International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague

Making CVE Work

A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption

One of the biggest barriers to designing a comprehensive Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programme is defining its scope. This paper argues for a narrow approach, focusing on disengagement and the disruption of recruitment. The author develops a simplified model of radicalisation and the concurrent terrorist recruitment process, proposing concrete themes for disruptive intervention and messaging. After analysing case studies of disengagement, the author offers recommendations for specific action to accomplish CVE goals by disrupting recruitment processes and deploying targeted messaging within the framework of the correlated models.

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Introduction

One of the biggest barriers to designing a comprehensive Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programme is defining its scope. CVE programmes include an astonishing range of activities, from messaging to community outreach, to religious argumentation, to economic development.

Programmes proposed under the rubric of CVE can range from individual interventions to efforts to rewrite the script for entire societies, from the economy to social mores.

Current CVE efforts pursue two goals, often without distinguishing between them:

> *Disengagement:* Individuals are dissuaded from violent participation in and material support for violent extremist organisations and movements.
>
> *De-radicalisation/counter-radicalisation:* Individuals are dissuaded from adopting extremist ideologies.

In addition, CVE portfolios increasingly include efforts to prevent radicalisation from taking root in the first place, sometimes referred to PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism). The key question that should be asked and answered before implementing any CVE/PVE programme is whether it seeks to counter the V (acts of violence, through disengagement) or the E (the adoption of extremism, through de-radicalisation or counter-radicalisation).

This paper will argue that disengagement is a realistic and achievable goal for CVE initiatives, and that de-radicalisation should be pursued as a separate and secondary line of effort. It will also argue that programmes should target people who are already engaged, to some extent, with VE recruitment and propaganda, rather than including purely preventative activities (under the rubric of either CVE or PVE) seeking to "inoculate" communities against extremism.

Together, these elements comprise a working definition of CVE as a narrow process focused exclusively on disrupting extremist recruitment and radicalisation activities.

Radicalisation that does culminate in violent extremism is best understood as a malicious process with material consequences. That process can be directly thwarted by interfering with the specific extremist actions that support it, rather than countering it as an epiphenomenon requiring a whole-of-society solution.[1]

Not all radicalisation leads to participation in a violent extremist movement. De-radicalisation, pluralism, women's rights, economic security, democracy promotion and other battles for hearts and minds should be undertaken, if at all, only after a target audience has been separated from violent extremist networks and recruitment activity.

This paper will focus in significant part on the CVE framework in the United States, where these assumptions are the primary drivers of planning and implementation, but

[1] J.M. Berger, "ISIS is not Winning the War of Ideas", *The Atlantic*, 11 November 2015, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/isis-war-of-ideas-propaganda/415335/.

they also apply, less uniformly, to programmes in other countries. Additionally, the paper will focus on the framework for efforts to counter the Islamic State, or ISIS, which is currently the primary driver of CVE activity, and the most relevant organisation for CVE programmes in the world today.

However, an explicit goal of this paper is to propose a strategy that is not exclusive to ISIS, or to jihadism. The programmes and principles discussed here are intended for use with a wider array of violent extremist threats.

This paper will:

- Examine materially flawed assumptions in the current CVE landscape.
- Propose a simplified model of radicalisation into violent extremism.
- Examine a model of observed terrorist (ISIS) recruitment processes.
- Propose themes for disruptive intervention and messaging.
- Review case studies of terrorist and armed group disengagement in the context of the proposed disruptive themes.
- Correlate recruitment and radicalisation models with types of disruption.
- Propose a programme of specific action to accomplish CVE goals by disrupting recruitment processes and deploying very specifically targeted messaging within the framework of the correlated models.

1. Flawed Assumptions

Violent extremism is a problem set that crosses national, ideological and cultural boundaries, but current efforts to define and implement programmes that specifically target jihadist extremism are bedevilled by a number of flawed assumptions.

CVE policy makers have adopted unsupported assumptions regarding both the causes of violent extremism and effective remedies. What follows is an examination of the most significant assumptions that undermine and overcomplicate CVE initiatives. Some of these assumptions play out in established CVE programmes, others create a bottleneck that prevents programmes from being launched until the assumed criteria can be met.

Promotion of Virtue is the Right Goal

A good way to fight VE is to recruit individuals to share our values and/or ideology.

A frequently stated goal of CVE messaging is the promotion of virtue, with the idea of transforming people theoretically at risk of radicalisation into good global or national citizens, by offering an alternative message that is more conducive to security and foreign policy goals. For instance, Richard Stengel, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, said recently that efforts against ISIS should focus "not only countering their message, but creating a positive alternative for people who may be attracted to their message".[2]

[2] Interview with Richard Stengel, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, State Department podcast, 10 March 2016, https://soundcloud.com/statedept/countering-the-message-of-violent-extremists.

There are multiple problems with this approach, the foremost being that there is no clear agreement among international stakeholders on the alternative ideology to be promoted. This makes it difficult to develop a values statement that is not either fatally watered down or hobbled by legitimate complaints of hypocrisy.

Consider the coalition against ISIS, which includes liberal democracies and authoritarian dictatorships, as well as conservative religious societies such as Saudi Arabia, where the state-supported religious ideology is distinguished from ISIS perhaps most importantly by its lack of military adventurism. Messages promoting democracy stand in stark contrast to the coalition's willingness to collaborate with authoritarian regimes, such as Egypt, and its continuing tolerance of Bashar al Assad in Syria. The message is further undermined by the unpopular 2003 invasion of Iraq, which created the conditions for ISIS to emerge, and which was framed, in part, as democracy promotion.[3]

Other favourite positive themes within the CVE community are similarly troubled. Promoting pluralism or women's rights, for instance, is difficult to reconcile with a coalition that includes Saudi Arabia. In Western countries, a rising wave of xenophobia deeply complicates efforts to promote messages of tolerance.[4]

Even in a best-case scenario, positive messaging must seek the lowest common denominator, resulting in a value set that is nebulous, non-cohesive and ahistorical. While not entirely pointless, values-oriented messaging is necessarily limited.

Development can be used to accomplish CVE

Whole societies can be inoculated against violent extremism by improvements to the economy, infrastructure, education system and other whole-of-society remedies.

Decades of research have found that correlations between structural development factors (such as high unemployment or low levels of education) and terrorism are at best unclear and often contraindicated, despite the fact that these correlations seem intuitively correct to many observers and to people on the front-lines dealing with violent extremism in their communities.

A study of terrorist attacks from 1986 to 2002 found no correlation between low GDP and incidence of terrorism, a finding that has been replicated again and again across different measures and time frames.[5] A 2016 study found that countries with higher

[3] For instance, "The United States will complete our work in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Democracy in those two countries will succeed. And that success will be a great milestone in the history of liberty." George W. Bush. Veterans Day Address, November 11, 2003, http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2003/11/president-bush-speech-to-the-heritage-foundation.

[4] "Anti-Islam movement PEGIDA stages protests across Europe", *Reuters*, 6 February 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-protests-germany-idUSKCN0VF0P4; K. Wong, "Poll: Half of American voters back Trump's Muslim ban", *TheHill.com*, 29 March 2016, http://thehill.com/policy/defense/274521-poll-half-of-american-voters-back-trumps-muslim-ban.

[5] K. B. Goldstein, "Unemployment, inequality and terrorism: Another look at the relationship between economics and terrorism", *Undergraduate Economic Review* 1, no. 1 (2005): p. 6, http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=uer; J. A. Piazza, "The determinants of domestic right-wing terrorism in the USA: Economic grievance, societal change and political resentment", *Conflict Management and Peace Science,* (2015): http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=uer; J. A. Piazza, "Rooted in poverty?: Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages 1", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006), pp. 159-177, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/095465590944578; E., Newman, "Exploring the "root causes" of terrorism", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 8 (2006) pp. 749-772, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100600704069; A. E. Feldmann, and M. Perälä, "Reassessing

economic prosperity and lower inequality were *more* likely to see residents travel to Syria as foreign fighters, rather than less, and that unemployment was "not highly correlated" to overall foreign fighter activity.[6]

Regarding education, a correlation exists, but not the one advanced by those advocating education programmes as an element of CVE. A study of more than 4,000 jihadist radicals found the average education level was considerably higher than average.[7] In a study of Palestinian terrorism, researchers found that higher levels of both education and economic achievement positively correlated with membership in Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.[8] Correlations to lower education or standard of living can be found in very constrained social contexts and in geographically limited settings, but inconsistently. Across numerous large-scale studies of the subject, higher levels of education consistently correlated to higher levels of participation in violent extremism, although smaller scale studies found variations in specific regions and smaller sets. Despite these findings, no one advocates for reducing educational opportunities as a way to counter violent extremism.

Generally speaking, any given argument for structural causes looks better when the sample size is smaller. For instance, unemployment correlates for some cities and countries in smaller-scale studies, especially at the level of troubled neighbourhoods like Molenbeek[9] or Somali communities in Minneapolis. But neighbourhoods that have an unemployment problem may simply produce violent extremists with an unemployment problem. One large-scale study found a correlation between high unemployment and high foreign fighter flows from within the Muslim world, but found the opposite correlation for foreign fighters from non-Muslim countries. It should be noted that the "Muslim world" dataset included failed states and countries beset by civil wars and insurgencies. There are obvious risks in arguing for single-issue causation in settings where multiple variables are at play.[10]

At the topmost levels, CVE policy makers continue to perseverate on economic and structural social issues despite the absence of clear factual support for their relevance. U.S. Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Sarah Sewall argued in September for "political, economic, educational, and entrepreneurial development" to undermine terrorist grievances, a theme she has repeatedly iterated. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has also repeatedly emphasised this theme, saying that combating terrorism requires "economic opportunities for marginalised youth at risk of recruitment".[11]

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the causes of nongovernmental terrorism in Latin America", *Latin American politics and society* 46, no. 2 (2004), pp. 101-132, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2004.tb00277.x/abstract.

[6] E., Benmelech and E. F. Klor, "What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?", No. w22190, *National Bureau of Economic* Research (2016), http://www.nber.org/papers/w22190.

[7] D. Gambetta and H. Steffen, "Uncivil Engineers: The surprising link between education and jihad", *Foreign Affairs*, 10 March 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-10/uncivil-engineers.

[8] C. Berrebi, "Evidence about the link between education, poverty and terrorism among Palestinians", *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy*, *13*(1) (2007), http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/peps.2007.13.issue-1/peps.2007.13.1.1101/peps.2007.13.1.1101.xml.

[9] R. Coolsaet, "Facing the fourth foreign fighters wave. What drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic state? Insights from the Belgian case. Egmont Paper 81, March 2016", Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations (2016), http://aei.pitt.edu/73708/.

[10] Ibid.

[11] For example, Speech, "Remarks at the Global Counterterrorism Forum Ministerial," John Kerry, Secretary of State, 27 September 2013, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/09/214877.htm; Speech, "Countering Violent Extremism: How Human Rights and Good Governance Help Prevent Terrorism," Sarah Sewall, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, 29 February 2016. http://www.state.gov/j/remarks/253870.htm; Speech, "Why Counterterrorism Needs Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): How Human Rights and Good Governance Help Prevent Terrorism," Sewall, 22 September 2015, http://www.state.gov/j/remarks/247214.htm.

While the focus on development is especially prevalent in U.S. circles, it is by no means an exclusively American preoccupation. A 2015 study of Denmark's CVE and development policy recommended a number of development-driven efforts to prevent and disrupt violent extremism, including employment initiatives, education, social services and the promotion of "sports and culture".[12] UK officials have cited unemployment as one of the "underlying reasons" for VE activity and cite the country's international development programmes as a potential remedy.[13] The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy calls for efforts to "to eradicate poverty and promote sustained economic growth, sustainable development and global prosperity for all", among many other things, in order to "address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism".[14]

Programmes built on false or ambiguous correlations diminish confidence in policy leaders, and in the very concept of CVE itself, as millions of dollars are wasted on efforts that can be charitably described as irrelevant, and less charitably described as the funding of pet projects under the auspices of fighting terrorism.

Even if a correlation between structural development factors and extremist violence could be clearly identified, it should be patently obvious that addressing these factors is not an efficient method to fight violent extremism, which in most countries engages less than 1 percent of the population. Attempting to "eradicate poverty" in order to counter violent extremism simply puts a bigger and more intractable problem in front of a smaller and more manageable one. While these may be laudable programmes for other reasons, they have no place in CVE conversations or budgets.

Messaging Must Be Creative

CVE messaging must be "slick" and "sophisticated".

A frequent criticism of CVE messaging notes that it is often relatively crude compared to terrorist propaganda, such as the professionally produced magazines and videos issued by ISIS. To remedy this, the Obama administration has recently made overtures to Hollywood and Silicon Valley, seeking to engage tech, entertainment and marketing professionals in producing CVE material and providing other forms of assistance. At least two significant meetings have been convened on the West Coast since summer 2015, with few visible programme results.[15]

While counter-messaging should not look shoddy or foolish, it does not have to ape extremist techniques or attempt to be cool. Pro-establishment messaging is inherently uncool, but it can be professional and effective, resembling a well-executed public service announcement or a political campaign ad, which policy makers are eminently qualified to oversee.

[12] J. Brett et al., "Lessons learned from Danish and other international efforts on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in development contexts", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2015), http://um.dk/da/~/media/UM/Danish-site/Documents/Udenrigspolitik/Fred-sikkerhed-og-retsorden/201503StudyCVE.pdf.
[13] C. Turner, "Speech: Counter Violent Extremism – Communities beat terrorism".
[14] Resolution, U. N. "60/288, The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," 8 September 2006, https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy
[15] A. Suebsaeng, "U.S. Turns to 'Zero Dark Thirty' Writer for Anti-ISIS Propaganda." TheDailyBeast.com. 28 September 2015, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/28/u-s-turns-to-zero-dark-thirty-writer-for-anti-isis-propaganda.html.

Messaging can also take the form of op-eds, speeches, fact-sheets, and other unglamorous modes of discourse. A recent study suggests that counter-narratives have a measurable persuasive effect regardless of the format in which they are disseminated.[16]

Most importantly, an excessive focus on which type of messaging to deploy is a bottleneck that prevents programmes from even getting off the ground. Once procedures have been implemented to quantitatively measure which approaches succeed and which do not, informed decisions can replace the current subjective speculation about "empowering credible voices" and attempting to undermine VE ideologies.

While many people have registered their opinions on what type of messaging is likely to succeed, there is a marked absence of published reporting on the success or failure of programmes that go beyond the number of impressions recorded by any given message or soft metrics such as "number of community contacts," which do not necessarily correlate to the prevention of VE activity.[17]

Resistance to evaluation is also embedded among many practitioners, and the unreasonably wide scope of activity characterised as CVE further complicates the process of generating useful comparative metrics. "The idea that CVE measures should be subject to evaluation is popular in principle, but many statements about the importance of evaluation from practitioners and in the secondary literature are quickly followed by a list of challenges that confront those wishing to evaluate CVE," one 2015 report noted.[18] There is no shortage of literature discussing the need for metrics to evaluate CVE success, but that has not translated into the implementation of actual evaluation on any significant scale.

Messaging Can Be Effective at Fractional Percentage of VE Activity

A handful of social media accounts tweeting at a slow pace, without engaging in interactive conversations, can effectively counter tens of thousands of highly engaged extremist accounts.

Typically, CVE initiatives are woefully under-staffed and under-populated. While no one explicitly advocates low-volume messaging as a meritorious approach, most prominent campaigns default to that setting, including such efforts as "UK Against Daesh", the international "Against Violent Extremism", and the U.S. State Department's now-retired "Think Again, Turn Away".[19] The Sawab Center, a joint venture by the United States and the United Arab Emirates, tweets at a volume more comparable to that of ISIS recruiters, but remains a singular voice emanating from one account, with the number

[16] K. Braddock and J. Price Dillard. "Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours." *Communication Monographs* (2016): 1-24.
[17] N. Chowdhury Fink, P. Romaniuk, and R. Barakat. "Evaluating countering violent extremism programming: Practice and progress." Final Report of Symposium on Measuring the Effectiveness of CVE Programming, Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2013.
[18] P. Romaniuk, "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned From the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism," Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015.
[19] See https://twitter.com/UKagainstDaesh, https://twitter.com/ave_org, https://twitter.com/TheGEC/.

of tweets per day and the amount of engagement with tweets declining since the account launched in 2015.[20]

Much of ISIS' success on social media comes from large volumes of fast-paced activity, and subsequent engagement in the form of conversations about the content ISIS seeks to promote. None of the efforts cited above consistently engage in conversation with other social media users. Low volumes of activity naturally tend to correspond to lower performance, especially on social media, where volume and interactive engagement create exponential structural advantages, for instance in terms of the ability to promote hashtags and accrue followers.

An example of this effect can be found in Russian, Iranian and Syrian messaging and disinformation operations, which employ at least hundreds of people and operate uncounted thousands of accounts to flood the Internet with messaging that serves the their purposes, either directly or obliquely.[21] Some of these efforts involve thousands of barely coherent bots that tweet computer-generated nonsense all day. Others involve state-controlled media and official and unofficial surrogates who aggressively engage in conversation with Western users.[22] The mere presence of these accounts helps advance messaging goals, including but not limited to, the discrediting of pro-Western narratives. Similar efforts have been mounted by the Syrian and Iranian governments, both for narrative purposes as well as creating a platform for cyber-attacks.[23]

Before the West can begin to win at messaging, it has to enter the game at scale. While some messaging is demonstrably better than no messaging at all, a high volume of messaging is exponentially better than a low volume.[24]

Messengers Must Be Uniquely Credible

Western media and Western governments do not possess adequate credibility to convince the target audiences for CVE programmes to change their beliefs or behaviours.

Anastasia Norton of Monitor 360, a consulting firm focused on strategic narratives, wrote in March 2015:

> [T]oo frequently, discussions of CVE among policymakers and commentators default to a causation fallacy that places religious belief and ideology at the root of terrorism. This argument posits that if we can just find the right "credible voice" to expose terrorists' perversions of religious ideology, we can convince extremists to abandon violent tactics and prevent unsuspecting recruits from falling prey to radical ideas.[25]

[20] Based on analysis of tweets in October 2015 compared to April 2016, https://twitter.com/sawabcenter.
[21] A. Chen, "The Agency", *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 2015; M. Seddon, "Documents Show How Russia's Troll Army Hit America", *Buzzfeed.com*, 2 June 2014.
[22] B. Nimmo, "Anatomy of an info-war: How Russia's propaganda machine works, and how to counter it", Central European Policy Institute, 15 May 2015; D. Sindelar, "The Kremlin's Troll Army", *The Atlantic* 12 (2014).
[23] S. Gunitsky, "Corrupting the cyber-commons: Social media as a tool of autocratic stability", *Perspectives on Politics* 13.01 (2015) pp. 42-54; M. Koren, "Iranian Hackers Target U.S. Military Officials With Elaborate Social Media Scam", *DefenseOne*, 29 May 2014.
[24] Ibid.
[25] A. Norton, "A new frame for CVE: Analyze beliefs, but counter behaviour", The Brookings Institution, Markaz blog, 17 March 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/03/17-lawfare-foreign-policy-essay-norton-cve.

In the article, Norton advocates for an approach to CVE policy similar to that outlined in this paper, focused on the actions of potentially violent extremists rather than their mental states.

Debates about credibility hobble many CVE programmes before they are even created, with policy makers fixated on finding the right Arab and Muslim voices to carry counter-extremist messages.

As noted by Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, former head of the U.S. State Department's counterterrorism messaging programme, "it is a cherished myth" that "credible voices" are not already mobilised against ISIS, noting that the "overwhelming weight of Islamic religious authority has been openly against the ISIS project".[26] This includes even jihadist scholars and prominent al Qaeda members, whose beliefs are far more similar to those of ISIS adherents than any mainstream Muslim source.

In reality, as discussed in more detail below, there are Western voices that carry credibility, or at least command attention, within extremist circles, such as journalists and analysts who demonstrate a uniquely granular understanding of the Syrian conflict, and whose influence can be further quantified through data-driven research.

Suppression of Extremist Content/Activity Doesn't Work

There is no benefit to suppressing the activities of VE organisations online. Suspended users simply create new accounts without suffering negative effects.

For some time, a significant number of media observers and terrorism analysts have argued that suppressing extremist activity on social media is unproductive, because extremists simply return with new accounts and continue at the same level of activity.[27] The evidence demonstrates that this is simply untrue. For instance, in 2013, al Shabab's Twitter account was suspended. It returned, but the new account never recovered its substantial follower base. After multiple suspensions, al Shabab surrendered and stopped creating new accounts, except sporadically.[28]

In 2014 and 2015, in a similar manner, Twitter suspensions effectively denied use of the platform to ISIS' official accounts. These accounts are key to the dissemination of official propaganda, and they provide a critical structural anchor for online recruitment efforts, which are based on conversations about the content, as described more fully in the sections that follow.

In 2015, the ISIS Twitter Census (by the author and Jonathon Morgan) found preliminary evidence that suspensions not only depressed follower counts, but also the average

[26] A. M. Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks", The Brookings Institution, October 2015, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez/is-propaganda_web_english_v2.pdf.

[27] J. Goldman, "Fighting ISIS online a game of digital whack-a-mole", *CBS News*, 13 September 2014, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/combating-isis-online-campaign-a-game-of-digital-whack-a-mole/; B. Makuch, "Banning Islamic State Jihadists From Twitter Is Like Playing Whack-a-Mole", *Vice.com* 21 August 2014, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/isis-twitter-whack-a-mole; C. Daileda and L. Franceschi-Bicchierai, "U.S. Intelligence Officials Want ISIL Fighters to Keep Tweeting", *Mashable.com,* 11 July 2014, http://mashable.com/2014/07/11/us-wants-iraq-radicals-to-tweet/#Mr68ob2zQsg9.

[28] J.M. Berger. "#Unfollow: The case for kicking terrorists off Twitter", *Foreign Policy*, 20 February 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/02/20/unfollow/; D. Mair. "Al-Shabaab Returns To Twitter", *VOX-POL Blog*, 3 February 2015, http://voxpol.eu/al-shabaab-returns-to-twitter/?platform=hootsuite.

number of tweets per day.[29] In 2016, a follow-up study (by the author and Heather Perez) covering Twitter activity throughout 2015 found robust evidence that suspensions limited follower counts, lowered tweets per day and devastated the reach of individual users who were repeatedly targeted.[30] A forthcoming study for George Washington University's Program on Extremism by the author covering activity in 2016 finds further dramatic reductions in activity.[31]

The most notorious resister of suspension is the pro-ISIS account Asawirti Media, which has returned from suspension more than 500 times. The account had more than 81,000 followers at its peak in September 2014. As of spring 2016, its returning accounts typically ranged between 1,000 and 2,000 followers before being suspended, a reduction of 75 to 85 percent in the account's immediate reach.[32]

All of the available data points toward the effectiveness of suspensions and suppression for limiting the recruitment and propaganda reach and activity of VE organisations. No data-driven study has provided support for any alternative conclusion. However, there are secondary effects worthy of consideration, which are discussed more fully below.[33]

Muslim Radicalisation is a Special Case

CVE programmes and strategies should be focused on Muslims specifically.

When the White House issued its 23-page CVE strategy in 2013, it mentioned Muslims only once, seeking to minimise the perception that CVE efforts are exclusively focused on Muslim extremism.[34]

However, the strategy was transparently just that, including proposals such as community engagement roundtables and the publication of brochures on civil rights. Aside from the lack of data correlating such activities, and the implied underlying grievances, with violent extremism, it is clear that such tactics would never be applied to white nationalist violent extremist movements, to pick the most obvious example. Embedded in the U.S. strategy is an assumption that mainstream Muslims are the target audience and that combating an Islamic extremist ideology is the main goal of CVE.

While this problem exists in the United States to the exclusion of all other CVE efforts, some European CVE practitioners also focus inordinately on ideological considerations and too exclusively on Muslim communities. In the UK, the controversial Prevent strategy focused first on "challenging extremist (and non-violent) ideas", and only

[29] J. M. Berger and J. Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and describing the population of ISIS supporters on Twitter", The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World 3, 20 (2015), http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2015/03/isis-twitter-census-berger-morgan/isis_twitter_census_berger_morgan.pdf.
[30] J. M. Berger and H. Perez, "The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter", George Washington University's Program on Extremism (2016).
[31] The study, which compares white nationalist networks to ISIS networks, will be published in spring 2016 at this address: https://cchs.gwu.edu/occasional-papers.
[32] Data collected from Twitter by the author.
[33] ISIS Twitter Census, op. cit., pp. 58-59; http://voxpol.eu/wilayat-twitter-and-the-battle-against-islamic-states-twitter-jihad/.
[34] "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States", The Office of the President, U.S. Government. 8 December 2011. http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf.

second on "prevent(ing) people from being drawn into terrorism". The UK government itself found the programme "flawed", but its proposed approach to fixing those flaws simply doubled-down on the ideological element.[35] "The Prevent strategy is clear: ideology that distorts religion is the problem," said Christian Turner of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in a 2014 speech on violent extremism that discussed the revamped programme.[36]

When challenging an ideology is the starting point for CVE programmes, they necessarily contort into shapes that are specific to the ideology. In contrast, "preventing people from being drawn into terrorism" offers some prospect for an approach that is not exclusively tuned to Muslim audiences and populations. If extremism and radicalisation exist as legitimate spheres of study, it is well worth examining them latitudinally and designing frameworks which are not ideology-dependent.

Many of the factors fuelling the rise of ISIS as a global extremist movement are unique neither to ISIS nor to jihadism, most importantly the ability to use online technologies to discover and coordinate groups of people by ethnic or religious identity across national and language boundaries. After ISIS, white nationalism is the most prominent movement to exploit these advantages, and white nationalists are currently outperforming ISIS on social media in most measurable respects.[37] Other extremist movements will surely follow this path.

While some programme elements obviously require context-specific content, the broad outlines of CVE policy should be oriented toward creating tools that can be used to face both present and future challenges.

Disengagement and De-Radicalisation Are Both Necessary CVE Goals

In order to combat violent extremism, we must change the religious and political views of the social groups from which violent extremists emanate.

It is rare for someone to carry out violence in the name of an extremist ideology without direct contact with other people who share that ideology. Certainly, one cannot join a terrorist group or act as a foreign fighter without such contact. Although true lone actors emerge rarely, the vast majority of extremist violence emanates from a social context in which perpetrators are directly engaged with a VE organisation or its supporters, either online or in the real world.

Disengagement seeks to sever social ties between at-risk individuals and VE recruiters. De-radicalisation means fostering changes in attitudes, with participants or would-be participants ceasing to believe in a VE ideology. From a policy perspective, if the goal of CVE is to control terrorist violence, is de-radicalisation a necessary step? Or is disengagement from VE networks sufficient?

[35] Prevent Strategy Review. Secretary of State for the Home Department, United Kingdom. June 2011. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.
[36] C. Turner. "Speech: Counter Violent Extremism – Communities beat terrorism." Foreign and Commonwealth Office, (Nairobi, 2014) https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/counter-violent-extremism-communities-beat-terrorism.
[37] B. W. Lance, "The personalization of politics political identity, social media, and changing patterns of participation", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644.1 (2012) pp. 20-39. As previously cited, the author will also publish a study on this topic in spring 2016.

Similar to poverty, a focus on de-radicalisation puts a bigger and more intractable problem in front of a smaller and more manageable one. De-radicalisation does not have to be part and parcel of CVE efforts and may be better addressed through discrete programmes, after disengagement has been accomplished. That said, a framework for understanding radicalisation is helpful in developing CVE strategies.

2. Radicalisation

It is important to state forthrightly that radicalism covers a wide spectrum of views that are not inherently illegal or even necessarily undesirable. For instance, the civil rights movement in the 1960s was considered radical for its time, and included elements that are still seen as radical today. Radicalisation also reflects a person's internal thought processes, which should be sacrosanct.

To be radical is not to be criminal. Nevertheless, radicalisation is usually a precursor to VE participation, and therefore it is an appropriate subject of conversation in the CVE context, in terms of understanding how mental processes and activities lead people to engagement with VE movements.

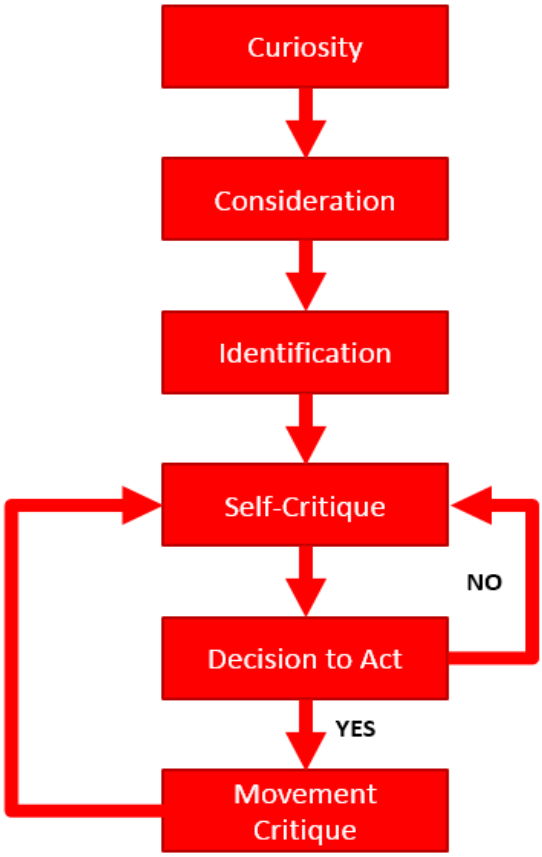


Figure 1: A typical radicalisation model

Attempts to model violent radicalisation have at times been controversial, some because they are too focused on Muslim radicalisation, others because the factors and stages they describe are not clearly correlated to violence or participation in terrorism. Some critics also point to vague definitions and, not without reason, object to the discussion as creating the specter of thought crimes.[38]

Yet some sort of model is crucial to inform efforts to combat violent extremism through non-kinetic means, and radicalisation is clearly a component of terrorist recruitment. The object of the radicalisation model offered in this paper is to describe some observed and quantifiable stages in the process that leads to violent political activism, in order to inform practical CVE actions.

A six-step process is proposed, which recruitment targets can exit at any point:

1. *Curiosity* – recruitment target's first contact with a VE ideology.
2. *Consideration* – target evaluates the VE ideology for credibility, relevance.

[38] M. German, "Debunked NYPD Radicalisation Report Just Won't Die", *ACLU.org*, 11 February 2013, https://www.aclu.org/blog/debunked-nypd-radicalisation-report-just-wont-die.

3. *Identification* – target identifies him/herself as an adherent of VE ideology.
4. *Self-critique* – target asks whether he or she is doing enough for the cause. If the answer is yes, the self-critique repeats periodically. If the answer is no, the target proceeds to the next step.
5. *Decision to act* – target decides whether to undertake violent or material action on behalf of VE ideology. If the decision is made to act, the target proceeds to Movement-critique. If decision is not to act, the target either disengages from the radicalisation process or revisits an earlier stage.
6. *Movement-critique* – target asks if the cause is doing enough for him or her. If the movement is not seen as deserving of the sacrifices a target makes on its behalf, the user may disengage. If the movement is seen as worthy, the self-critique repeats and more action may be taken.

These steps are not always linear, and some at-risk individuals may skip steps entirely, but most people will pass through most of the stages. After the sixth step, the self-critique is reiterated. The typical route is pictured in Figure 1.

While far from complete, and obviously not sufficient to provide a full explanation of the radicalisation process, this modest model can be a practical tool for CVE strategy. First, the model is not specific to jihadist radicalisation and can easily be applied to other ideological frameworks. Second, it is theoretically possible to diagnose at-risk individuals using this model with the limited objective of identifying fruitful target audiences for CVE programming, for instance through the analysis of online activity, or by using a checklist in an interview or survey.

More concretely, the stages correlate to observed VE recruitment activities online and offline, and those recruitment activities can also be modelled, quantified and detected. Radicalisation without exposure to a VE social network can lead to violence, but sporadically. Together, the radicalisation and recruitment models offer opportunities for specific criteria-based targeting of disruptive CVE efforts to audiences that are already being exposed to extremist recruitment, rather than to audiences that are not currently engaged with violent extremist networks.

3. Recruitment

Terrorist recruitment can take place in both online and offline fora, and the details vary. The radicalisation model is correlated here to tactics used by ISIS online, which are broadly similar to historical terrorist recruitment practices, but with enhancements made possible by the use of technology, particularly in the discovery phase. The recruitment model below was developed by the author from observations of ISIS' social networks in English on Twitter; it has parallels in other VE movements, although not every VE movement is as systematic as ISIS in approaching this activity.

There are five steps to the recruitment process:

1. *Discovery* – target's first contact with ISIS.
2. *Create micro-community* – ISIS introduces recruiters to target's environment.
3. *Isolate target from mainstream* – Recruiters encourage target to cut ties with mainstream, friends and family.

4. *Shift to private communications* – Recruiters move from open-source to closed.
5. *Identify and encourage most-likely action* – In both open and closed source communications, recruiters promote actions including *hijra* (emigration to ISIS territories), "lone wolf" attacks, and more advanced social media activism such as promoting the return of suspended accounts and taking part in organised posting campaigns.

The author wrote about this process at length in October 2015:

> The social media ecosystem created by the Islamic State for use in radicalization offers a number of potential warning signs and intervention points along the road that leads a targeted user to take concrete action on behalf of the group. Yet there are significant practical obstacles to tackling the problem programmatically. The majority of those who post messages in support of the Islamic State to social media will never act out. There is no consensus on when radical rhetoric signals a move to violence, at what point intervention is appropriate, or what type of intervention is most appropriate.[39]

The following sections present a CVE framework that attempts to address and reconcile the pragmatic obstacles previously cited.

Disruption

While there are rare exceptions, radicalisation and at least some exposure to recruitment are meaningful precursors to participation in violent extremism.

CVE, therefore, should focus on the practical and quantifiable goal of interfering with radicalisation and recruitment processes, as opposed to attempting to implant nebulously defined positive values in audiences that are not necessarily at risk.[40] Simple disengagement from violent participation or material support is a satisfactory interim outcome.

Usefully defined by Dr. John Horgan in his book *Walking Away from Terrorism*, disengagement is:

> The process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation. It may not necessarily involve leaving the movement, but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change. Additionally, while disengagement may stem from role change, that role change may be influenced by psychological factors such as disillusionment, burnout or the failure to reach the expectations that influenced initial involvement.[41]

[39] J.M. Berger, "Tailored Online Interventions: The Islamic State's Recruitment Strategy", *CTC Sentinel,* October 2015, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/tailored-online-interventions-the-islamic-states-recruitment-strategy.
[40] K. Bokhari, "Countering Violent Extremism and American Muslims", Program on Extremism, George Washington University, (2015).
[41] J. Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (UK: Routledge, 2009), p. 152.

Five Ds of CVE

Disruption means using interventions and messaging to introduce or highlight disincentives to material or violent participation, creating obstacles that prevent targets from full participation in the recruitment process.

There are two types of disruption – kinetic, meaning to kill or arrest persons participating in VE activity; and non-kinetic, meaning to persuade people not to take part in VE activities. CVE is generally understood to encompass the non-kinetic approach. There are two possible goals for non-kinetic disruption:

1) Disrupt extremist belief
2) Disrupt will to take criminal action

Typically, CVE grand strategies have not clearly distinguished between these goals. Disrupting extremist beliefs is easier said than done, but there are approaches to the problem which stand some chance of success. Disrupting the will to take violent action presents a wider range of tactical options and narrows the field of targets considerably, to focus more closely on those who present a genuine risk of violence or VE criminal activity, in the form of material support or violence.

While efforts can and should be directed toward both goals, the second goal should receive a greater share of funding and policy attention.

Preferred outcomes can be summed up as the "Five Ds of CVE". The content of both messaging and intervention actions can be geared to advance these outcomes and highlight them where they already exist.

The first three Ds apply generally to disrupting extremist belief, the last two apply to disrupting the will to act. The desired outcomes are:

- Divided
    - *We have a good ideology, but we can't agree on important points.*
    - Specific messages:
        - If major pro-jihadist clerics are divided about ISIS and al Qaeda, how can I know which message to trust?
        - If ISIS executes its own fighters as dissidents, how can it claim to present a unified front?
        - If I go to Syria, I am more likely to die at the hands of a fellow Muslim and/or jihadist than fighting Assad or the United States.
        - How can Islamic prophecies legitimise ISIS when they conflict with each other in important details?

- Disabused
    - *Facts undermine our ideology or our view of the VE organisation.*
    - *Participation in the VE movement is not what I expected it to be.*
    - Specific messages:
        - ISIS is not succeeding on the battlefield or as a government.
        - Fighters and emigrants testify that life under ISIS is not what they expected.

- Most victims of jihadist violence are Muslim.

- Disillusioned
  - *Our ideology is good, but our leaders are corrupt.*
  - Specific messages:
    - ISIS leaders are following an insane, apocalyptic plan that will results in the death of many Muslims, rather than protecting them.
    - The Assad regime, Iran and Russia are not fighting ISIS, and ISIS is not fighting them.
    - ISIS collaborates with Baathists and Alawites to survive.
    - Many ISIS leaders are Baathists, whose motives may be impure.
    - ISIS helps criminals enrich themselves.
    - ISIS leaders may be siphoning money for personal gain.
    - ISIS leaders are sexually abusive and deviant.
    - Popular and trusted figures in the movement have collaborated with Western authorities (highlight informants, plea deals, etc.).

- Directionless
  - *Our ideology is good, but we don't have a strategy for success.*
  - Specific messages:
    - ISIS strategy is not sustainable because its economy depends on confiscation of goods from residents.
    - ISIS international expansion is impractical and ad hoc.
    - Lone wolf attacks do not deter targets from military intervention; in fact, they accomplish the opposite.

- Discouraged
  - *Our ideology is good, but we can't win.*
  - Specific messages:
    - ISIS has no international support and cannot continue without it.
    - Muslims do not support ISIS, and ISIS cannot continue without that support.
    - ISIS is devastating its own territories to support war, and those territories will not be able to recover from the costs of war.
    - Survival is not success.

While there are rare exceptions, radicalisation and at least some exposure to recruitment are meaningful precursors to participation in violent extremism.

Displacement and Denial

In addition to the five types of disruption listed above, it is worth considering two other "Ds" – displacement, meaning to physically or virtually move a targeted person to a different venue, and denial, meaning to prohibit targeted persons from their desired form of participation, for instance by depriving them of Internet access or confiscating their passports. Displacement and denial are different from the Five Ds discussed above in that they are possible means to an end, rather than desired end-states.

Displacement could, for instance, take the form of a family moving their radicalised teen into another school or another town, which could be effective if accompanied by other measures. Another example might be to drive a recruitment target off a social media platform through repeated suspensions. Denial can take the form of a parent attempting to cut off a minor recruitment target's Internet access, or a government revoking the passport of a suspected VE supporter to prevent him or her from traveling to serve as a foreign fighter.

Displacement and denial tend to involved direct, forceful confrontation. In some contexts, such as parents dealing with a minor, this may be appropriate and useful, but there is also a risk of hardening a potential recruit's interest, or spurring them toward violent action. For instance, at least three Western lone ISIS supporters, in Canada and Australia, carried out lone wolf attacks in October 2014 alone, after official actions blocked their ambitions to travel to Syria.[42]

Similar issues attend to the question of social media account suspension, discussed at more length below. Suspending the accounts of people who are not yet fully radicalised can result in either displacement or denial and may risk accelerating their radicalisation. Suspending the recruiters who are targeting those people is more indirect and may carry a reduced risk of backlash.

Family Issues

As illustrated in the case studies below, family considerations quantifiably factor into disengagement from violent extremism and/or armed movements, including social pressure from families and acknowledgement of the need to care for families.

Anecdotally, this approach shows less promise in the ISIS context, but our visibility on this question comes with serious caveats. It is impossible (or extremely impractical) to measure how many people did not join ISIS because of pressure from their families, so we cannot discount family influence. What we can see are numerous examples of ISIS recruits who radicalise in defiance of their families.

ISIS explicitly offers the promise of family as part of its recruitment pitch, which urges people to move to its territories and bring their families with them, or start a new family on arrival.[43] This undermines the power of family ties as a counterbalance to recruitment.

Additionally, ISIS includes a countercultural element, which may strengthen its hand by exploiting classic generational conflicts – specifically the desire of young people to individualise and distinguish themselves from the values of their parents.

Where family considerations influenced disengagement in the case studies below, the organisations studied were distinctly regional, differentiating them from the globalised ideology of ISIS and some other jihadist groups. Therefore, the mix of factors that lead people to participation are different, and participants' commitment to the VE organisation may be more vulnerable to the counter-appeal of ordinary life.

[42] J. Stern and J.M. Berger, *ISIS: The State of Terror* (Harper Collins, 2015), pp. 96-97.
[43] For example, "Eid Greetings from the Land of Khilafah," ISIS video, released August 2014; "Race Toward Good," ISIS video, released 22 November 2014.

Finally, family interventions are complex, and in some cases, the actions of families can actually contribute to radicalisation, whether in the form of a dysfunctional or strictly ideological upbringing, or because family members are themselves radicalised. Nevertheless, the evidence strongly suggests that family interventions should always be supported as an available option for CVE practitioners, even if the approach is not always appropriate or necessarily likely to succeed.

4. Case Studies

The following case studies examine how and why people disengage from violent ideologies and organisations. The first is based on original research by the author. The remainder are drawn from the literature about why people disengage from violent non-state movements, including insurgencies, terrorist organisations and hybrid groups.

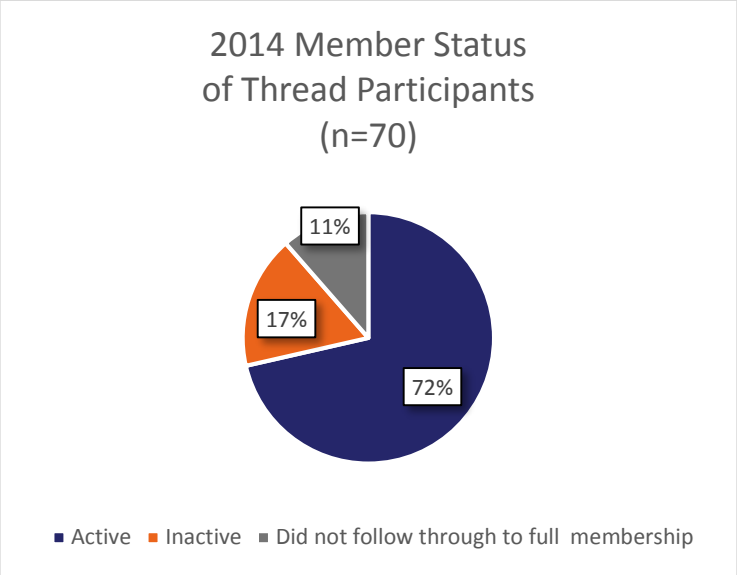
One case study deals with the Free Syrian Army (FSA). It is not the intention of this paper to describe the FSA as violent extremists, but irregular participants in an insurgency have obvious relevance to violent extremist dynamics such as foreign fighter participation. Overall, a review of the literature on disengagement produced one overwhelming conclusion – that further data-driven research on disengagement is sorely needed.

Neo-Nazis Online

The initial inspiration for the Five Ds approach was a thread on Stormfront, a white nationalist message board. The 2011 discussion "National Socialism is Anti-American" recorded 368 posts by 70 users.[44]

The posts were coded by the author for a number of characteristics and content-types. Users argued, at times acrimoniously, over a number of issues, highlighting rifts and disappointments within the white nationalist movement. As of mid-2014, 28 percent of the users who had participated in the discussion were no longer active on Stormfront, compared to 5 percent in a control group derived from a non-controversial topic.

[44] *Stormfront.org*, https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t823055/.



Users in the thread had been radicalised, but did not show evidence of violent intent and only sporadic evidence of material support. Posts in the thread generally tracked with the Five Ds. For instance, many users indicated their discouragement, saying they thought it was impossible to convince Americans to support white nationalism. Others criticised white nationalists who openly supported Hitler, on the basis that Americans would not accept Nazi symbolism and language, but they might accept white nationalism in a more palatable guise. Some posts disputed hotly over Hitler's historical beliefs and factual claims about the success or failure of Nazi Germany and its policies.

Notably, a majority of users in the thread, 56 percent, made positive comments about Nazi ideology in their final posts, with another 27 percent leaving on an ambiguous note. Only 17 percent departed on a negative note, and only 18 percent of all posts in the thread expressed negative sentiments about Nazi ideology. For users who became inactive, the percentages of positive and negative sentiments about Nazi ideology expressed in all posts were virtually identical to the overall group.

This suggests, in a preliminary but quantifiable way, that disengagement does not necessarily require the replacement of negative values with positive values; it may be enough for someone to simply go home. However, it is important to note that some users may simply have sought other venues, possibly more radical, for their online activism. Additional studies of online communities may shed more light on this.

Syrian Fighter Disengagement

A 2014 study surveyed more than 50 Free Syrian Army fighters who disengaged from the Syrian civil war and moved to Turkey. Participants were asked why they decided to abandon the conflict. Respondents could select more than one reason for disengagement. Notably, only 8 percent of respondents cited a change of heart on the issues (i.e., "do not support rebel goals any more") as a reason for disengagement, and the statement did not specify whether respondents' views of appropriate goals had changed or whether they perceived that the FSA's goals had changed.

Factors such as discouragement and disillusionment led the field. As with the neo-Nazi message board thread, these results suggest that negative inputs may prompt disengagement with the movement or organisation, without the need to attempt to instill replacement values.

Reason Given	Percentage	Type of Disruption
I felt it was impossible to win	53.5	Discouraged, Disabused
Lack of discipline in the group	44	Disillusioned, Disabused, Directionless
Lack of teamwork in the group	36	Divided
Wounded, not able to fight	34.9	
Need to take care of my family	28	Family Issues
Family pressure	24	Family Issues
Fighting was not worth the risks I was taking	16.3	Disillusioned
Risk of dying outweighed benefits of victory	14	Disillusioned, Discouraged
Do not support rebel goals any more	8	Divided
I felt it was impossible to win	53.5	Discouraged, Disabused

Table 1: Top reasons given by former Free Syrian Army fighters for disengagement

Colombian Militants

Over the course of 10 years, the Colombian government debriefed more than 15,000 militants as part of a demobilisation programme, including paramilitary, insurgent and terrorist components, drawn from multiple armed groups, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Militants were surveyed about their motivation for leaving. The coding of the results left something to be desired, with more than 5,000 (33 percent) uninformatively responding "desire for a change of life." If any respondents cited a change of heart about their reasons for fighting, grievances or ideology, the total was below 4 percent.[45]

After "change of life", the most-cited reasons for disengagement were:

Reason Given	Percentage	Type of Disruption
Mistreatment	26	Disillusioned
Pressure from military operations	13.6	Discouraged

[45] W. Rosenau et al., "Why They Join, Why They Fight, and Why They Leave: Learning From Colombia's Database of Demobilized Militants", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26.2 (2014) pp. 277-285.

Absence from family	5	Family
Demoralised about the armed struggle	4.1	Discouraged or Directionless

Table 2: Top reasons given by former Colombian militants for disengagement, excluding "change of life"

A separate study of 1,485 demobilised and defected Colombian militants from the same data source found that ideological members of militant organisations are more likely to demobilise or defect when a VE group's "ideology and actions diverge" and the group begins to be seen as "impure," further arguing for disillusionment and division as factors which can contribute to disengagement.[46]

ETA

A qualitative study of disengagement and de-radicalisation pertaining to the Basque ethnic separatist terrorist organisation ETA, based on 35 long-form interviews, found three overarching reasons that terrorists disengaged from the organisation – structural, organisational and personal.

On the structural front, users frequently cited changes to the large-scale political context rather than changes in their ideological beliefs; for instance, some of ETA's political adversaries died or left power, while popular support for terrorism waned among Basque communities. Organisational factors included division and disagreement within the group. Personal factors were more diverse, but family considerations and the quality of family life were cited in several cases.

Across the board, the study found, "the actual process of terrorist disengagement [...] is not necessarily concomitant with that of de-radicalisation".[47]

Right-Wing Violent Extremism

In a 2016 study, researchers conducted a detailed interview with a woman who disengaged from an unnamed American racist group. The interview and its conclusions cover a wide range of mental and emotional dynamics starting from first contact with the VE movement and tracking her progress through engagement, disengagement and de-radicalisation.

Soon after becoming engaged with a VE organisation, the subject experienced significant doubts, some of which were driven by socialisation outside of the VE organisation and outside of its identity group boundaries (white supremacy). She became disillusioned but was unable to disengage from the group due to a variety of psychological dependencies and practical considerations. She was arrested as an accessory to a crime committed by the VE group and imprisoned, during which time her doubts began to outweigh the rewards of the social bond she had formed with her fellow VE adherents. According to the authors, "her account shows the importance of prison in providing physical separation from the group, allowing for self-reflection,

[46] B. Oppenheim et al., "True Believers, Deserters, and Traitors Who Leaves Insurgent Groups and Why", *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2015): 0022002715576750.
[47] F. Reinares, "Exit from terrorism: A qualitative empirical study on disengagement and deradicalisation among members of ETA", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23.5 (2011) pp. 780-803.

which aided in her psychological disengagement".[48] This reflects the dynamic of displacement and/or denial, but it also speaks more generally to the value of actions that separate potential recruits from VE social networks.

Somali Pirates

A study interviewed 22 individuals involved with Somali piracy, or judged to be at risk of joining; 11 members of the set had actively participated in piracy. All 11 had voluntarily disengaged from piracy.

Several of the ex-pirates cited disillusionment as part of their reason for disengaging; they were specifically disillusioned with their income or their ability to spend their income. Six of the 11 ex-pirates cited risk and hardship as major factors, while seven cited family or community pressure.[49]

While the study offers some interesting insights, it does not provide a perfect analogue to violent extremism, due to the profit motive fundamentally embedded in piracy. Unlike ideological rewards, profits are tangible. Either you have them or you don't, and no amount of persuasion is likely to convince you to ignore the material evidence.

[48] J, Horgan et al. "Walking away: the disengagement and de-radicalisation of a violent right-wing extremist", *Behavioural Sciences Of Terrorism And Political Aggression* (2016) p. 10.
[49] I. M. Gjelsvik and T. Bjørgo. "Ex-pirates in Somalia: disengagement processes and reintegration programming", (2012).

Radicalisation Phase	ISIS Recruitment Stage	Response
Curiosity	• Broadcast • Availability	• Suspend Broadcasters • Awareness/fact-driven Programmes • Facts and Narratives
Consideration	• Micro - Community	• Individual Intervention • Family Intervention • Suspend Recruiters, not Recruits • Facts and Narratives
Identification	• Isolation	• Individual intervention • Family intervention • Suspend Recruiters, not Recruits • Law Enforcement (LE) Situational Awareness • LE investigation
Self-Critique	• Private Communication	• LE pre-Arrest Intervention • LE Situational Awareness • Suspend Recruiters, not Recruits • Investigation • Surveillance
Decide to Act	• Identify and Courage	• Individual Intervention • Suspend Recruits • Investigation • Surveillance • LE pre-Arrest Intervention • Arrest
Movement Critique	• Identify and Discourage	• Awareness Programmes • Facts and Narratives • Investigation • Surveillance • Arrest • Defector Incentives • Highlight Exit Paths

Table 3: Action Matrix correlating CVE actions to VE actions and recruitment target disposition

5. Programme of Action

The frameworks detailed in the preceding sections on radicalisation and recruitment address how people are drawn into engagement with violent extremist organisations, and their supporters, recruiters and messaging, and some of the reasons why people subsequently disengage. With this information, we can sketch out a programme of action intended to discourage people from engagement with both VE organisations and their recruitment processes.

The primary goal of these efforts is to separate potential recruits from the social networks of VE movement after they have made first contact.

The CVE Action Matrix on the preceding page (Table 3) is a first attempt to correlate CVE interventions to VE actions and the recruitment target's frame of mind. What follows is a preliminary road map for tailoring recommended CVE actions to the context in which VE recruitment and radicalisation actions occur.

This is a living document. The outcomes of these recommendations should be carefully documented using the success metrics proposed. Approaches which do not produce quantifiably positive results should be discarded. Metrics should be recorded for specific tactics, but also for each radicalisation and recruitment stage identified. If actions at one stage are demonstrably more fruitful than another, resource allocation should be adjusted accordingly.

CVE policy makers should be committed to frank and continuous self-evaluation. Without a concrete feedback loop, CVE policy will continue to reflect the wishful thinking and flawed assumptions that plague current efforts.

The framework presented in this paper should also be subjected to performance testing as part of this process. The recruitment/radicalisation models and the "Five Ds" approach described here are not canonical; they are only a starting point.

The recommendations that follow are focused on online activity, which allows for the immediate development of evaluation data and metrics on the efficacy of different approaches, subject to further testing over time. With that data in hand, CVE efforts can expand into offline arenas, where similar and more robust testing can be applied.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that there are substantial bureaucratic obstacles to the implementation of these recommendations. The various interventions and messaging initiatives described herein currently require synchronisation among efforts in different countries, among disparate branches of governments, and between governments and NGOs working on CVE initiatives. This presents a formidable and unavoidable challenge for all parties involved, but perhaps not an insurmountable one.

Curiosity

The curiosity stage of the radicalisation process correlates to the discovery phase of the ISIS recruitment process. Before someone can adopt a VE ideology or join a VE organisation (VEO), they must first be exposed to some information about the organisation.

It is neither desirable nor practical to suppress all information about VEOs, but it is useful to interrupt information flows that lead directly to further engagement with the VEO and its supporters.

ISIS and other VEOs introduce propaganda into a social network, online or offline, with the object of engaging targets in further conversation and advancing them through the recruitment process. Inhibiting those conversations, while introducing competing messages to the same venues, is likely to reduce the number of potential targets who advance further in the process.

In an ideal scenario, the suspension of VEO propaganda dissemination channels (such as social media accounts) would be carried out surgically. The diffusion of responsibility for suspensions makes this difficult. Social media companies each take different approaches to suspending their accounts, according varying terms of service, and user reporting of abusive accounts originates with citizen activists as well as CVE organisations and agencies. Companies are also struggling with the challenge of operating in a global theatre encompassing often contradictory laws and values.

Nevertheless, CVE organisations that report abusive accounts – such as the Counter Extremism Project and the Sawab Center – can focus their reporting efforts with reasonable specificity on disseminators and can record detailed metrics regarding:

- Which accounts originally distribute a release and whether identifiable users or techniques recur over time;
- The number of disseminator accounts online and active when a piece of propaganda is released;
- How many followers those accounts reach and who they are;
- How many accounts are reported, how many reported accounts are suspended, how long it takes for them to be suspended, and how much dissemination they achieve prior to suspension;
- Tweet and retweet activity surrounding a specific propaganda release;
- Engagement with tweets containing content, including replies and mentions.

This data should be collected and compared over time to discern trends and measure the success of reporting campaigns. The metric for success should be reducing the number of followers reached by content, engagement with the content, and the length of time that the content is widely available (trending).

Anti-extremist messaging can also be introduced into networks at risk of exposure, with a focus on disruptive messages that discourage further engagement with VE recruiters. These can take the form of promoted social media posts targeting audiences which have already been exposed to VE networks. Different types of messaging can be tested in this context and evaluated to understand which approaches produce engagement.

For instance, Twitter ads can be targeted to the followers of specific users. Counter-messages should be promoted to users who follow disseminators and retweeters of extremist content. Social network analysis can also be used to pare less relevant followers from the target audience, for instance separating fully engaged ISIS users from people in the early stage of curiosity.

Precision matters. Distributing counter-messages to an overly broad audience can increase curiosity about the VEO and its ideology, and such messaging may be alienating to target audiences who feel they have been singled out due their race or religion.

The number of users reached is not the correct metric, but rather the percentage of *relevant* users who engage with the VE content and with the CVE content. Success should be measured by improving the ratio of CVE post views and engagement to users, with an emphasis on retweets, replies and mentions, and by degrading the same metrics for VE content. Introducing virtually any objective or anti-extremist narrative content to the ecosystem is likely to have some measurable effect.[50] Even hostile mentions by VEO supporters are likely to have merit in this context, as they will expose the content to associates of the supporter.

Propagators of counter-messaging should always provide interlocutors who can engage in conversations about the content online, by interacting with individuals who interact with the counter-message. Follow-up engagement is a crucial part of VE recruiting and should be equally central to counter-messaging. Interlocutor interactions can be archived and measured, and the targets of their conversations can be monitored to see if they advance down the path of radicalisation or disengage.

Targeting data can also be used to measure disengagement. After each iteration of this process, the target audience for messaging as defined here will change, with some users added and some subtracted. The goal over time should be shrinking the target audience and tracking which individual users stay or go.

While positive messaging can be tested for resonance using the metrics noted above, the initial focus should be on messages that accentuate the Five Ds, which should also be carefully evaluated for performance. The collection of data and development of metrics for success is a critical part of the plan described in this paper, and approaches that demonstrably do not work should be discarded.

Consideration

Messaging

When considering how to allocate messaging resources to Curiosity or Consideration, it is useful to examine lessons learned from several decades of antidrug narratives targeted to very wide audiences, which have largely failed to produce a reduction in drug use. One particular flaw of antidrug messaging was the failure to adequately

[50] Braddock and Dillard. "Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours".

define the target audience and set specific objectives about the desired end-state in terms of audience attitudes.[51] If such messaging is to be undertaken, it should target:

a) *Small audiences.* Broadcasting counter-messages to large audiences may create curiosity, rather than suppress it, and may prompt vulnerable people to seek more information about the VE organisation.
b) *Specific audiences.* Aim efforts at people who have already evinced Curiosity and are in the early stages of Consideration.

While counter-messaging should be tested at the Curiosity stage, it may be more productive at the Consideration stage. The same metrics generally apply, but the target audience is narrower, consisting of people who have engaged with VE supporters about the content being disseminated, for instance, by asking questions or seeking out additional VE content.

Paid advertising on search engines is another approach that may be effective and is already being implemented. In addition to obvious targeting, such as promoting ads to users who search for "how can I travel to Syria", efforts should focus on users whose secondary search terms suggest they may be considering the VE argument, including questioning words such as "truth," "really," and "why" (i.e., "why does ISIS hate the West?" or "Does ISIS really kill Muslims?").

Success can be measured by clickthrough rates, views of the message being promoted, length of time spent viewing or listening to the message. If possible, tracking of subsequent search terms by users who were exposed to the message would provide powerful evidence to evaluate the message's resonance.

As in the previous section, success should be measured not by the number of audience members reached, but the percentage of the relevant audience that engages with the promoted content. Interlocutors should also engage with the targets of messaging, and careful records should be maintained as to the nature and number of those interactions.

Messaging content for the Consideration phase should especially focus on providing factual rebuttals to extremist messaging (Disabusing, Disillusioning and Discouraging). Individuals who are questioning whether they should join a VE organisation should be exposed to a volume of material that will inspire doubt. It is preferable to encourage considering users to reach their own conclusions by providing truthful information that shapes the narrative, rather than overtly telling them what to think.

Suspensions

At the Consideration phase, ISIS recruiters swarm around a target to create a sense of community, as well as to answer the target's questions. Disrupting this process may help prompt targets to disengage from the VE network and discourage them from concluding the Consideration phase by proceeding to Identification.

[51] W. Crano. Presentation: "Using media for the prevention of drug use and substance abuse." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Undated/circa 2014. https://www.unodc.org/documents/prevention/policymakers/PMAlmaty/0204_overview_media_revised.ppt.

Recruiters and members of the "micro-community" ISIS creates during this process can be identified and targeted for suspension. There is a risk of backlash, as potential recruits may see the suppression of these users as evidence of the success of ISIS, but the benefits likely outweigh the costs at this stage.

Inasmuch as possible, care should be taken to minimise suspensions of potential recruits who are in the Consideration phase. Suspending someone for asking questions about ISIS could promote radicalisation rather than encourage it.

Robust data should be collected on users who are in the Consideration stage, in order to gauge the effects of suspensions, whether directed at recruiters by CVE programmes or at potential recruits by volunteer/vigilante efforts such as Anonymous' #OpISIS.

The progress of users can be evaluated by examining such metrics as volume of engagement with VE supporters, the length of exchanges, and the ratio of VE supporters in a user's visible social network. Eventually, systematic data collection may yield additional metrics to evaluate a user's status and depth of involvement in the VE ideology.

Interventions

Simply removing negative influences and replacing them with positive messaging is not a complete strategy, as the target may simply continue to seek out ISIS influences. Positive social contact can fill the gap and counterbalance VE recruitment efforts. In addition to online engagement, this should include frank conversations with friends and family, when they can be identified. Typically, as online users move from Consideration to Identification, overt links to friends and family will become harder to detect on social media. Users at the Consideration stage may still be employing social media accounts connected to their real names and real-life associates.

As noted in the case studies, family considerations play a role in disengagement for people who become full participants in armed organisations. It is likely that they can provide a similar role for people who are at a preliminary stage of participation, but each case should be carefully evaluated, due to the complexities of family relationships. For instance, if parents have a contentious relationship with a child at risk of radicalisation, their input could worsen the situation, rather than improve it.

While there is not a direct role for government programmes in creating a daily social context for vulnerable people, there should be some kind of mechanism for alerting family, community influencers and nongovernmental CVE organisations when a target is seen entering the Consideration stage. The mere presence of countervailing influences may help counter VE recruitment efforts, especially if they can reinforce points relevant to the Five Ds. It would also be highly advisable to create credible and useful guidelines for family, friends and communities on how to deal with people who have been exposed to VEO recruitment. Obviously these should be very carefully vetted before content is finalised in order to reduce the chance that interventions will backfire and alienate the recruitment target.

While controversial, there may also be a role for unattributed interventions, although such efforts should be undertaken with care and under strict guidelines. For instance, accounts that pose as ISIS supporters may be able to covertly promote awareness of

the Five Ds. Even when using unattributed accounts, it is advisable to promulgate correct information rather than disinformation.

Identification

Identification is generally the easiest stage to detect, as a user will reinvent their online or offline persona to openly signal attachment to the group using key phrases (for instance, the ISIS slogan *baqiya,* Arabic for "surviving") or imagery (changing profile picture to ISIS flag or a photo of known ISIS figure). If users are monitored continuously from the Curiosity and Consideration stages, the transition can be noted and metrics for detection developed. However, users will sometimes create new accounts and new personas at the Identification stage, and this can make it difficult to trace the user's full life-cycle.

As a countermeasure to account suspension, some users who have reached the Identification phase will engage in subterfuge. ISIS supporters online have attempted a number of tactics to hide their affiliation and evade suspension, such as pretending to be news analysts or even other types of extremists (one ISIS supporter notably sported a Confederate flag on his profile). Nevertheless, supporters must find some way to overtly signal their affiliation in order to signal their level of participation to other users in the social network.

As users approach the Identification stage, in which they begin to consider themselves part of the VE organisation, the range of CVE options begins to narrow. If a user has fully identified with the VE group, he or she will not be especially vulnerable to non-kinetic interventions. However, within the period immediately before and after the Identification stage begins, some options remain.

Interventions

The ISIS process that correlates to the Identification stage is isolation of the target from mainstream influences. This happens organically, as well as at the urging of VE recruiters and supporters. When someone begins to identify him/herself as a violent extremist, many real-world associates are likely to distance themselves, for reasons that include fear of prosecution or investigation, fear of becoming the target of violence, and a general desire to avoid conflict. Friends and family may not know how to respond appropriately, which can be addressed to some extent by the creation of guidelines and support networks as previously noted.[52]

Alienation from previous social networks reinforces explicit messages from VE recruiters that family, friends and community members cannot be trusted and should be shunned for both practical and ideological reasons. Ideally, people targeted by VE recruiters should not be left alone by their friends and families, and they should ideally be presented with continual opportunities for interaction.

Friends and family should exercise discretion about how confrontational to be in these encounters. An atmosphere of continual confrontation in real life could drive the target further into the hands of VE recruiters and supporters.

[52] M. J. Williams, J. Horgan, and W.P. Evans, "The critical role of friends in networks for countering violent extremism: toward a theory of vicarious help-seeking." *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8, no. 1 (2016): 45-65. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19434472.2015.1101147.

When interventions are impractical for whatever reason, targets should be monitored in order to develop comparative data for measuring the impact of interventions.

Although there are still opportunities at this stage, CVE programmes face diminishing returns once a recruitment target has begun to identify with the organisation, especially if that identification persists for any significant duration. CVE programme participants should be prepared to hand off cases to law enforcement at this point.

Suspensions

When individuals begin to openly identify with a VE organisation, particularly ISIS, it greatly increases the odds that their social media account will be suspended, if not by CVE abuse reporters, then by volunteers/vigilantes such as #OpISIS. Unfortunately, the suspension of a recruitment target's account immediately after the Identification phase begins is very likely to accelerate the recruitment process of isolation. Based on the author's observation of ISIS networks since 2014, when suspensions first began to occur in large numbers, those who repeatedly return to social media with a new account are likely to follow other ISIS supporters almost exclusively.

On social media, isolation correlates with measurable changes to following patterns, as users increasingly tune out from mainstream news and information sources and replace them with VE sources. If a target's account is suspended, the user may create a new account without following mainstream sources.

Inasmuch as mainstream news and information sources can be funnelled to the user, for instance through promoted tweets or other targeted advertising, the isolation process may be slowed, offering additional time and opportunities for intervention.

These sources are more likely to receive engagement from users who have progressed to the Identification stage than overt messaging, which is likely to be rejected outright. Based on the author's analysis of ISIS social media networks in English and French, one viable messaging option for recruitment targets at the Identification stage is the promotion of accounts that provide credible and granular information on the Syrian Civil War and other jihadist arenas.[53] ISIS supporters on Twitter widely follow analysts such as Charles Lister, Aaron Zelin and Aymenn J. Al-Tamimi, and journalists such as Al Jazeera's Faisal Alkasim and Radio France Internationale's David Thomson. In repeated surveys of ISIS networks from 2014 to the present, these figures have consistently prompted engagement from ISIS supporters, including mentions and frequent retweets, despite being seen as unfriendly to ISIS. Based on these observations, content from such sources is more likely to produce engagement from individuals at the Identification phase than content from general news sources, a thesis that can be tested more fully once the appropriate target audience has been identified.

Law Enforcement

There is some ambiguity about when law enforcement options should be introduced into this process, but generally this will not happen earlier than the Identification stage. Even at this stage, the number of individuals identifying as ISIS supporters is daunting, and the vast majority are still likely to confine their activities to passive support, in some

[53] Data collected from Twitter, November to December, 2015.

cases, or arguably material support in the form of social media activism. Individuals who identify as ISIS supporters also become part of the micro-community, cited earlier, which plays a key role in the recruitment process.

Whether social media activity rises to the level of material support or criminal behaviour can be both subjective and controversial, certainly in the United States.[54] But law enforcement officials should maintain some level of situational awareness regarding people who identify as ISIS supporters in their jurisdictions. Whether that awareness should be passive (monitoring of public social media posts likely in a jurisdiction) or active (in the form of surveillance or preliminary investigations) will depend on the specific circumstance and the presence of other aggravating factors, including whether the activity itself breaks the law.

In some cases, where a person has begun identifying as an ISIS supporter, and that person's identity is known to friends, family or CVE workers, it may be productive to involve law enforcement in a non-arrest capacity. A visit or interview may discourage targets of recruitment from further engagement with the VE organisation.

However, such interventions also risk provoking precipitous action from a subject who has progressed undetected to Self-Critique or Decision to Act, such as trying to leave the country or accelerating a timetable for an attack, and therefore any decision to undertake such action should be weighed carefully. Although this will necessarily be a small sample size, detailed records of outcomes can inform future tactics.

Self-Critique and Decision to Act

As people targeted for recruitment progress through the process of radicalisation, the window for CVE intervention becomes vanishingly small.

Nevertheless, a few options remain for non-kinetic (pre-arrest) intervention. Law enforcement agencies can choose to alert a recruitment target that they are under surveillance, in an effort to discourage violent action by giving the impression that it would be doomed to fail, or promoting a sense of directionlessness by signalling the recruit that his or her specific strategies have already been detected and countered.

If a target reaches the point of self-critique but declines to act, it may be worth exploring the reasons for this, if undercover assets or supportive family or community members can engage the target in a frank conversation, or if such a conversation can be staged in the form of a law enforcement intervention such as formal questioning. If the target is simply allowed to repeat the self-critique periodically, without any type of intervention, it increases the odds that he or she will eventually decide to act.

Finally, if an arrest is unavoidable, opportunities to exercise agency should be created for the detainee as he/she is processed by the criminal justice system. Radicalised detainees should be able to make decisions that have a concrete impact on the conditions and duration of their detention. In other words, the detainee should be

[54] B. Van Ginkel, "Incitement to Terrorism: A Matter of Prevention or Repression?", *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 2 (2011), http://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Van-Ginkel-Incitement-To-Terrorism-August-2011.pdf; E. Rediker, "Incitement of Terrorism on the Internet: Legal Standards, Enforcement, and the Role of the European Union", *Mich. J. Int'l L.* 36 (2014), p. 321, http://heinonlinebackup.com/hol-cgi-bin/get_pdf.cgi?handle=hein.journals/mjil36&section=13.

given multiple opportunities to revisit their self-critique and other earlier stages in the radicalisation process.[55]

While reform cannot be forced, it can be gently encouraged by promoting socialisation with people who are not VE adherents, as opposed to some current prison structures which group together inmates who share a VE ideology. Socialisation can include correspondence and visits with family and friends from the target's pre-radicalised life, who should be encouraged to participate in this process in an informed manner.

De-radicalisation

Once effective CVE programmes have been implemented, using the narrow definition and framework discussed here, it may be appropriate to conduct further research into de-radicalisation, assuming some kind of consensus can be reached on exactly how to define and model radicalisation in the first place. The model used in this paper is process-driven with a focus on engagement, and it may not be useful in a de-radicalisation context.

People who have disengaged from a VE movement without de-radicalising may experience an enhanced risk of reengaging at a later date. Radicalisation within specific communities may also point to other social problems which need to be addressed outside of the context of countering violent extremism. While the data does not support causation on a broad scale crossing geographies, issues such as discrimination and lack of integration do exist within specific contexts where radicalisation takes place, as in France's Muslim community, for instance. But these problems should be addressed on their merits, rather than seen as CVE. Generally speaking, participants in a society should do the right thing because it is the right thing, and not as a response to violent extremism.

The proportional context of the problem should be kept firmly in mind. Some amount of radicalism in a society is not only normal, it is almost certainly healthy. Radicalism generally refers to a drive for widespread changes in society. Such radical changes are sometimes necessary and appropriate, as in the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s, and those who advocate for such change are often perceived by their contemporaries as radicalised. It is not surprising that some radicals see violence as the only means to achieve this large-scale change, but not all radicalism leads to violence.

The line between radicalism and extremism is not always clear, except in retrospect. While some forms of nonviolent radicalism (for instance, some strains of white nationalism) require assertive responses from society at large, countering violent extremism should remain a distinct process focused on violent extremism. Even when seen on a large scale, there may be no need to address radicalisation when it does not lead to violence, infringements on human rights, or political disenfranchisement.

De-radicalisation programmes should not be directed at entire communities with only fractional percentages of VE participation. For people who have undergone disengagement from a VE movement, or in communities where a statistically significant number of people are engaged in material support (such as Derna, Libya),[56] some form

[55] A number of ICCT resources on rehabilitation and reintegration programmes can be found here http://icct.nl/topic/rehabilitation-reintegration/.
[56] J. Felter and B. Fishman, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, (Military Academy West Point NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007),

of de-radicalisation effort is likely appropriate. While some of the analytical techniques discussed here may also be useful for such programmes, it should be emphasised again that de-radicalisation should be compartmentalised from CVE efforts.

6. Conclusions

In the 15 years since September 11, policy makers have struggled to find alternatives to military and law enforcement action in the struggle against violent extremism. But the intense political pressure to offer solutions and to create the appearance of momentum has led to a proliferation of proposals that are not firmly grounded in reality.

Violent extremism is an outlier problem made large by super-empowered super-minorities – super-empowered meaning they are equipped with technology to discover each other and organise collective action that did not exist 20 years ago, and super-minority reflecting the fact it is now possible to recruit hundreds or thousands of people by successfully influencing only a fraction of one percent of a massive global audience.

Large-scale social engineering is at best an inefficient method to combat the narrow problem of violent extremism. At worst it can backfire spectacularly, as did the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was to some extent intended to foment the rise of liberal democracy in the Middle East. Social engineering is especially problematic when its sponsors cannot agree on the coherent ideological platform to be advanced. And existing research is almost entirely devoid of support for the efficacy of this approach. Instead, we should seek to disrupt social engineering programmes that are being perpetrated by violent extremists. Ultimately, this is path is pragmatic and achievable, and it is far more compatible with the ideals of liberal democracy. We can quantifiably improve our security by simply thwarting the recruitment activities of clearly violent and illegal organisations.

The rise of networked communications and social media has provided extremists with new tools to discover and persuade audiences on a global scale, but it has also empowered us with tools to detect their efforts as they occur and to quantify the success of our countermeasures. We have not yet begun to exploit these tools to their fullest potential, and our failures are particularly acute when it comes to programme evaluation.

By defining CVE as a narrow process of disrupting extremist recruitment and radicalisation efforts, we can begin to determine which approaches work and which do not. That feedback is essential to creating successful programmes. If a CVE proposal cannot be evaluated, it should not be implemented.

The proposals in this paper offer a starting point for approaching CVE as a discipline, with pertinent goals than can be defined and realistically achieved, while generating sorely needed evidence to drive outcomes and inform best practices.

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http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA474986; C. Watts, "Foreign Fighters: How Are They Being Recruited? Two Imperfect Recruitment Models", *Small Wars Journal* (2008), http://www.trackingterrorism.org/sites/default/files/chatter/http___smallwarsjournal.com_blog_journal_docs-temp_69-watts.pdf_q=mag_docs-temp_69-watts.pdf.

If we cannot commit to these four qualities – pertinent, defined, realistic, and measurable – CVE will continue to exist as a field that, on the whole, cannot be taken seriously. Serious-minded CVE efforts that do exist will continue to compete with wishful and expensive scenarios that produce no measurable results.

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Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption

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The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism.

ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights related aspects of counter-terrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation, civil society engagement and victims' voices.

Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT connects experts, policymakers, civil society actors and practitioners from different fields by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical analysis, and exchange of experiences and expertise, with the ultimate aim of identifying innovative and comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering terrorism.

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