabilities** within individuals and communities. These vulnerabilities provide 'breeding grounds' for violent extremism alongside other threats such as organised crime.[11] Extremism groups are most likely to succeed in their recruitment campaigns if and when they are able to perform a function through which they address specific needs, such as by offering some form of livelihood, belonging and personal status. These groups also exploit and/or harness vulnerabilities in order to promote a particular logic or interpretation of events, thereby shaping the ideological narrative. [12]

Component 2: The Ideological Narrative

6. Violent extremism requires the existence of an **ideology** which, in turn, typically consists of the following interconnected elements:

    a. The construction of a (political) narrative, by attributing meaning to events and emotions in order to explain 'why things are the way they are.'[13] This usually involves a process of interpreting events and diagnosing core vulnerabilities, usually in a way that meets basic human needs. For example, an extremist narrative may explain political marginalisation through the use of us-versus-them themes aimed at undermining or dehumanising 'enemies', thus elevating the comparative status (a basic human need) of the target audience.[14] This process also provides positive, negative or neutral values to specific topics or issues and, in doing so, produces a *system* or *framework* of belief.

    b. The development of an offer or manifesto describing how an ideology will lead to better prospects and how individuals stand to gain from it.[15] This usually provides clarity on both *political aims,* such as the control of a given territory or the expulsion of an invading force, and the *means* of achieving those aims, such as through the 'legitimate' use violence.[16] The offer, which, in some contexts may resemble a social contract, may also be supplemented by tangible transactional 'benefits', such as the promise of a wife, adventure or belonging - all of which can, once again, be linked to basic human needs. Ideological narratives and offers are likely to be of greatest appeal when accompanied by tangible, *reinforcing* activities and actions, such as when a violent political group is able to provide basic, grass-roots services or justice to its target support base. It is very likely that in some instances, individuals may support a particular ideology because of these benefits and services alone rather than because of the draw of the narrative.

    c. Scriptures and manuscripts often provide an authoritative evidence-base or 'handrail' for both the construction of the narrative and the development of an ideological offer. For example, radical interpretations such as Sayyid Qutb's 'Milestones', Ayman al-Zawahiri's 'Knights Under the Prophet's Banner', and Abdullah Azzam's 'Defending the Land of the Muslims is Each Man's most Important Duty' are often cited as seminal works within the development of radical Islam.[17] Critically, such (usually macro-level) scriptures and works may expedite the propagations of ideological narratives by providing 'off the shelf', readily-available frameworks of belief or doctrines that can be tailored or adapted to local contexts.

Component 3: (Group) Interaction

7. Group - or interpersonal - interaction, often referred to as **socialisation**, is the "*social process* of networking and *group dynamics* through which the individual comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it."[18] It is the process through which macro-level ideological narratives, such as Wahhabism, are interpreted and made relevant to specific audiences. At the individual level, this component often marks the culmination of the radicalisation process. As its name suggests, this component usually involves *collective* environments.[19] For example, social psychological research highlights a tendency for like-minded groups to 'arrive' at a more radical position than an individual member would have done on his or her own, a phenomenon referred to as *risky shifts* (also referred to as *group polarisation*). Moreover, political science research highlights identity (including ideological identity) as a process of *negotiation* amongst people and interest groups.[20] These theories help to explain the prominent role of some madrasas and prisons in the radicalisation process as well as why European foreign fighters sometimes come from the same street, let alone the same town.[21] It also partly explains why some groups take on more extreme views than others on the legitimacy of violence in achieving political change, despite subscribing to a similar macro-level ideological narrative. [22]

8. Socialisation processes are assisted - and sometimes led - by 'multipliers', including key *opinion leaders* and *communication systems*. Opinion leaders play a vital role in both constructing ideological narratives and in propagating them within any given context, thus facilitating the identity discourse. These may consist of members of the elite, religious authorities, group leaders or simply charismatic figures.[23] At times, these individuals reinterpret existing ideologies and therefore act as a catalyst for the evolution and migration of ideas, sometimes resulting in splinter groups. For example, key tenets of Hezbollah's ideology can be traced back to its leaders' shared theological experience with Iranian clergymen in Najaf (Iraq).[24] They also continually (re)interpret the strategic logic and applicability of an ideological narrative to any given context or situation. This explains why some violent extremist groups may take the decision to abandon, or indeed initiate, violence if they feel that this approach is more conducive to achieving their political aims.[25] Moreover, modern, global communication systems - particularly social media - have enabled borderless, collective interaction as well social comparisons.[26] They have also engendered an environment where vulnerabilities such as inequality in one geographic area can resonate in another.

Component 4: *Being* a violent extremist

9. The extremism journey does not end with joining or supporting a violent group, movement or ideology. For some individuals, such as those who are kidnapped and inserted into groups, 'joining' a violent organisation may be the first step in the radicalisation process. The fact that individuals are subjected to different experiences implies that they may not necessarily go through the same extremism process. The four aforementioned components or 'steps' may therefore be described as being somewhat akin to a ladder, where some - but not all - rungs may be climbed. For example, a broad distinction might be made between: opportunists - those individuals having been through step 1 only; sympathisers - those individuals having been through steps 1 and 2; and extremists - steps 1, 2 and 3. However rigid typologies are often misleading and analysis of individuals therefore needs to be context-sensitive.[27]

10. Individuals also tend to experience a range of psychological and social pressures *after* subscribing to or accepting a violent ideological narrative.[28] This includes the emergence of cognitive dissonance (a situation involving conflicting attitudes or behaviours) in instances where there is a tension between a particular narrative, such as the fact that an ideology

does not condone the targeting of civilians or other Muslims, and the 'reality' experienced by an individual, such as where both civilians and Muslims are harmed. This cognitive dissonance can lead to a process of questioning and disillusionment and, ultimately, ideological disengagement. Illustratively, studies suggest that a number of foreign fighters in Syria disengaged from ISIL's ideology following the realisation that they were primarily fighting other Muslim opposition groups rather than the Assad regime (the primary 'enemy' in ISIL's narrative).[29] Research also describes instances of *ideological entrapment*, where individuals may have disengaged with an ideology but are unable to fully distance themselves from it because of the physical control of a group or movement over a specific geographical area.[30]

11. The different components of the violent extremism process (outlined above), whilst interlinked as well as mutually supporting, can loosely be placed under 'push' and 'pull' categories. 'Push' factors include structural drivers and individual needs. 'Pull' factors include the ideological narrative and the process of group interaction (as illustrated in **Figure 1**). However, an individual needn't experience all components of the process in order to become a violent extremist. For example, the existence of core vulnerabilities combined with an attractive ideological offer may be sufficient to draw him or her to violence (and socialisation may therefore not always be required).
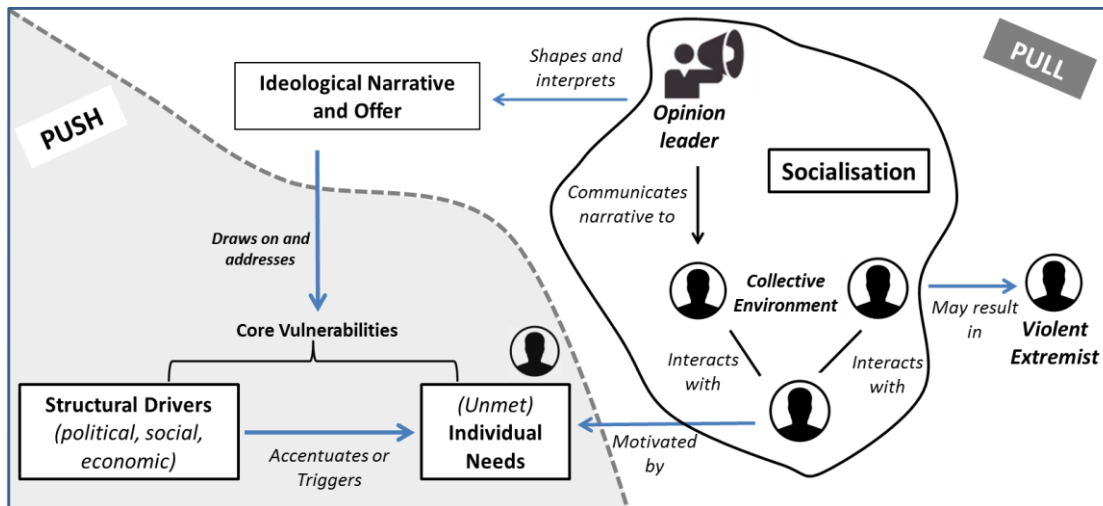
Figure 1: The components or 'steps' of the violent extremism process.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT AFFECTED STATES

Guiding principles

12. The literature on countering violent extremism highlights a few overarching and generally familiar guidelines. Firstly, CVE interventions need to be **context specific**, acknowledging local-level motivations, dynamics and sensitivities. Secondly, CVE programmes **should not be conducted in isolation** but instead, be part a strategic, integrated approach drawing on available levers of power or influence. For example, the evidence base, which includes a Mercy Corps study focussing on youth in Colombia, Somalia and Afghanistan, suggests that many of the prevailing development approaches, including education and job creation programmes, are unlikely, in isolation, to make youth more peaceful if they are not paired with meaningful governance reforms.[31] Moreover, this strategic approach should also seek to understand and **draw linkages to existing activity**, including that of civil society actors and international partners who may be working in the same space.[32] Thirdly, a CVE strategy within any given context should seek to **bolster or draw on sources of resilience** that exist

within that context. These sources may be ideological, such as an acceptance of religious diversity or freedom of speech, or structural, such as democratic institutions.

Different levels and types of response

13. The fact that violent extremism manifests itself at different levels (macro, meso and micro) implies that different types of activities and responses may be delivered at each of those levels.[33] Moreover, CVE research suggests that responses may either be *indirect (*'CVE relevant'), such as longer term development; or *direct (*'CVE specific'), such as alternative-narrative efforts.[34] In turn, a summary of the different types of CVE interventions which either have – or may be – considered at those levels is outlined below.

Macro-level responses:

14. Macro-level (i.e. primarily transnational and national) responses to violent extremism are inherently difficult to conceptualise and implement. At this level, violent extremism arguably consists of an overarching ideological narrative which *subsumes* or *aggregates* different (i.e. geographically disconnected) sub-national narratives and movements. Historically, both Marxism and Fascism might have fallen within this category. As such, any given macro-level ideology will act as an umbrella for multiple denominations or strands that subscribe to the same broad social, political or religious principles, such as Deobandism and Wahhabism.[35]

15. It follows that macro-level *responses* are likely to be primarily strategic, at times requiring multi-generational change as a means of eroding an ideology's relevance or legitimacy. Approaches include the sustained use of soft-power, such as the promotion of pluralist, democratic or economic values, and high-level strategic communications and messaging as a means of gradually challenging ideas or assumptions.[36] The eventual thawing of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States may be an example of this process. In addition, it is likely that macro-level ideologies can be challenged – if not completely 'countered'- when consistently and repeatedly undermined within different sub-national contexts.

Sub-national (including group and individual- level) responses:

16. The above-mentioned assumption that violent ideologies may, at least on the short to medium term, best be eroded through the combined effect of sub-national level interventions suggests that the primary focus of CVE efforts should also be on that (sub-national) level. These interventions may be geared towards either individuals or groups; however, this report assesses that it is inherently difficult to distinguish between the two levels, not least because groups consist of a c*ollection* of individuals. For example, tailored de-radicalisation programmes may be geared towards the needs (e.g. vocational skills and theological understanding) of *individuals* but result in a net loss for violent non-state actor *groups*, whose support base might be eroded as a result of those programmes. Similarly, addressing core structural drivers such as a breakdown in governance may decrease the vulnerability of both individuals *and* groups to violent ideologies and manifestos. In turn, the following types of interventions, which are broken into two categories of activity - indirect (*CVE relevant*) and direct (*CVE specific*) - are assessed to impact both levels.

17. Indirect (*CVE relevant*) activities are those that are wider-ranging than the CVE agenda but which *may*, in some circumstances, support CVE outcomes by preventing - and/or bolstering resilience to - extremism. The relevance of indirect CVE activities will be dependent on

whether they address the *actual* drivers of extremism within any given context. For example, programmes aimed at addressing unemployment are unlikely to reduce the attractiveness of violent ideologies in a context where the main driver of extremism is the lack of access to justice. Indirect CVE activities include:

a. **Making governance more effective and inclusive.** The absence of (formal) governance can engender perceptions of injustice and marginalisation as well as an inability to provide basic services - 'vulnerabilities' that are often exploited by violent (extremist) non-state actor groups as well as organised crime networks. In turn, studies highlight the importance of building strong, inclusive - as well as cooperative - relationships between civil society and the Government. In Mali for example, UNDP technical assistance involved supporting the restoration of state authority in the North and carrying out activities aimed at promoting and strengthening social cohesion, including through engaging women.[37] Also worthy of consideration is support for the establishment of autonomous electoral commissions that might, over time, change the nature of the political system and help to ensure the rotation of political power.[38]

b. **Counter-corruption efforts**, similarly, are likely to yield CVE dividends, not least because of the fact that "when corruption goes unaddressed, citizens may conclude that government exists not to serve but to exploit."[39] Related SU research on tackling the roots of organised crime highlights the potential impact of **supporting tax administration and collection systems** given that an inverse correlation exists between tax collection and corruption. Over time, increasing tax revenue from individuals (income) and businesses (sales, value added and customs) may have the additional benefit of fuelling public demand for greater transparency and accountability, thus further undermining corruption.[40] Corruption may also be undermined by promoting **citizens' ability to pursue legal claims against their Governments.** This type of approach might also include support to the recipient country's Bar Association in representing litigants against the government; an initiative which may have the added benefit of promoting judicial independence.[41]

c. **Security and justice initiatives** and Security Sector Reform (SSR) to promote access to justice and human-rights sensitive policing. This can, at least in theory, assist in ensuring the state's capacity to identify and respond to violent extremist groups, including through establishing a presence in vulnerable areas, such as where individuals feel neglected by institutions or where there is a perceived lack of access to justice. These can also promote adherence to International Human Rights Law. Historically however, building the capacity of a single institution such as the police whilst failing to address capacity and integrity deficits within other institutions within the criminal justice chain has commonly contributed to the growth of pre-trial detention numbers and the duration of incarceration. This, in turn, may render individuals vulnerable to extremist movements or ideologies.[42]

d. **Addressing poverty and unemployment** can - but does not necessarily - support CVE outcomes. The literature suggests that, whilst there is no causal relationship between poverty and/or unemployment and extremism, these may increase individuals' vulnerability to violent groups and ideologies, especially if these groups are able to provide tangible economic opportunities or benefits.[43] However, programmes providing vocational training which do not lead to meaningful employment can damage expectations and exacerbate resentment, as can employment programmes which are manipulated locally to favour certain sectors of society or the elites.[44]

e. Investment into **education** and the wider youth sector may (arguably) be relevant to the CVE agenda, not least because schools and universities provide a fertile ground for socialisation and the spread of ideas. However, research conducted by RUSI concludes that "there is no clear link between education levels and extremism."[45] Somewhat paradoxically, research also suggests that in many cases where individuals are at risk of recruitment to Islamist violent extremism, a strong traditional religious education (albeit one that does not condone recourse to violence) can in fact provide a good defence against radicalisation to violent extremism.[46]

f. **Encouraging independent media outlets** and investigatory journalism can provide an effective means of both highlighting violent extremism–related issues and of holding governments into account, thus potentially addressing a range of grievances. Such outlets may also offer a vehicle for promoting alternative messages as well as moderate voices which, in turn, can help to challenge extremist narratives.

g. It is possible that **countering organised-crime** can (in a similar way to the anti-corruption corruption efforts) address a key breeding ground for violent extremism. In the Sahel for example, newfound access to the illicit economy has reportedly led to a rise in demand for brothels in transit hubs as well as along the main smuggling routes, often staffed by (sometimes trafficked) migrants attempting to pay for the next leg of their journey.[47] These dynamics, combined with the wider erosion of traditional sources of authority such as clan leaders and imams, have contributed to growing social conservatism and the reassertion of fundamentalist values as a backlash to widespread impact of criminality.[48]

18. Clearly, *indirect* CVE activities such as those outlined above may already be underway in any given context. It follows that one of the first steps to developing CVE strategies is to assess the extent to which existing activities may or may not be supporting CVE outcomes (as already alluded to in the above 'guidelines' section).

19. Direct (*CVE-specific*) activities are aimed at disrupting and eroding violent extremist ideologies head-on, including by separating or isolating violent groups from their support base. These include:

a. **Strategic communications** and **alternative-narrative** efforts (those activities aimed at demystifying and deconstructing extremist messaging), which have been the subject of considerable debate. For example, evidence suggests that, just as interaction with extremist content alone may not necessarily lead to participation in violent activities, "the hypothesis that violent extremist narratives or the real life threat of violent extremism can be countered by an alternative set of communications is an assumption that remains unproven."[49] Rather, 'alternative' media approaches – including television and radio drama addressing issues of identity, reconciliation, and tolerance – may deliver greater results, especially if these are not perceived to be linked to a political agenda.[50] More widely however, the literature does highlight a few consistent themes such as:

    i.   The importance of ensuring that messages are delivered through *credible* individuals (such as respected community figures);
    ii. The fact that communications should be integrated into CVE strategies from the earliest stage;
    iii. The need to understand local audiences;

iv. The importance of ensuring that the appropriate *capability* (i.e. the medium of dissemination – such as radio or television) is employed in order to reach those audiences;

v. The fact that communications should be considered as a genuine, two-way, and therefore interactive, conversation with a target audience.[51]

b. **Defector programmes** can, in certain contexts, be an effective addition to the CVE tool-kit. Indeed, these can offer a means of depleting a violent extremist group of both key leaders and of its rank and file, thus undermining their cohesion and the credibility of their offer to prospective members or supporters. For example, senior defectors may play an important role in countering the narrative of a movement such as by highlighting discrepancies and inconsistencies between a group's manifesto and its actual activities or tactics. These programmes are likely to be most achievable in those instances where a group's or movement's leadership or support base has already *disengaged* with a violent ideology and is looking for a 'way out.' It should however be noted that HMG's experience of defector programmes acts as a stark reminder of the complexity of these programmes, especially when attempted in the absence of a political settlement.[52]

c. **De-radicalisation** and **rehabilitation programmes** may take many forms. Some countries, such as Morocco and Bangladesh, have focussed on preventing further radicalisation whilst others, such as Yemen have emphasised the rehabilitation of those who are already radicalised.[53] Moreover, such programmes can be run within the criminal justice system (such as in prisons), focus on individuals who have already served their sentence, or be conducted by civil society organisations in vulnerable communities. Saudi Arabia's approach to de-radicalisation, for example, combines elements of the above. It begins inside prisons by way of counselling by Islamic clerics who are employed to both understand the ideological motivations of violent extremist inmates and to deliver a religious 'academic course of study' aimed at explaining to those same inmates that their interpretation of the Qur'an is incorrect.[54] Individuals then spend a period of eight to twelve weeks in the Mohammed bin Nayef Centre for Counselling and Advice, where they receive further therapy and vocational training during which time generous financial support is given to the participants' families (who, in return, are held responsible for the conduct of the participant upon release).[55] Overall however, ideological *disengagement* may once again be a more realistic initial aim than *de-radicalisation*, not least because this outcome allows for individuals to be physically distanced from an ideology which, in turn, may lead to longer-term de-radicalisation.[56] Moreover, isolated de-radicalisation and rehabilitation processes in FCAS are unlikely to succeed in the absence of wider social and political change aimed at addressing the driving forces which enable the emergence and spread of a violent political ideology.

d. **Disrupting violent extremist group resources and funding** may, at first glance, appear to more of a conventional CT approach and therefore less CVE relevant. However, this type of activity can contribute to eroding the viability of violent extremist group 'offers' to their prospective support base, including benefit-packages (outlined above). Fundamentally, groups are usually dependent on funding in order to acquire capabilities, uphold manpower-bases and provide social services. A case in point is Hezbollah, who, between 1982 and 1986 and with Iranian backing, distributed over $90 million to families whose dependents had died or were wounded in the Lebanese Civil War.[57]

e. **Political deals and negotiations** can have a direct impact on countering violent extremist groups and ideologies. Firstly, these can undermine one of the core vulnerabilities exploited by violent extremist movements - that of political marginalisation - thereby offering an important preventative function. Secondly, inclusion of violent political groups within the political settlement can lead to a de-escalation in hostilities or even to the decision to abandon violence, not least because movements may conclude that they are more likely to achieve their aims through political, rather than through violent, means.[58] For example, The African National Congress (ANC) moderated its objectives between 1990 and 1993, accepting a peaceful power-sharing transition and no immediate destruction of Apartheid's structures.[59] Thirdly, local-level political deals can lead sub-groups or factions to 'turn' against extremist groups, especially in those instances where there is already distrust towards those groups, such as in the case of the Sunni 'Awakening' movement in Iraq. Finally, political deals also directly support other 'direct' CVE activities such as defector programmes as indeed, they may provide the legal and political framework for amnesties, official pardons and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reconciliation (DDR) programmes.[60]

Towards an CVE Analytical Framework

20. Logically, analysis of the different components involved in the extremism process can provide the basis for an analytical and planning framework aimed at identifying points of entry that correspond to each of those components (illustrated in Figure 2). This framework, which focusses on the sub-national / group level (for the reasons outlined above), consists of a series of analytical and related planning *questions* that can be loosely placed under 'push' and 'pull' headings. These questions could also be mainstreamed within different types of analytical products including the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS).

'Push' questions:

- **Analytical questions**:
  o <u>What</u> are the core vulnerabilities (and related needs) which are being exploited by violent extremist groups?
  o <u>How</u> are these vulnerabilities being exploited?

- **Related planning questions**:
  o What options and approaches can be employed to address these vulnerabilities?
  o What sources of resilience exist within the context or area?
  o What are the risks associated with these options and approaches (e.g. in terms of conflict sensitivity)?

'Pull' questions:

- **Analytical questions**:
  o <u>What</u> is the (violent extremist) groups manifesto and 'offer'?
  o <u>What</u> are its key messages and themes?
  o <u>How</u> (e.g. in which collective environments and through which social networks) are messages being socialised?
  o <u>By whom</u> are these being socialised?
  o Are there sources of disillusionment or disengagement amongst members?

- **Related planning questions**:
  - Can the 'offer' or manifesto be challenged or 'matched'?
  - What mechanisms and options are available to (credibly) challenge key messages and themes?
  - Can key opinion leaders be challenged or neutralised?
  - How can sources of disillusionment or disengagement be exploited (and what are the associated risks)?

21. Different tools and methodologies may assist in answering each of the questions. For example, Social Network Analysis can help to identify key opinion leaders as well as understand processes of socialisation and group interaction (such as links to particular institutions or centres).
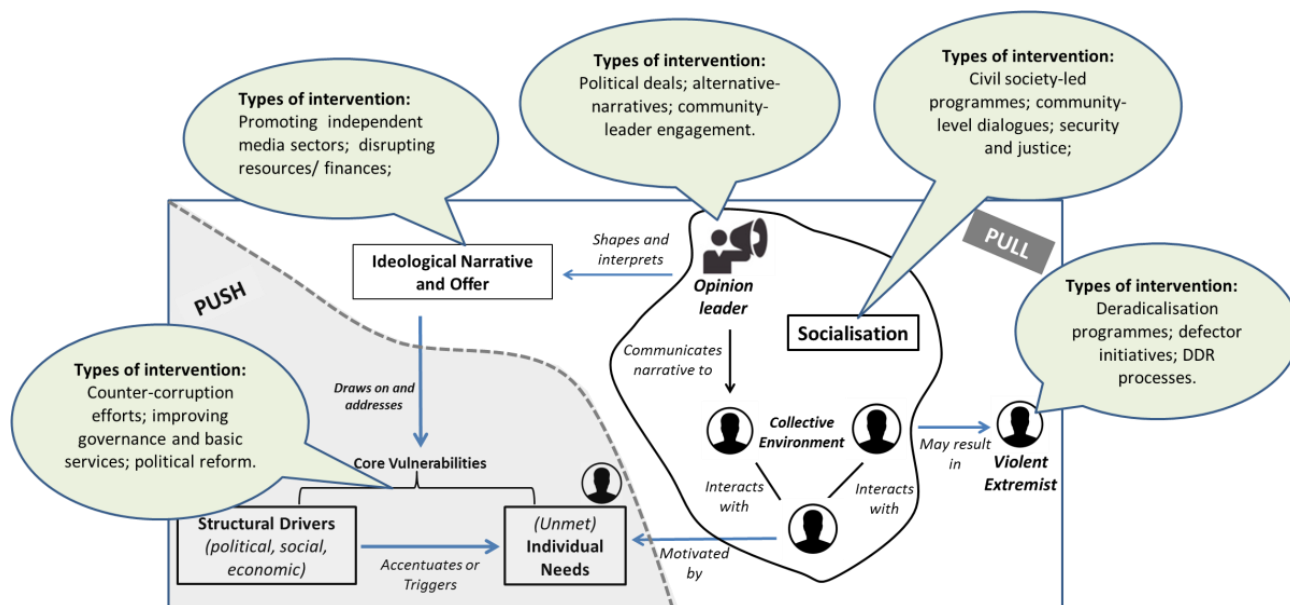

Figure 2: Components of the extremism process can help identify programmatic entry points.

Stabilisation Unit June 2016.

References:

[1] Violent extremism, or the use of - or support for the use of - violence to achieve ideological goals, is recognisable in one form or another within most contexts where there is conflict or instability. In turn, violent *extremists* can range from political leaders to insurgencies and wider single-issue activist groups.

[2] This clarity is important, as whilst it is true that different forms of extremism demonstrate social and psychological similarities, there are likely to be nuances between religious extremism and more secular (such as right-wing) extremism. For example, Charles Kimball[2] suggests that religious extremism is characterised by a combination of: absolute truth claims; blind obedience; the establishment of the 'ideal' time; the notion of the ends justifying the means; and declarations of holy war. See C. Kimball, When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs, (New York: Harper, 2002), chapters 2-6 (The Five Warning Signs of Corruption in Religion) *in* A. P. Schmid, *Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, May 2014.

[3] This research spans across political science, sociology, social-psychology, anthropology and to a lesser extent, behavioural economics.

[4] CVE therefore consists of a process that can be identified in relation to most belief systems. See for example: E. F. Thomas, C. McGarty et al. *Social interaction and psychological pathways to political engagement and extremism. European Journal of Social Psychology (44),* February 2014, pp. 15–20.

[5] Illustratively, political science, social psychological and economic theories converge around the notion that the rationality of a decision depends on structures found in the environment.

[6] See for example H. Allan, A. Glazzard *et al. Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), October 2015.

[7] See for example: A. Silke, *Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization*, European Journal of Criminology, January 2008, pp. 99-123; S. Gibbs, The terrorist mind: A psychological and political analysis, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology April 1, 2006, pp. 121-138 and M. Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, *Comparative Studies in Religion & Society,* Aug. 2003.

[8] J. Horgan and K. Braddock, *Assessing the Effectiveness of Current De-Radicalization Initiatives and Identifying Implications for the Development of US-Based Initiatives in Multiple Settings*, 2009.

[9] Also described as the motivational component or 'the quest for personal significance that defines a goal to which one may be committed.' See A. W. Kruglanski, M. J. Gelfand *et al. The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism*, Advances in Political Psychology, Volume 35, Issue Supplement S1, February 2014, pp. 69–93.

[10] Within North East Nigeria for example, these might include a lack of social justice. *Stabilisation Unit fieldwork on Boko Haram defectors*, Stabilisation Unit, November 2015.

[11] See for example E. Scheye, Organised Crime in Stabilisation Contexts, Stabilisation Unit, January 2016.

[12] See also S. Ladbury, *Women and Extremism: The Association of Women and Girls with Jihadi Groups and Implications for Programming*, DFID / FCO, January 2015.

[13] This step is therefore sometimes referred to as the the *ideological* component. See also W. Kruglanski, M. J. Gelfand *et al.* pp. 69-93.

[14] Research suggests some psychological parallels to gang-related violence. See for example: A New Approach to Countering Violent Extremism: Sharing Expertise and Empowering Local Communities, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, October 2014 available at https://leb.fbi.gov/2014/october/a-new-approach-to-countering-violent-extremism-sharing-expertise-and-empowering-local-communities.

[15] J. Leader Maynard (University of Oxford), *The Role of Ideology in Political Violence and Armed Conflict* Lecture, April 2016.

[16] For example, violent political narratives may fill voids and offer existential comfort by providing meaning or self-protective belief systems. S. R. Corman, S. R, *Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication* in L. Fenstermacher and T. Leventhal (Eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies*, Washington DC, 2015.

[17] *Studies into Violent Radicalisation; Lot 2: The beliefs ideologies and narratives,* The Change Institute for the European Commission, February 2008, p.34 (available at http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/terrorism/docs/ec_radicalisation_study_on_ideology_and_narrative_en.pdf.)

[18] Also described (in similar terms) as the '*social process* of networking and *group dynamics* through which the individual comes to share in the violence-justifying ideology and proceeds to implement it as a means of significance gain.' See *A.* W. Kruglanski, M. J. Gelfand *et al.* pp. 69-93.

[19] T. K. Samuel, *Countering the Terrorist Narrative: Issues and challenges in contesting such spaces* in S. Zeiger and A. Aly (Eds.)*,* p.92.

[20] The corollary of this argument is that *Collective identity*, therefore, 'is not something out there, waiting to be discovered.' See for example B. McSweeny on identity and multiplicity and B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (New Edition), Verso, London, 2006; and M. Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Second Edition), Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford: 2009.

[21] Also relevant to socialisation processes may be acts such as killings and stabbings, which may be part of a 'no return' initiation process.

[22] Related to this is anthropologist Scott Atran's claim that 'there is nothing unusual about ISIS members'; S. Atran, *The Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace,* Address to the UN Security Council Ministerial Debate, 23 April 2015.

[23] Communications theory highlights the way in which people look to a few key individuals or sources perceived to be credible in order to interpret events and information (a trend traditionally referred to as 'the medium is the message').

[24] See for example *Understanding Violent Non-State Actors*, Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL), March 2008, p. 1.

[25] Ibid, p.8.

[26] Examples of this phenomenon range from the role of radio in the Rwandan Genocide to radical, present-day online forums as well as terrorist publications and videos.

[27] See for example: *The Evolution of Violent Non-State Actors*, DSTL, 2008.

[28] *Why young Syrian choose to fight: vulnerability and resilience to recruitment to violent extremist groups in Syria*, International Alert, March 2016.

[29] See for example *Stabilisation Network Study*, Presented at RUSI, February 2016.

[30] See for example M. Moaddel, Islamic Modernism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

[31] *Youth and Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence*. Mercy Corps, 2015.

[32] See for example, *Interpeace* report on a Roundtable Discussion on CVE held at their HQ on 30 11 2015 in *Countering Violent Extremism Literature Review*, Stabilisation Unit, March 2016.

[33] *H. Allan et al*, p.2.

[34] Stabilisation Unit, *Countering Violent Extremism Literature Review*, March 2016, p. 14.

[35] See for example and D. Perlmutter, Investigating Religious Terrorism and Ritualistic Crimes, CRC Press, London: 2004 and A. Rabasa, P. Chalk *et al*., Beyond Al Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement, RAND, 2006 (available at http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG429.sum.pdf).

[36] See for example A. T. J. Lennon A. T. J., *The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Using Soft Power to Undermine Terrorist Networks*, London: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 282-297 and Gompert D C, 'Heads We Win', The Cognitive Side of Counterinsurgency, RAND National Defense Institute, Counter-Insurgency Study, Paper 1, pp. 29-32.

[37] Stabilisation Unit Literature Review, p. 6.

[38] E. Scheye, p.14.

[39] http://www.state.gov/j/remarks/253870.htm, February 2016.

[40] E. Scheye, pp. 14-15.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] Stabilisation Unit Literature Review, p. 9.

[43] See Celeste Fremon: *G-Dog and the Homeboys,* 2008, about Fr Greg Boyle's work with the Gangs of East Los Angeles, and Jack Pransky: *Modello*, 2011, about dealing with violence in a South Florida Housing Project.

[44] Stabilisation Unit (SU) Literature Review, p. 13.

[45] *H. Allan et al*, p. 5.

[46] SU Literature Review, p. 12.

[47] See for example: *Organised Immigration Crime in North Africa: Networks, Vulnerabilities and Interventions*, Stabilisation Unit, June 2015, p. 9.

[48] M. Shaw and T. Reitano, *People's Perspective of Organised Crime in West Africa and the Sahel*, Institute for Security Studies (Paper 254), April 2014, pp.7-10.

[49] SU Literature Review, p. 19.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] See for example SU What Works: Strategic Communications in Conflict & Stabilisation Interventions, pp. 7-15.

[52] Stabilisation Unit research on various defector programmes, October-November 2015.

[53] See for example H. El-Said, *De-Radicalising Islamists: Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, January 2012.

[54] A. Casptack, *Deradicalisaiton Programs in Saudi Arabia: A Case Study*, Middle East Institute, June 2015.

[55] Extremism Rehab, Saudi Arabia's Innovative Approach to De-radicalisation, The New Arab, June 2015

[56] See for example J. Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, London: Routledge, 2005.

[57] See also R. Gunaratna , *Inside Al Qaida: Global Network of Terror*, (NY, Berkley Books, 2002) pp. 81-82.

[58] DSTL, 2008 pp.9-11.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] Stabilisation Unit research on various defector programmes, October-November 2015.