



**COUNTERING VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM**  
*THE COUNTER NARRATIVE  
STUDY*



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*Countering the  
Narratives of  
Violent Extremism*

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# FOREWORD

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The Achilles' heel of our strategy against terrorism and violent extremism has been the failure to counter the narratives that groups use to recruit. As long as groups attract a steady stream of new members, the terrorism and violence will continue. This is why the strategy known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is so important, and must be used as a counterterrorism tool alongside military, intelligence, and law enforcement operations.

Through our partnership with the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS), we offer critical guidance to those wishing to counter the narratives of violence and extremism. "Countering Violent Extremism: The Counter-Narrative Study" is the result of a year-long research project conducted by our team of former top law enforcement, intelligence, and counterterrorism officials. We traveled around the world, from Malaysia to Kenya to Norway to Northern Ireland to the United States, studying extremist and terrorist groups and interviewing their members, as well as those in government and other important stakeholders responsible for tackling the problem.

As you will see from our "Findings," we've put together some essential lessons. One of the most important takeaways is understanding the pattern(s) behind group recruitment. Terrorist and extremist groups first prey on local grievances—exploiting feelings of anger, humiliation, resentment, or lack of purpose. They then incorporate, into their violent pronouncements, conspiratorial messages that blame those they are targeting. Self-proclaimed religious groups use distorted religious edicts in their narratives. Recruiters achieve success by providing both answers and a sense of purpose to vulnerable individuals. It is critical, therefore, that when countering their narratives we employ the most effective medium, message, and messenger.

We have also seen that terrorists and extremists are, in many ways, in a stronger position today than in the past. The Internet and social media provide avenues for recruiting new members and disseminating terrorists' and extremists' messages. Previously concentrated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, today al-Qaeda's counterculture is found as far afield as Nigeria and Southeast Asia. This

also explains the increase in homegrown terrorism in the West—seen tragically on April 15, 2013, at the Boston Marathon in the United States, and on May 22, 2013, on the streets of London.

We are proud to launch the study at the first ever Global Town Hall on Countering the Narratives of Extremism, being held simultaneously in four cities—New York, Belfast, Singapore, and Dakar—on September 9, 2013. The event brings together world leaders, global counterterrorism officials, and subject matter experts, highlighting the findings of the study and its crucial lessons.

This study not only offers guidance to those committed to countering the narratives of extremism but will, we hope, change the way that stakeholders see and confront this problem on a broader level.

*Ali Soufan*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This Qatar International Academy for Security Studies' Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) project, "The Counter-Narrative Study," continues the work of our previous CVE project, "Risk Reduction for Countering Violent Extremism," which examined strategic approaches to counterterrorism across multiple countries.

This study builds on the previous QIASS research by revisiting some of the strategies identified in the first report and assessing additional strategies along with new and emerging cases. The focus of this report is the identification of efforts to counter the narrative of violent extremists. In Europe: Our team revisited London and Belfast, while Sweden and Norway were added as case studies. Site visits to Africa included Kenya and Uganda. Another team visited the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the United States to assess the Somali-American community, in which over a dozen young men have left to join al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-affiliated group in Somalia. This case, while not a country study, is focused on a local, at-risk community within a country. There are additional communities that have likewise been identified as having risk potential. Within them are South Asian and Middle Eastern non-citizens committed to a violent form of political Islam, or their version of jihad; citizens from a variety of backgrounds who were raised and radicalized in the United States, and who might target U.S. officials and citizens in the name of putative jihadist causes; and citizens and residents from a range of backgrounds who go abroad to fight in the name of jihad. Throughout the Counter Narrative Study there is reference to ongoing concern about homegrown terrorists who are motivated by extremism on the radical right, such as neo-Nazi ideology, as well as left-wing organizations. This report also includes results of site visits to nations

with recently developed and maturing CVE programs and with large majority Muslim populations: Indonesia and Malaysia. Though not included as a site visit during this phase of CVE research, Singapore is included in the study; we report on its unique approach—and successes—in countering the narrative of violence.

As part of this phase of the multiyear project, two Visiting Scholar research works were published: “Community Engagement Programmes in Europe,” by Stephen White and Kieran McEvoy; and “Leveraging Terrorist Dropouts to Counter Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia,” by Susan Sim.

This report acknowledges the need for—and relevance of—a thorough review and assessment of the effectiveness of the counter-narrative programs detailed in this study. The majority of countries and officials we engaged with told us that their programs were in some nascent stage, and that statistical data was just beginning to be compiled, or the programs had not established criteria for gauging effectiveness.

Our first CVE study identified many different approaches for the prevention and reduction of risk and focused specifically on disrupting engagement and reengagement in terrorist activities. The main theme for Counter Narratives Study team continues to be prevention—but with a specific focus on countering the (extremist) narrative as a means of preventing engagement in terrorism.

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# KEY FINDINGS

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While governments across the world have had many notable successes against extremist and terrorist groups, there is a growing realization at the highest levels that in one key area they have fallen short: in countering the narratives that inspire individuals to join such groups in the first place.

This is costly. For as long as extremist narratives continue to inspire new recruits to join movements, the battle will continue for generations to come. This is why the strategic tool known as “countering violent extremism,” or CVE, is so important. It’s critical that governments utilize it alongside special operations and other important tactical weapons.

Governments are now recognizing this, and there are many important lessons from across the world that they and others can learn. Our study offers many of these. Here are our top findings:

***+ There is no cookie-cutter approach to countering the narratives of extremism.***

***Tactics and methods need to vary not only from country to country but even within countries, and within different groups and communities.***

Extremist and terrorist groups tailor their recruitment methods based on the individuals, their location, and local grievances. They adapt their message to what is most likely to resonate. We need to do the same in countering them. The reasons people join groups differ radically from country to country. In some African countries, economic reasons factor highly. Elsewhere, it is religion. In other places it is tribal rivalries. Our strategies need to be similarly focused. Crafting broad messages about how “the West is not at war with Islam” is not effective.

**+ *It's easier for extremists to recruit today than ever before, thanks to the Internet and the spread of social media tools. This is a large part of why self-radicalization, and the phenomenon of the "lone wolf terrorist," is on the rise.***

The Internet and social media tools have helped extremist narratives spread further afield. Today, for example, al-Qaeda's counterculture, once centered in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is found in places like Nigeria and Southeast Asia. This has been a major factor in the increase in homegrown terrorism in the West, seen horrifically in 2013—on May 22 on the streets of London, England, and on April 15 at the U.S. Boston Marathon.

**+ *Extremists use local grievances as initial motivators to recruit. Dealing with local and regional issues is the starting point for countering the narratives of violence.***

Just as all politics is local, so is terrorism. It is local issues that inspire people to join groups. Only afterwards do they fully embrace the broader agendas. This is a lesson seen through the history of the recent "terrorism era," starting even with Usama bin Laden's own path to terrorism. His grievances were directed at the ruling elites in Saudi Arabia before he turned toward the West.

**+ *Both traditional media and new media play an important role in recruitment and in countering the narratives.***

From Boston to London to Oslo to Jakarta to Kampala we have seen how media, both old and new, play a critical role in either spreading or countering the narratives of extremists. The number of websites utilized by extremists is rising. Unfortunately, this isn't the case with websites countering the narratives. The role of the media in either validating or refuting the messages of extremists is growing in importance. The phenomenon of Minneapolis-based Somali-American young males, for example, who traveled to Somalia, fought alongside al-Shabaab, and, in some cases, became suicide bombers, can be traced to their being motivated by the nationalistic narrative they were exposed to on social media. The reports of violence in their ancestral home included a compelling combination of propaganda and accurate reporting that appealed to a sense of obligation to defend Somalia from "foreign invaders.

**+ *Education is the enemy of extremists.***

There is a striking absence of critical thinking among members of extremist and terrorist groups. Leaders demand almost blind obedience and train followers to follow orders. It is the absence of critical thinking that explains why distortion of religion and conspiracy theories, so plainly wrong to a thinking person, hold sway among members of these groups. The name of the Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram literally means, "Western education is forbidden," and it's one of the pillars of their cause. In July 2013 Boko Haram killed more than forty people, mostly students, during an attack on a school in the village of Mamudo, in Yobe State. In October 2012 the Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban, tried to kill a fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, Malala Yousafzai, by shooting her in the head because she campaigned

for education for girls. A critical component of any counter-narrative campaign is to promote education and critical thinking within vulnerable communities and among would-be recruits.

**+ *Language and terminology matter.***

It is important to refrain from using terms such as “radical” or “jihad,” as the words may traditionally have positive connotations. Care needs to be taken to find what best resonates with the targeted audience. In Northern Ireland, for example, the UK PREVENT strategy was renamed ENGAGE as it was more acceptable to the communities from where the violent extremists were recruited. Similarly, terms such as “former terrorists” and “former extremists” are problematic within some Northern Ireland communities. Former activists prefer to be referred to as “former combatants” or “ex-prisoners.” The wrong terminology can lead to a refusal to cooperate.

**+ *Where there is a lack of alternative narratives, extremists fill the void.***

Around the world, whether in Afghanistan or the south of Yemen, a common factor that aids extremists is the lack of strong governance. In North and West Africa and the Sahel, for example, we saw how the combination of weak governance, a flood of weapons from the fall of the Qadhafi regime, funds from criminal enterprises, and a lack of alternatives has aided the spread of violent extremism.

**+ *One of the most powerful tactics is the involvement of former terrorists, although it often gives rise to contention.***

“Formers” (former terrorists/extremists) know firsthand what narratives inspire people to join groups. Their abandonment of the group and of violence, and the reasons for their defection, provide an extremely powerful counter-narrative message. They have a credibility that most other messengers lack. In Northern Ireland, formers are embedded in the society, with hundreds involved in reconciliation work. Given the death and destruction that formers were involved in, this approach is often contentious.

**+ *Governments should learn from past experiences and from different kinds of extremist groups.***

Each group and situation is unique, but counter-narrative approaches and tactics can be adapted from elsewhere and tailored to new challenges. There is a valuable global knowledge base that can be tapped. The Netherlands, for example, initially developed its program to respond to the Salafi-jihadi extremist Hofstad Network. But they also see their programs as applicable to countering right-wing extremists.

**+ *Religious leaders and groups can play an important role in both countering extremist narratives and rehabilitating extremists.***

Just as extremists choose their recruitment messengers based on who is likely to be the most effective, we need to do the same. Where the issue is a distortion of Islam, it is religious leaders who therefore are our best messengers. Security officials in Singapore, for example, found that individuals who have visited extremist websites often struggle with the question of how a Muslim should live in a secular society. They are attracted to the message of taking up

arms to “protect” fellow Muslims. Scholars from Singapore’s Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) play a critical role in countering these narratives by, among other things, emphasizing the importance of moderation.

**+ *Community resiliency groups are a very effective tool.***

Just like religious leaders are the most effective messengers when dealing with a distortion of religion, where people are being recruited because of alleged (or even true) local or tribal grievances, it is community leaders and groups that need to lead the response. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), for example, has initiated a series of roundtables to discuss radicalization in the U.S. Somali community. This program is designed to bring together local, state, and federal officials with members of the Somali-American community to address problems.

**+ *The most effective programs consistently assess and recalibrate approaches.***

As governments succeed with tactics and counter-narratives, groups adapt to try and mitigate this. In Indonesia, for example, once the government had success in disengaging Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members in prison, the group arranged marriages for imprisoned members with wives committed to the cause—so that they would keep their new husbands engaged. Indonesian authorities therefore needed to adapt.

**+ *Ownership of CVE programs is important.***

Some countries have established counter-narrative programs at the national level, while others are driven by local authorities and non-governmental organizations. The twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the United States, for example, use a combined local authority and community organization approach augmented by input and support from the Department of Homeland Security and State Department (both national-level organizations). The overarching emphasis of the program is trust building among the Somali diaspora community.

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# UNITED KINGDOM

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The primary terrorist threat in the United Kingdom is from groups and individuals inspired by the al-Qaeda narrative of violence as the nearly sole means to address perceived grievances. The threat is real, according to UK security officials, and it continues, as evidenced by the number of ongoing police investigations.

In 2010–11, the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies commissioned a study to examine programs designed by various countries to counter violent extremism. The group reviewed CVE schemes in the UK initiated under the auspices of the country’s comprehensive counterterrorism strategy known as CONTEST, together with its counterpart, PREVENT.

Between the completion of our first CVE study and the start of the Counter Narratives Study team’s research, the UK government conducted a complete review of the PREVENT program and CONTEST strategy. According to officials interviewed, the major obstacles to conducting research in the area of formulating a more effective CVE strategy are the lack of agreement on performance indicators and buy-in to the new accreditation requirements for funding, as well as the requirement to sign on to British values, which to date have not been clearly defined. Lord Carlile conducted the review, and the Home Office reduced the five original objectives to three. They are:

- + Respond to the **ideological challenge** of terrorism and the threat from those who promote it.

+ **Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism** and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support.

+ Work with **sectors and institutions** where there are risks of radicalization that need to be addressed.

These objectives have been abbreviated to the three *Is*: **Ideology, Individuals, and Institutions**. In effect, however, the approach is more complex, encompassing twenty-five priorities for a multiagency effort. Although Home Office officials did not use the specific phrase “countering the narrative” in their description of priorities, it appears to have been a consistent theme within the PREVENT strategy, and much of the approach is consistent with CVE.

The strategy was introduced in June 2011. As of the time of writing, its impact has yet to be formally evaluated.

## + **Background**

The Counter Narratives Study team project team visited England September 18–21, 2011, and engaged in formal briefings, informal meetings, and interviews using a structured questionnaire as a framework for gathering information.

Discussions and meetings were held with representatives from the following agencies:

+ UK Home Office

+ Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT)

+ Senior British police officers from the PREVENT Delivery Unit of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)

+ Regional PREVENT and CHANNEL coordinators (see below)

+UK Foreign Office

+Departmental and partner agencies in PREVENT delivery, including health and education sectors

+Project directors of community-based programs

## CVE PROGRAMS

### +The UK's Counterterrorism Strategy

The official aim of CONTEST is “to reduce the risk to the UK and its interests overseas from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.”<sup>1</sup>

The scope of the CONTEST strategy has been revised and broadened to cover all forms of terrorism, but it is important to note that Northern Ireland has a tailored approach, which recognizes some of the particular context and specific aspects of the threats in the region.

The Home Office counterterrorism strategy is organized around four work-streams, each comprising a number of objectives:

+**Pursue:** to stop terrorist attacks

+**Prevent:** to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism

+**Protect:** to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack

+**Prepare:** to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism/uk-counterterrorism-strat/>

For the purposes of Counter Narratives Study team, research during the UK site visit concentrated on the new PREVENT strategy and sought information on efforts to counter the narrative.

## **+PREVENT**

A critical factor associated with revising the PREVENT initiative was the belief that the previous strategy was ineffective. The new PREVENT strategy highlights the flaws of the original program: “It confused the delivery of government policy to promote integration with government policy to prevent terrorism. It failed to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat we face” (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism/review-of-prevent-strategy/>). The new strategy is guided by a number of principles.

PREVENT has multiple strands, combining government sponsorship and funding with NGO involvement and the participation of other agencies. According to Lord Carlile, the strategy aims to provide “a template for challenging the extremist ideas and terrorist actions which seek to undermine the rule of law and fundamental British political values and institutions.”

The twenty-five stated actions work to disrupt the narrative of violence and prevent it from reaching its intended audience, in the process undermining its attractiveness. Actions taken, especially those undertaken in partnership with other agencies and institutions, include inoculating those vulnerable to the message of violent extremism and exposing the contradictions or hypocrisies in the narrative.

The strategy identifies the “ideology of extremism and terrorism” as the real challenge and stresses the fact that legitimate religious belief is not the core problem. The first aim of the strategy is to tackle those extremist organizations that oppose universal human rights, equality before the law, real democracy, and full participation in society. In its efforts to *prevent* people from being drawn into

terrorism, and to ensure that this audience is given appropriate advice and support, the strategy's second objective is to build on the successful multiagency CHANNEL program, which identifies and provides support for people at risk of radicalization. This includes challenging beliefs and providing alternatives. The third aim of the approach is to work with sectors and institutions within which there are risks of radicalization. These include education, healthcare providers, faith groups, charities, the criminal justice system, and online forums.

PREVENT addresses all forms of terrorism, including that of the extreme right. The program targets those forms of terrorism that pose the greatest risk to national security. PREVENT will tackle nonviolent extremism where it may create an environment conducive to terrorism and where it popularizes ideas that are espoused by terrorist groups.

PREVENT should distinguish between counterterrorist work and integration strategies. The UK government believes that the two cannot be confused or merged. In a warning, it points out that “failure to appreciate the distinction risks securitizing integration and reducing the chances of our success.”

PREVENT must improve its evaluation and monitoring process against a common set of objectives. A principle about which the site team gathered many views and concerns was that public money not be provided to extremist organizations that do not support the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and mutual respect for and tolerance of different faiths. This statement as a general principle presented no problems, but when acceding to “British standards and values accreditation became a prerequisite to receiving funding, it was a major source of contention.

Those on the QIASS visit perceived strains in the relationship between official agencies and NGOs engaged in CVE work—for instance, over the above-mentioned accreditation system that now requires community groups to sign on to British standards. The team was told about the need

for culturally sensitive and mutually agreed-upon terminology, and why the term “British values” could “provoke, not prevent” violent extremism. Violent recruiters can point to this narrative as evidence of an undervaluing and undermining of Muslim values and traditions. On the positive side, the team observed real examples of multiagency cooperation.

The new, revised PREVENT strategy places more emphasis on monitoring performance, evaluation, and the measurement of success. However, there is no agreement on the indicators and methods of evaluation. During the site visit, the issue of evaluation, or efficacy, was observed as

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**The new, revised PREVENT strategy places more emphasis on monitoring performance, evaluation, and the measurement of success.**

representing a continuing challenge—with every interviewee agreeing about the need for evaluation, yet no consensus formed on systematic assessment.

According to the Home Office, monitoring of performance was weak during the tenure of the previous PREVENT strategy. In the future, funding will be contingent upon rigorous assessment and likelihood of success. Future assessments must take into account the extent to which the project can reach people who are vulnerable to radicalization. Program outcomes must be clearly delineated. To justify funding of specific PREVENT projects, decision makers will consider their likely impact as compared to other interventions. The UK is developing input and impact indicators across the whole of the CONTEST program to assess what is being done to reduce vulnerability to terrorist attacks. In an attempt to reduce reporting burdens, indicators will be based on data,

wherever possible, which has already been collected and used by contributing organizations. For security reasons, not all of these performance assessments will be published.

PREVENT will need to identify ways to challenge radical and violent ideologies and disrupt propaganda for terrorism. The program will also need to gauge the effectiveness of interventions to support vulnerable individuals, and to work with sectors dealing with radicalization. “Input” will be calculated based upon the number of individuals in intervention programs or total expenditures on PREVENT in any one sector. “Impact” can be understood as the number of individuals no longer assessed as being vulnerable or a percentage reduction of risk within a particular geographical area or sector. The Home Office intends to commission regular follow-up studies following preliminary evaluation of projects against specific indicators.

During the site visit to a community-based project countering the violent narrative and providing individual tailored interventions, the issue of evaluation was discussed. The project manager referred to the number of CHANNEL referrals; the number of police commanders involved; and the actual changes in the young people within the group. He stated strongly that interventions cannot be done without NGO partner involvement; that the new PREVENT program was problematic because of the government narrative stating that partners must sign on to British values; and that there were differences of opinion around the issue of evaluation.

The PREVENT strategy enables former extremists (or perhaps those who could more accurately be described as combatants, fighters, and activists, since language is such a crucial consideration) to play a role. The team met an organization established by formers (of British Pakistani background) that has established itself as a credible intervention group, identifying and supporting those at risk. The local police support the scheme, although the strategy makes clear that formers are responding to issues of fairness and justice *with* the police but are not working *for* the police. The leaders are committed, charismatic individuals who have had to stand up to physical and

verbal attacks from their own community. The group is now commencing work in Pakistan, and yet because of changes to the funding and accreditation rules (whereby community-based schemes must sign on to specifically stated British values), they find themselves in difficulty. They pointed out that if those working with young Irish Republicans at risk of involvement in violent extremism were asked to do the same, no scheme could ever commence.

In meetings with community representatives (for example, an imam and other community leaders in London), it became clear that compelling participants to sign on to British values is a matter best left to local schemes. Therefore, as is explicit in the PREVENT strategy, government's role is to select and facilitate appropriate partnerships, and to support dialogue and stimulate communities. Previously, a stated PREVENT objective was to "address grievances," but this is no longer a specific objective—despite the fact that there are those in the British Muslim community who believe that state actors (particularly police) should be very aware that their actions can support the recruiters' narrative.

One area in which government can be active is in countering Internet narratives, which aim to recruit others to engage in violent extremism. Actions can include working with Internet service providers and various Web hosts to remove these sites and making alternative narratives easily available.

## **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

The team learned that the main rhetoric used by Islamist recruiters is a jihadist narrative, while other narratives included: dissident Irish Republicans still hoping to end the "British occupation" of the six counties in Northern Ireland; and a right-wing British nationalist anti-immigrant narrative. Statistics shared with the QIASS team indicated that 88 percent of CHANNEL referral cases showed interest in international terrorism, while 10 percent showed interest in right-wing activities.

One interviewee, a senior government official, outlined his view of how young people are drawn into radicalization. He talked about “supply meeting demand” in a fertile breeding ground where issues of identity were important to young British Muslims actively seeking knowledge about Islam. He talked about gaps between the generations that caused them to look beyond the local

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**The solution is to prevent the supply of violent extremist ideology meeting demand.**

imam. He identified the “supply side” as violent extremist ideologies that are actively being spread through the Internet, CDs, DVDs, and face-to-face engagements and radicalizers who target “the seeking youth” who have no theological resilience.

The breeding ground is created when young Muslims in the UK react to real or perceived negative imagery, discrimination, polarization, humiliation, international conflicts (brought close by satellite TV and the Internet), poor political representation, low socioeconomic indicators, national and international injustice, hypocrisy, and double standards. The same interviewee explained that where the breeding ground (demand) intersects with lack of resilience (supply) and with at-risk individuals (“cognitive opening”), radicalization is likely to occur. He described these cognitive openings as being prompted either by crisis or some other trauma, personal or social. Therefore, the underlying strategy must identify when a crisis is about to break or has broken, leaving a cognitive opening where the violent extremist supply can penetrate. The solution is to prevent the supply of violent extremist ideology meeting demand. This government official explained that reducing youth vulnerability to radicalization would require diminishing the demand, countering the supply by providing healthy and authentic alternatives, and targeting the breeding ground.

## **+Best Practices/Lessons Learned:**

In terms of best practices, the QIASS study group identified general principles such as the need for tailored interventions and the important role played by charismatic, committed individuals in order to complement agency interventions.

There is a need to identify and act in actual cases of radicalization by delivering tailored interventions especially when dealing with immediate, short-term effects that are likely to lead to violent extremism.

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# NORTHERN IRELAND

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## +Background

The main threat in Northern Ireland is from the various dissident Republican groups that have proliferated in recent years. While their activities do not threaten political agreements or the peace process, they are deadly and have the potential for greater violence in the future. The threat from dissident groups who have killed soldiers and police officers is considered severe (as of October 24, 2012). (When the threat in Northern Ireland is designated as severe, an attack is considered to be highly likely.) There is also the fear that Loyalists opposed to the dissident campaign may likewise reengage in violence. This puts pressure on the state, particularly on the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), who are in the unenviable position of having been warned by all sides neither to underreact nor overreact. Consequently, those who manage community-based schemes perceive the threat as emanating from the state's response to the dissidents. This is especially the case if state responses undermine the work of ex-prisoners who are advocates of nonviolence and cooperation with the police (for example, the Coiste organization).

There is no single program in Northern Ireland that can be characterized exclusively as counterterrorism; nor is there a unified counter-narrative strategy to combat violent extremism. Instead the region has had the benefit of a multilayered peace process. It is important to differentiate the situation in NI from the rest of the UK, where there is a threat from groups and individuals influenced by al-Qaeda's philosophy of violence. Northern Ireland is in the midst of *postconflict reconciliation*, which poses significant challenges about how to prevent released political prisoners from reengaging in violence. Further, there is a concern about the likely recruitment of a

new generation of terrorists who believe in the violent extremism (VE) narrative, and who feel that the peace process is flawed. The dissident Irish Republican narrative is that the peace process has not delivered independence/unity, and that former Republican activists have capitulated and are now part of a political system that operates under British rule. Thus, the VE narrative is one of “armed struggle” against the British and its need to be escalated. The counter to this VE narrative is that the armed struggle failed and a new dispensation exists in the North that will enable a peaceful transition to a united Ireland if a majority of the people vote for it in a referendum. Violence did succeed over thirty years of insurgency and is unlikely to succeed now.

The Home Office’s new PREVENT strategy makes specific reference to Northern Ireland and its context, recent history, and current imperatives. In Northern Ireland the threat level has been assessed as severe in relation to the capacity and intentions of dissident Republican groups opposed to the peace process. The QIASS site visit deliberately focused on the activities of community-based groups (supported and encouraged by state agencies) who are countering narratives, especially those that might draw young people into violent extremism on the dissident Republican side and those on the Loyalist side. The team examined three specific schemes: two that are organized and operated by former political prisoners (one in Loyalist areas and one in Republican areas) and one operated by a cross-community NGO. Each one targets young people and tries to prevent them from becoming involved in crime, and, implicitly and explicitly, counters the narrative that promotes sectarian and politically motivated violent extremism.

The first QIASS CVE report described the philosophy of the existing NI peace process political agreements and initiatives as “engaged grievance management.” It was described as a multilayered and multifaceted approach toward countering the narratives (pro-Republican and pro-Loyalist) that could inspire a return to violence by former combatants or inspire a new generation of extremists. At the time of writing, the site visit team is aware that political efforts are under way with

armed groups to dissuade them from continuing violence; however, the QIASS study team limited its focus to efforts that are in the public domain.

The QIASS Counter Narratives Study team project team visited Northern Ireland September 21–24, 2011. Its study included formal briefings, informal meetings, and semistructured interviews. As a framework to gather information, the team used a structured questionnaire.

In addition, discussions and meetings were held with representatives from the following:

- + Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- + NI Criminal Justice Inspectorate
- + a local political party
- + an academic majoring in transitional justice—including community-based justice schemes
- + Cooperation Ireland (the peace-building charity)
- + project directors of community-based programs
- + former political prisoners

Three schemes were examined: two Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) and Northern Ireland Alternatives schemes led by former combatants and early-release political prisoners (Republican and Loyalist); and one scheme addressing vulnerable youth organized by a cross-border and cross-community NGO. Some of these initiatives cater to specific groups, such as victims, ex-prisoners, youth, and women.

As on the previous site visit, the QIASS study team was afforded access to many of those engaged in delivery of the strategy as it pertains in Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland, and some themes emerged, including:

- + the multistranded approach to countering terrorism and maintaining peace after major conflict;
- + the importance of language and terminology, which can either hinder or help engagement;
- + the importance and impact of individuals working within the community;
- + the important requirement from police and other statutory agencies to understand the community-based schemes and respond to them in appropriate ways;
- + the transferability of some key principles.

## **CVE PROGRAMS**

### **+CONTEST in Northern Ireland**

According to “Prevent Strategy”:

Historically, the principal threat from terrorist organizations in the UK came from Northern Ireland-related terrorist groups. Between 1969 and the signing of the Belfast Agreement in April 1998, over 3,500 people died in the UK in attacks by the Irish Republican and Loyalist terrorist groups. While the political process and the ongoing implementation of the 1998 Belfast (‘Good Friday’) Agreement ended the Troubles and there was a dramatic

decline in terrorist activity, there remains a serious and persistent threat from terrorist groups in Northern Ireland.

This threat has increased significantly over the previous three years [2010, 2011, and 2012]. . . .

The current threat comes principally from republican terrorist groups opposed to the political process, including the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA), who were responsible for the murder of two soldiers in Antrim in 2009, the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA), who were responsible for the murder of Police Constable Stephen Carroll in 2009, and Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH), which has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks since 2009. A smaller number of unaffiliated individuals have been engaged in or have supported attacks (p. 14).

The document notes that “Republican terrorist groups have long recognized the political and propaganda value of mounting an attack in Great Britain.”

In September 2010, the Northern Ireland–related terrorist threat to Great Britain was raised from MODERATE to SUBSTANTIAL. . . . The last attack by Northern Ireland–related groups in Great Britain was in 2001. . . .

Dealing with the threat from Northern Ireland–related terrorism in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Secretary of State. . . . While “Prevent” does not deal directly with the threat from Northern Ireland–related terrorism, the issues dealt with . . . and the principles it sets out are relevant to the attempts to counter the threat. . . . Most relevant policy areas are the responsibility of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland with whom we continue to cooperate very closely (p. 15).

According to one interviewee:

A range of factors drives recruitment to, and support for, Northern Ireland-related terrorist groups. Ideologically, the key factor for Republican groups throughout the history has been the constitutional position and in particular the ongoing British presence in Ireland. While the “Good Friday” Agreement provided a political resolution to this issue by enshrining the principle of consent [that Northern Ireland will remain part of the UK until a majority vote otherwise], a small number of people have become disillusioned with the pace of progress and with the political parties engaged in the new political systems set up by the Agreement. But in Ireland, as elsewhere, ideology is rarely the only factor in radicalization and recruitment. Recruitment is often personality-driven or dependent on family or local allegiances. The promise of status, excitement, and, in some cases, financial rewards are all relevant. Socioeconomic factors play a significant role: Communities with significant terrorist activity generally score highest on a range of social deprivation indicators.

It is therefore important to note that the UK CT strategy differentiates between the implementation of PREVENT in Northern Ireland (where it is referred locally as ENGAGE, community engagement) and the UK by specifying the following:

Under the Northern Ireland constitutional settlement, national security remains the sole responsibility of the UK government. For the most part, UK-wide counterterrorism legislation applies in Northern Ireland and remains the responsibility of the UK government. However, following the devolution of policing and justice matters in April 2010, the Northern Ireland Minister of Justice is responsible for policing and criminal justice policy matters. In addition, most of the levers which are relevant to the work of PREVENT are devolved and are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In Northern Ireland, unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, the principal threat from

terrorism comes from Northern Ireland-related terrorist groups. While the PREVENT strategy does not directly apply to Northern Ireland-related terrorism, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland works closely with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive to counter the threat posed by these groups.

This enables context-specific interventions to occur. Taking these facts into consideration, the QIASS site visit focused on community efforts in Northern Ireland (especially those of groups led by former prisoners), which are not found elsewhere in the UK. The team concluded, however, that there are particular practices and procedures in place, which demonstrate principles that are applicable in and transferable to other situations.

### **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

The rhetoric used by dissident Republican recruiters is that after eight hundred years there is still British rule in Ireland, and “one last push” can finally bring about complete independence. However, interviewees described the micro-canvas on which this is played out in reality—with local issues and grievances providing evidence of the need for violence. Police and other state institutions’ behavior was particularly significant in this regard. Loyalist extremists’ disenfranchisement and disillusionment with the peace process were the main drivers returning the situation to violence. A PSNI Historical Enquiries Team is investigating cold cases, and there is a belief that one side (the Loyalists) is under greater scrutiny than the other (the IRA and other Republican groups). Tensions increase as cases are brought to trial—for example, a major Loyalist murder trial. In the past, trials have typically resulted in rioting, gunfire exchanges, and bombings.

The three schemes examined are part of a multidimensional postconflict counter-narrative. There is great divergence of viewpoints on how “dealing with the past” fits into this counter-violence approach. Some have called for a Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) approach and maintain that a true counter-narrative will not succeed until the truth is exposed—especially those actions

perpetrated by the state. Others feel that exposing, and to a degree reinvestigating, the violence of the past will open old wounds and corroborate the narrative of violent extremists who still feel there is a military solution in NI.

Those working within the communities stressed the importance of local groups (both faith-based and secular) to intervene and counter the narratives espoused by recruiters. A number of CRJI programs have been designed in working-class areas and housing estates throughout NI. The primary driver was the desire by the terrorist/paramilitary groups to find an alternative to violence as a means of controlling antisocial behavior in their areas. However, the programs have evolved into a powerful counter-narrative tool.

An interviewee involved in managing CRJI schemes (in Republican areas) described the general acceptance of violence (as a means of control in working-class housing estates) as something that had been caused by the state's security response early in the conflict. Social behavior—in this case, public acceptance of paramilitaries punishing young offenders with beatings, knee-capping (the deliberate shooting of an adversary's knees), exclusions, and in some cases executions—was partly shaped by the state's counter-insurgency strategy. Regular, responsive policing had become severely restricted in some parts of NI due to the terrorist campaign—which resulted in three hundred murders of police officers—and paramilitary groups were “forced” to fill the vacuum.

This narrative posits that during a “political war,” the state commits atrocities and creates inequities, causing some members of society to feel like second-class citizens. The result is a loss of trust in state institutions—for example, the police. Violent paramilitary-style “social discipline” evolves to fill the traditional role played by policing.

At some point, however, paramilitary organizations realized that kneecapping can only do so much, and they began searching for alternatives. The current schemes developed informally over time because of the need for social order and policing. However, the underlying strategy was **social**

**and political.** It was based on a belief that criminal justice is too important to be left in the hands of the few (that is, the state), and that the community has an important role to play. This, coupled with the desire to move away from violence, has led to the schemes in working-class areas of NI led by former prisoners who have credibility in their own communities. Despite coming from an opposing side, the Loyalist schemes' organizers share similar analyses in terms of the necessity of

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There was a realization that ‘beating up and locking up people didn’t work and did not restore or heal relationships’ and that there must be a better way.

the schemes and what they can achieve.

A former Loyalist prisoner was interviewed about his role in managing Northern Ireland Alternatives, a collective of five CRJI schemes operating in mainly Loyalist areas in and around Belfast. As well as providing preventative and diversionary work for and with young people, it supports victims—and is contributing to **community development**. This is a vital issue in the peace process and contributes toward undermining the narrative of violent extremism. The schemes play a role in mediation between police and communities—for example, during and in the aftermath of riots.

The prisons provided the starting point in terms of looking for another way to resolve problems. There was a realization that “beating up and locking up people didn’t work and did not restore or heal relationships” and that there must be a better way. The interviewee we met with claimed, “It is so simple—it works, but it is not so simple to get buy-in.” Class remains an important

factor. The middle classes view restorative justice programs in a negative way and do not value the work of diverting youths away from violence. The Alternatives program, started in 1996, was based around the desire to stop intercommunity crime and low-level crime while allowing the police to deal with high-level crimes, such as the dissident threat.

Alternatives is comprised of thirty staff members and one hundred volunteers, and there are twenty-five cases at the “tip of the triangle”—more serious, involving police. The scheme does preventative work in schools and is now in all areas of Belfast and in Bangor, a nearby town. An American philanthropist helped to fund the scheme at the beginning, but there are many additional sources of funding, including the European Union, the Belfast City Council, and the police; however, according to the interviewee, “they all want something different in terms of outcomes.”

Today there is widespread recognition that **policing with and by the community** is the solution. “Policing” is meant in the broadest sense of the word. CRJI schemes are one of the components of this strategy. The schemes initially were about dealing with low-level crimes and antisocial behavior, but a critical question soon arose: Would the programs be useful in countering terrorism, the activities of paramilitary organizations, and sectarian violence? In short, do they counter the narratives that promote violent extremism? The fact that the schemes are one important method of empowering former prisoners to espouse peaceful, nonviolent means of achieving goals appears to answer this question in the affirmative.

## **+Strategies/Best Practices**

Since the start of the CRJI initiatives (in Republican areas), the program has focused on approximately ten thousand people over a period of six years (at time of writing). These are almost always at-risk young people who are engaging in antisocial behavior and low-level criminality and are deemed to be vulnerable to paramilitary/terrorist interest. They are vulnerable to being either punished (shot, exiled, beaten, etc.) or recruited into the ranks and used for rioting, racketeering,

and drug running. Cases are based on referrals, and on occasion the schemes reach out to offenders prior to a referral. In 2010 the various offices of CRJI dealt with 1,866 new cases, ranging from neighbor disputes to more serious cases of individuals under threat. Some were resolved by mediation, while others required agency support and a few had to be referred out—including to PSNI. A real, tangible change is now reflected whereby former members of the IRA who tried to kill police, or would have killed members within their own community for collaborating with police, are now working with the PSNI and referring cases to them, according to officials interviewed.

In Loyalist areas the numbers involved in community-based restorative justice schemes have been smaller—less than 100 in the previous year (2011). As in Republican communities, the focus is on young people who are considered vulnerable, in part because they may have engaged in antisocial behavior. Referral by members of the community is the routine way they come to the

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The scheme is designed to take vulnerable, working-class youths ‘outside their bubble’ (their normal environment, with its attendant risks).

attention of those responsible for overseeing the scheme.

In the case of the NGO scheme, the numbers have been kept deliberately small, and a “selection process” took place (to identify those best suited to the program) that involved the community and state agencies. The process invited the most likely young leaders in the area—but not leaders in the traditional, positive role-model sense. Instead the scheme focused on gang leaders and other charismatic individuals with a propensity for bringing followers into troublesome or illegal activities. The aim is to channel their qualities into something different and more positive.

In addition to examining the community-based restorative justice schemes, the QIASS team was briefed on an innovative, cross-community, all-Ireland NGO scheme. Its underlying strategy is to prevent and disrupt the potential recruitment of young leaders into violent extremism. The scheme, which is careful not to label or promote itself using CT terminology, is designed to take vulnerable, working-class youths “outside their bubble” (their normal environment, with its attendant risks). It follows an existing UK-wide scheme as a model. The scheme runs programs that “encourage young people to take responsibility for themselves—helping them build the life they choose rather than the one they’ve ended up with.” The NI scheme targets particular young people who are at risk of involvement in violent extremism and offers them alternatives through a program that includes a creative activity (moviemaking and gourmet cooking were given as examples; others included citizenship classes, short-term internships, and prolonged mentoring). Thus the narrative of violence is replaced with one of self-worth and good citizenship. Although this scheme, established in 2011, is in its early stages, so far there has been no recidivism from any of the fifteen participants. For example, they have not been involved in anti-police rioting.

Rioting in Northern Ireland is seldom a spontaneous event—unlike hooligan activity in other parts of Europe. Rather, it is an organized and carefully orchestrated strategy directly linked to terrorist gatherings at which members brandish firearms and explosives and encourage potential recruits to engage in violence.

According to the formers interviewed by the QIASS team, the threat to the peace process is the possibility of renewed conflict—that is, the gun has not been completely removed from Irish politics. The overarching goal is to take the gun out of politics on both sides, ending the use of violence to reach political goals. The community restorative justice schemes are therefore seen by the organizers as much more than simply social work or youth justice interventions. The espoused aim of one scheme is “through a process of empowerment to build a just restorative community

that is tolerant, responsive and inclusive.” This is a powerful counter-narrative to intolerant violent extremism.

The government and statutory agencies initially approached the issue of community justice schemes from a different and singular viewpoint—to integrate the schemes into the formal justice system. Over a prolonged period of consultation and negotiation, common ground was found between the schemes and the state. The Republican schemes produced a blue book, which proposed a set of operating procedures, while the state response involved the police and other agencies in all their cases—at least in terms of notification.

In 2000, a government protocol was developed that required community-based schemes to become accredited and audited, to be recognized as legitimate, and to receive funding. Schemes in both the Loyalist and the Republican communities agreed to comply with the protocol, and the requirement stands today.

Adherence to the government protocol to inform police has been a hard sell in some areas, and, according to a Loyalist interviewee, this has limited the number of cases referred to the schemes. Some parents and communities had hoped that community interventions would be a good alternative to police involvement. However, to receive funding and be accredited, the schemes must be open with the police. It is an issue that has to be handled sensitively and in a trusting manner by both the police and the organizers.

## **+Successes**

In 2000, the official protocol for the NI community-based justice schemes was developed, and now there is official oversight, provided by the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). The inspectorate assesses and evaluates the schemes against existing protocols, which

require police involvement and the sharing of information with statutory agencies. It was claimed by interviewees (not only by those administering the schemes) that they are successful on many levels.

In terms of gauging success and establishing performance measurement, indicators include general prevention statistics, levels of community support for the schemes, the number of community referrals, case-by-case improvements, the absence of punishment beatings, and levels of funding. The scheme organizers offered the fact that PSNI value them so highly as a strong indicator that they had been successful in convincing the authorities of their overall worth. Local police in republican areas of Belfast are on record as saying their relationship with CRJI was the single most important relationship in their area.

In 2010 formal review of the schemes took place by the CJINI. In the case of the Loyalist schemes, the review team concluded that the organizers “had done everything expected” to comply with the government protocol. These schemes are accredited and have a recognized relationship with the police, the probation board, and other statutory agencies.

One scheme organizer concluded that success could be measured at the individual level, either by assessing victim satisfaction or by measuring the amount of time engaging with the police. An important by-product of the schemes is a growing incremental acceptance of official policing. This in itself is countering the old narrative.

It is important to mention that, as in the case of the Active Change Foundation (ACF) and its “Preventing Violence Program” (the QIASS team interviewed ACF officials in East London), the relationship with the police has been described as hard nosed —and demands a different style of policing and acceptance by enlightened police commanders. The locals are no longer passive, and the ACF schemes require the police to listen to the community, particularly with regard to how best to service an area. One interviewee aptly described the situation by saying police should consider “the community is not just the eyes and ears of the police; [it is] also the muscle and brains.”

## +Role for Formers

Within post-conflict Northern Ireland there still exists the threat of violent extremism. Some recruiters remain actively involved in trying to attract young people to join paramilitary and armed terrorist groups. Many counter-narrative schemes—not just the two visited by the QIASS team—engage the services of former prisoners.

For example, the Prison to Peace Partnership, funded by the EU, brings former political prisoners in contact with school groups and describes itself and its aims in the following manner:

It is a very honest sharing of experiences by a number of individual ex-combatants/political ex-prisoners from very different backgrounds. The views that these individuals bring to the important question of citizenship are not often heard in Northern Ireland despite its long history of conflict. All too often society only learns about its history from either political power-holders or professional historians—this [scheme] represents something different, [and] it offers the often-painful learning from lives that were intertwined in all the contradictions of a bitterly contested society. What motivated the participation of the political ex-prisoners in this project was a determination that their experiences should be shared with young people. There is no sense of glamour in their stories or any sense of self-aggrandizement. They are an honest portrayal of how individuals can become caught up in violence; inflict and suffer pain; endure often long prison sentences and still hold a commitment to make society a more just and inclusive place. This is the essence of where we have come from; hopefully it can contribute to, and inform, a future sense of citizenship that can avoid these circumstances and work to create a more inclusive, welcoming and equal society.

This approach, which involves learning from the past and sharing stories, is in itself a powerful counter-narrative, albeit a difficult one to evaluate. It is aimed at a general audience rather than specific individuals. The Northern Ireland approach is multifaceted and includes a combination of these more generic interventions and other, targeted interventions.

The objectives of the two community-based restorative justice programs visited by the research team are to reduce antisocial behavior and to support victims, but the formers leading the projects are quick to articulate that *they are also countering the narrative of armed struggle and armed resistance*.

Language and terminology remain, as we have said, a sensitive issue with former prisoners. The ENGAGE strategy refers to them as “former combatants,” “fighters,” or “activists,” and not as former terrorists or former extremists. Ironically, many of these individuals hold the same political views and have the same ambitions as before. The only narrative that has changed for them is the method of achieving their goals.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

+With peace agreements, power-sharing arrangements, and prisoner releases, NI has a customized and multifaceted approach to CT, which it continues to foster postconflict.

+A relatively severe threat still exists in NI, and although the dissidents do not pose the same threat numerically as the Provisional IRA did from the 1960s through the 2000s (and likewise do not enjoy the same level of community support), they remain a deadly threat and are actively recruiting.

+Along with political progress, progressive policing, and the other *Ps*—prepare, protect, and pursue—having a prevention strategy is imperative.

+In NI, individuals and schemes based in communities are engaged in a variety of activities that counter violent extremist narratives.

+Of particular note is the work performed by former prisoners and combatants (alongside other NGO activities) that attempts to prevent young people from becoming involved in violent extremism.

+The QIASS team examined the rise of community restorative justice schemes, which operate in working-class housing estates in many areas of NI. Such schemes deal with antisocial behavior by young people through the use of a nonviolent, rehabilitative approach, and in doing so, they explicitly and implicitly are countering the narrative that violence works.

+The role played by community-based individuals (often former prisoners with street credibility) cannot be underestimated, and state actions must be planned and delivered in a way that does not undermine or, in effect, counter the counter-narrative.

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## SWEDEN

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The QIASS team visited Sweden, where they focused on Stockholm but covered strategies and efforts in effect nationwide.

At the time of the site visit, the most recently published counterterrorist strategy report was the Swedish government’s “National Responsibility and International Commitment: A National Strategy to Meet the Threat of Terrorism,” presented to Parliament on February 7, 2008. This was updated in 2011–12.<sup>2</sup> According to the report, Sweden “intends to meet the threat from terrorism under three headings: preventing, stopping and preparing.” The revised document highlights the improvements introduced in legal due process and supervision. Sweden's capability can be developed and improved even more by drawing on lessons learned from attacks and other incidents—for example, the December 11, 2010, suicide bombing in Stockholm.

During the visit by the QIASS team, the 2007–8 report was reviewed. The strategy sits within the 27-country European Union “CONTEST” CT strategy and falls under four main headings:

+PURSUE

+PREVENT

+PROTECT

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.government.se/sb/d/16072/a/195928>.

## +MANAGE (as opposed to “prepare”)

The document at the outset identifies the “new threat” characterized by links to religious extremism. It explains that “the most serious terrorist threat to Europe as well as globally consists of groups who seek to legitimize the use of violence by reference to extreme interpretations of Islam.” The report specifies that “the rhetoric of the al-Qaeda terrorist network [is] a source of inspiration.” In an effort to be even-handed, the document treats all forms of violent extremism in the same way. Sweden appears keen to play “an active and constructive part in refining domestic, EU and UN instruments to ensure effective, proportionate, appropriate action based on rule of law.” During the visit the team was regularly told that there is a deliberate policy to avoid ramping up the threat and risking alienating the Swedish Muslim population. An effort was being made to treat and respond to all threats (whether from right-wing, left-wing, or religious extremists) in a similar fashion and with clear and consistent methods.

## +Background

There have been few incidents in Sweden. In the December 2010 attack, the suicide bomber died. Another attack, on a newspaper office in Denmark, was preempted thanks to an effective collaboration between Sweden and Danish authorities. The perpetrators, including three Swedish citizens, were arrested in 2010.

As a result of experiences within Sweden and across the Netherlands, the country has made a concerted effort to learn from other countries’ best practices to combat terrorism and to work collaboratively with security agencies outside its borders. Under the Counter-Terrorism Cooperative Council, led by the Swedish Security Service (Säpo), the goal is to develop and strengthen Sweden’s collective ability to combat terrorism. (Those on the site visit learned that there is a multiagency approach that fully recognizes the role for NGOs, although one not as formally collaborative as that

of the UK model, which brought in the departments of health and education for the purposes of CT planning and prevention.)

During the study, a number of state interlocutors reinforced Sweden's respect for liberal attitudes, which translated as that it was very difficult to arrest someone in order to prevent a crime. Arrest is usually only conducted if a crime has already been committed.

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The central point was the need for an innate, integral knowledge of Islam to avoid culture clashes and the potential for violence.

One interviewee explained that during the 1970s, as the Muslim community began to establish itself, a disconnect developed between policing and minorities. Until recently, police had no training in how to deal with different cultures and different values. The central point was the need for an innate, integral knowledge of Islam to avoid culture clashes and the potential for violence. Efforts were under way to link elements of the Stockholm government with mosques and their representatives to promote mutual understanding between the state and the Muslim community.

The interviewee identified a “cultural clash” between the Swedish judicial system and Muslim Sharia law. Swedish Muslim youth posed a potential threat, and in particular intellectuals, who may feel undervalued, leading to ostracism, alienation, discontent, and suspicion. The threat could spread if young Muslims were treated by society and the state as if they were already guilty of some crime or were part of a problem.

There are intercommunal tensions that migrate to Sweden together with immigrant populations. Existing conflicts from the home country are sometimes replayed in the new countries

after emigration, for example the conflict between Syrian Christians and Swedish Muslims. There have been clashes between ethnic rivals as well, with Turks and Arabs carrying out vendettas and other violence against the Kurdish community after their arrival in Sweden.

Part of the CVE challenge in Sweden as identified to the QIASS team was that mainstream groups in the mosques and their leaders are said to lack local credibility. They lack respect from those most at risk in their communities, and they have no training to deal with complex issues, according to those interviewed. An official who requested anonymity stated, “Many people have said there was a naïveté about Sweden and that this country is not fit for a fight.” Further, he related that the “people” referred to were ambassadors from Muslim majority–populated countries.

The Swedish government believes that prevention is the best way forward. They will emphasize “open dialogue” as a way to deal with culture clashes and problems. This is in line with the United Nations open dialogue strategy. A priority is “preventative diplomacy” within a comprehensive CT strategy.

An official explained that the Swedish authorities endorsed the Fryshuset (activity center) scheme, which employs an imam. He has been described as “a moderate imam who could do a good job.” The government official also endorsed Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice, a group led by an intellectual young Muslim with credibility. “They were doing a good job,” in the opinion of the government strategist, to educate and to modernize and to give a moderate interpretation of the Qur’an. Some young men had no suitable modern role models and became disgruntled and vulnerable to radicalization despite the fact that a *fatwa* had been issued against extremism. The group likewise had the ear of young men who were located in the at-risk zone—more so than other mainstream Muslim role models.

The QIASS site visit focused on the activities of a number of community-based groups that are attempting to counter-narratives that might draw young people into violent extremism (for

example, Swedish Muslim Peace Agents, SENSUS) and those that support young people trying to leave extremist organizations and prevent reengagement (for example, EXIT and PASSUS at Fryshuset).

The team examined two sets of schemes: one organized and operated by Swedish Muslims to promote truth and justice; and another (Fryshuset) based in the Swedish suburbs (housing estates) that targets young people to prevent them from becoming involved in crime. It also supports those who wish to exit gangs—often right-wing extremist gangs. In doing so, the NGOs explicitly and implicitly counter narratives that promote violent extremism in the variety of forms to be found in Sweden.

Some themes have emerged, including:

- + the openness with which the Swedish authorities approach the issue of violent extremism and their focus on open dialogue and “preventative diplomacy”;
- + the multi-stranded approach to countering terrorism;
- + the importance and impact of individuals working within the community to prevent violent extremism;
- + the important requirement from police and other statutory agencies to understand the community and the NGOs’ efforts and respond to them in appropriate ways;
- + the importance of avoiding overreaction by the state, which could lead to the alienation of one section of the community;
- + learning from others’ mistakes—a cerebral approach to prevention.

## +Introduction

The Counter Narrative Study project team visited Stockholm September 24–30, 2011. The trip included formal briefings, informal meetings, and semistructured interviews. As stated, the target group for EXIT is marginalized and vulnerable young people who most likely have joined extremist groups but who now want out or may be ready to be helped to decide to quit. As an NGO, Fryshuset is not permitted to “map,” or target, people. Thus, referrals routinely come from the police, who drop the young people off at the facility. Participation is voluntary and free. Referrals may also come from schools, therapists, neighbors, social workers, or by word of mouth.

Fryshuset appreciated their (referrals’) ability to empower disenfranchised kids and expose them to positive role models and activities that could be expanded to include members of criminal gangs, left- and right-wing groups, religious sects, and international terrorist organizations who wish to exit such groups.

The Swedish Muslim interventions are aimed at young Muslims who are having identity crises and are vulnerable to radicalization—and, on the other side, to those who want to help promote the counter-narrative on a more generic basis.

The team used a structured questionnaire as a framework for gathering its information.

Discussions and meetings were held with representatives from the following agencies:

- +Swedish Security Police (Säkerhetspolisen)
- +Swedish Military
- +Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- +Ministry of Justice (Police Division and Democracy Department)

+Fryshuset (in particular CIDES and EXIT)

+Swedish Muslim groups (in particular the following: SENSUS, Swedish Peace Agents, and Swedish Muslims for Truth and Justice)

## **+Strategies**

When the 2008 national strategy was published, the threat was perceived as low: “Sweden has been spared large-scale terrorist attacks since the 1970s. The direct threat to Sweden and Swedish interests is still considered relatively low.” However, this changed following the suicide bomb attack in Stockholm in December 2010. The bomber, Taimor Abdul Wahab al-Abdaly, was born in Iraq, brought up and educated in Sweden, and attended university in Luton, England. At the time of the visit the threat level was raised one grade to level 3 (out of 5.)

Interlocutors were keen to point out that national security and international security are inseparable and that Sweden has been used as a base for money collection, dissemination of propaganda, and other activities to support terrorism elsewhere—for example, in Somalia. Two weeks before the site visit, four men were arrested in Gothenburg for plotting a terror attack in Sweden. Three are of Somali origin and the fourth is Iraqi. In October 2010, two other men were arrested on suspicion in Gothenburg on suspicion of plotting terrorism.

According to officials engaged, the main threat appears to be from Islamist extremists, but there are also concerns about growing right-wing extremism (the 2011–12 National Counterterrorism Strategy argues the following: “From an international perspective, most terrorist attacks occur in areas affected by conflict outside Europe. In Europe, local nationalist and separatist groups account for most of the attacks. In Sweden neither the white power environment, the autonomous environment, nor violent Islamic extremism [is] currently a serious threat to the democratic system).

In November 2010, the director general of the Swedish Security Service published a document reporting on “violence-promoting Islamist extremism in Sweden, the radicalization processes discernible in violence-promoting Islamist circles in Sweden, and the tools and strategies which can be used to counter radicalization.” Some have commented that the report was timely. A few weeks later, the first (and still the only) Islamist terrorist suicide bomb attack took place on Swedish soil. However the 112-page document, entitled “Violence-Promoting Islamist Extremism in Sweden,” is an example of Swedish authorities’ efforts to be open about the threat to Swedish interests at home and abroad, its origins, the processes of radicalization, how it intends (with all of society’s assistance) to counter it, and its focus on mainly proactive, preventive measures. State and police overreaction were identified by several people with whom we spoke as a real threat.

In December 2011 the government issued *An Action Plan to Safeguard Democracy Against Violence-Promoting Extremism*. This document presents measures that the government has taken or intends to take to strengthen awareness of democracy. It takes a long-term perspective. The government intends to implement the measures through the year 2014.

## **CVE PROGRAMS**

### **+FRYSHUSET and EXIT**

The site team visited Fryshuset, a scheme that started in Stockholm (in a large cold store/warehouse-style building) but is now located in three different urban settings. The initiative was the brainchild of Anders Carlberg, who identified a variety of factors that led young men to join gangs. It provides a range of outlets for young people, including sport, recreation, music, and education, and, also provides role models and mentoring. The scheme works with criminal gangs, skinheads, neo-Nazis, and other marginalized youths.

There are thirty different programs and activities (including a school), with eight hundred students/participants. Fryshuset employs over four hundred full-time staff members, plus volunteers who are often highly regarded professionals. There are headquarters in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

Fryshuset's EXIT was developed in 1998 to prevent kids from joining extremist groups (specifically white power organizations) by offering positive alternatives, educating them about the perils of such groups, and helping them leave if they so desired. The scheme has identified causes of and steps in recruitment (often local and personal; politics and ideology come later); "benefits" of belonging; common factors within sects; how those who belong come to think and act; strategies for leaving; and methods of preventing relapse or recidivism. The interventions are personal, intensive, and require role models and mentoring.

Fryshuset initiated PASSUS to help youth leave organized criminal gangs. Both EXIT and PASSUS handle about twenty young people per year. Programs for each essentially utilize the same methodology, but participants are kept separated, in deference to those who do not want to mix with members of other groups. This model is based on a 1996 program developed by the Norwegian Police Academy to help members disengage from white power groups.

EXIT has dealt mostly with youth involved in right-wing extremist groups—white power organizations but also left-wing movements. They recognize that globally, and in Scandinavia in particular, with increased immigration of Muslims there has been an increase in Islamic extremism. Young Swedish men have been found to attend al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab training camps abroad and then return to Sweden, and it is felt that there is transferability of principles from EXIT and PASSUS models into other counter-narrative and preventive schemes—such as to counter religious extremism. Consequently, Fryshuset has hired a moderate imam to start work in this area (and a

priest and a rabbi to prevent allegations of sectarian stereotyping). EXIT is now dealing with Islamist extremism, but this is a fairly new venture.

The initial aim of the group was to spread the message of peace within the Muslim community. The question “What does it mean to be a European Muslim in 2000?” helped to structure the group. After 9/11, which local Muslims condemned, the group’s organizers felt that they needed to do something more. They reached out to other European countries and to members of the Swedish peace movement and decided to focus on the needs and expectations of second-generation Swedish Muslims. Thus the Swedish Peace Agents emerged. The definition of a Muslim Peace Agent is an “active citizen who promotes positive interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. They subscribe to the Islamic peace culture and counteract mutual prejudices such as phobia towards Islam and phobia towards the west and non-Muslims (Westo-phobia).”

## **+Successes**

The program is funded by a number of Swedish agencies and has trained over 100 Muslim Peace Agents in Sweden. They have produced a book and participated in the creation of Sweden’s first Muslim peace movement—headed by Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice. The project continues to receive finance and funding.

The 100 youth leaders produced a peace book (*Salam*) aimed at a multicultural audience. The book explains that Islam is not about terrorism. It addresses the feelings of young Muslims who feel lost and isolated in society, while offering support and suggestions. The organizer described the objective of the scheme as “countering the internal identity crises before radicalization takes over.”

There is an intensive training course on “Islam-ology,” which everyone completes prior to training others. The staff includes ten instructors (five men and five women). They have visited Cairo for educational purposes. Participants are challenged about their identity in a series of study

weekends. They are asked whether they are Swedish or Muslim. They discuss identity, roles, the media, and other topics and are taught presentation techniques.

In the aftermath of the December 2010 suicide bombing, the peace agents took a proactive position. Their future strategy is to focus on what it means to be a Swedish Muslim playing a part in European culture overall.

The organizers claim that since the Arab Spring there has been a growing interest in their work and that others have copied the peace agents scheme. Egyptians were coming to Sweden to learn how to challenge Islamophobia and Westo-phobia.

“We help the police but we are not part of the police.” This repeats almost verbatim what the QIASS team heard during visits to Belfast and London and from Fryshuset.

The Swedish Muslim organizations that the QIASS Counter Narratives Study team met are also affiliated with SENSUS, which is a more multicultural organization but with similar (though more generic) aims. SENSUS provides forums for learning, experiences, and fellowship and has a wide range of circles and educational and cultural events throughout the country. They describe themselves as an educational association that explores questions of life, diversity, and global issues.

## **+PREVENT**

The Swedish PREVENT strategy is under review, and no dramatic changes are expected to the program. Generally, preventing terrorism is intended to reduce the will of individuals or groups to commit or support terrorist crimes. This work includes efforts to try to identify and reduce potential breeding grounds for terrorism and violent extremism. Preventive work also includes strengthening the values on which democracy rests. Some of the measures planned or implemented are: a national action plan to defend democracy from violence-promoting extremism; the

development of the measures and cooperation undertaken by several authorities; and support for and the development of cooperation with other countries.

The strategy emphasizes that all members of society should be involved in preventing radicalization and in preventing all activities that involve increased interest in terrorism and violent tendencies. There is a need to research and emphasize measures that target “the breeding grounds of terrorism.” Swedish PREVENT specifies the need for further research on the “causes of

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**The strategy includes initiatives to overcome exclusion (local causes of grievance) by promoting an integration policy and democratization.**

terrorism” and on the processes that lead to violent radicalization. The strategy includes initiatives to overcome exclusion (local causes of grievance) by promoting an integration policy and democratization. It espouses the widespread use of dialogue as a means of creating opportunities for civil society to consider possible threats and feasible counter-measures. It also highlights the need for closer study of ways to support individuals who want to leave extremist violence-promoting environments. The site visit team focused on schemes enacted by Swedish Muslims who seek to counter the jihadi narrative and those community schemes used to support individuals wishing to leave gangs and extremist groups. Together they illustrate the Swedish desire to build upon community-based initiatives.

At the government level, there are no formal CVE programs dealing specifically with Islamic extremism. The country has a history of peace and does not perceive the threat of Islamic

extremism to be serious enough to warrant direct action. It is more inclined to award grants to a range of NGOs that deal with at-risk youth who may be recruited by extremist organizations. However, the Swedish police have commenced community awareness training to promote a better understanding of Muslims and Islam among police officers. (Community awareness was similarly introduced into NI police training in 1992. This involved former terrorists speaking to police recruits.).

The country has significant experience dealing with white power groups, and it is clear that the state recognizes that similar programs may prevent or disrupt violent Islamic terrorism. The most viable program (a model for future work) is Fryshuset's EXIT, which, as we have seen, focuses primarily on young people on the margins of society. It is from this population that potential extremists may be recruited either as actual members or as sympathizers. Also of significance is the counter-narrative by local groups such as Swedish Muslims for Peace and Justice.

## **+EXIT Strategies**

The underlying strategy of EXIT is to prevent terrorism by interacting with youths involved in or considering joining extremist groups, and to counter the narrative. This is primarily achieved by educating the youth about the misguided thinking and behavior of the extremists, helping them understand the group's flawed, destructive, and self-serving emotional appeal, and identifying strategies for disengagement if already involved.

EXIT is not a "brainwashing" scheme. It involves individual (de)programming based on the participant's personality, relationship with his/her parents, and the extent of his/her involvement in extremist group and a range of other factors. Emphasis is on providing adequate support, which is individually customized and can range from motivational talks to daily contact over several years.

Staff will often work with families and the parents of the participants to explain the program and to help them understand why their children became involved with an extremist group.

With regard to countering extremism: EXIT believes in the value of history. To elicit reaction and initiate debate, they often ask provocative questions such as, “How many people know that in the nineteenth century, Muslims in Europe were called ‘false prophets’ and were considered the ‘mad dogs of Europe?’” They are keen to teach and to promote discussions in order to overcome prejudice, fear, and ignorance.

Countering extremist narratives involves teaching participants the importance of challenging “wrong” ideas. To this end, Fryshuset has published a booklet entitled “The Way Out.” It educates readers about white power extremist groups, which are seen as being similar to religious sects in many ways.

The booklet explains the dynamics of such groups and their leadership; it discusses their flawed philosophy of hate, the fallacy of their “truth,” and what inspires their prejudicial, rigid, simplistic black-and-white thinking. It explains why such groups exist, to whom they appeal, their recruitment methodology, and their ways of ensuring and maintaining loyalty and compliance with group mandates. It points out how such groups typically project blame onto others for real or perceived grievances and gain power through fear and intimidation. Finally, it provides strategies for leaving such groups.

## **+EXIT’s Successes**

Formal evaluation of EXIT has not been regular or in-depth. No statistics are collected or maintained on participants in EXIT or PASSUS. In general, those who have administered the scheme over the past five years have case-by-case information but have not collated data about their clients in terms of demographics, social history, progress, or prognosis.

EXIT's success has rather been determined by staff (for each case) based on informal, unstructured conversations about a participant's current attitudes versus his (or her) previous perspectives. It is left to the individual staff member to assess progress or lack thereof, but the process is entirely unstructured. However, the scheme is seen to be a success. There are participants who have disengaged from violence and who no longer see it as part of the solution.

### **+Role for Formers**

EXIT is run by staff (some of whom are former extremists), professional therapists, and social workers. The presence of former extremists gives the program a high degree of credibility. EXIT is run at Fryshuset's main facilities in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

The police are not part of the formal program team because kids often regard them as "oppressive." However, in December 2010, the same date as the would-be suicide attacker detonated himself in Stockholm, the police were invited to Fryshuset to meet young people, since the latter often complained they had no dialogue with them.

### **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

The rhetoric used by right-wing, left-wing and Islamist extremists is similar to that used in other parts of Europe and, in the case of Islamists, around the world. However, violent Islamic extremism is in its nascent stage in Sweden, which is why there is little available in the way of explicit extremist narratives. There are no mosques in Sweden preaching violence and jihad. In fact, there is a very aggressive Muslim grassroots organization busy preaching against violent jihad.

In the December 2010 suicide attack in Stockholm, the bomber indicated that he was opposed to Sweden's involvement in Afghanistan (principally a peace mission), and this mirrors narratives seen in other countries that have sustained terrorist incidents or attacks. The lack of more

narratives within Sweden does not, however, suggest that there is low risk of extremism, because several Swedish youths are known to have recently attended overseas terrorist training.

As in other regions visited (among them England and Northern Ireland), community-based schemes and their representatives made it clear that, although the state plays a part—for example, by funding and supporting their work—credible local role models have much more chance of success than civil servants and other professionals. The commitment of charismatic individuals within society should not be underestimated, and in Sweden it is clear that the state is attempting to remove obstacles, not place them in the way. The commitment to open dialogue and a new element of police training—understanding Islam—are examples.

The government partially funds, but does not operate, EXIT. Nor does it dictate how the program should be run. However, both the organizers and the Swedish government share the goal of preventing acts of terrorism through peaceful means, especially through education.

## **+Research Gaps**

Fryshuset claims to research CT policies and determine best practices. The staff conduct seminars in an effort to combine the practical and theoretical aspects and bring disparate parts of the various communities together. However, the program as it is currently structured (and funded) is challenged to complete its impressive operational tasks, let alone conduct theoretical research.

Officials involved in the program acknowledge there is the issue of determining what is working for EXIT and what is not. A formal evaluation would help the program determine how to best meet the needs of participants. This would necessitate a uniform set of questions followed by an independent assessment.

Ironically, unless there is an actual terrorist attack, funding and staffing will not be enhanced. The program runs the risk of being cut back. At present, Sweden has a history of

restraint, and government policies tend to avoid overreaction. Thus any policies will be structured by real-world events and not by worst-case scenarios.

Swedish Muslims play a vital role in maintaining peaceful relations, and there are two diaspora-led initiatives designed to educate Muslim youth and the community in general. These focus on the flawed message and perils of violent jihad. One initiative is developing a network of European peace agents and encouraging young Swedish Muslims to disseminate positive images and messages about their faith and culture.

### **+Online and Offline Initiatives**

Fryshuset has its own website, where it advertises its services. They estimate that over four thousand of their followers are on Facebook and that some of the four thousand maintain or participate in blogs about a range of issues. However, as an organization, they deliberately do not blog or conduct chatroom discussions about their initiatives.

This is especially true for EXIT. They believe that confronting adversaries online would grant the adversaries legitimacy, and that most of them use/abuse their online anonymity to propagate hate while avoiding responsibility for their messages.

Fryshuset believes that engaging such people online would change the fundamental nature of their organization from one of serving youth to one seen as having a political agenda, which would likely repel potential participants. To promote its message, EXIT has conducted lectures in schools and produced a movie entitled, *The Voice of Hate*, which preaches against prejudice. They rely on an army of volunteers to spread positive information about cultural awareness, tolerance, and inclusion. Fryshuset's best advertising is possibly good word of mouth about their successes, which have been recognized by the Swedish government.

## +Best Practices/Lessons Learned

Learning is a central theme in Sweden's thoughtful approach to CT. The national tradition of neutrality and peace have created a potential soft target or safe haven for terrorists (note: although officials were quick to disagree with this point.) The dangers of adopting an overzealous and more draconian approach provide justification for a more intelligent (and intelligence-led) approach. Sanctions do still exist and will be used where necessary – for example the loss of Swedish residency for those who have been involved in terrorist activities abroad and might wish to return.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

+Sweden has a multi-faceted strategy for Countering Terrorism that is positioned within the EU and UN agreements and strategies.

+A moderate threat (level 3) exists and there is an active prevention strategy that recognizes the link between national and international activities.

+It is a multi-dimensional approach that includes legal changes, promotes open dialogue (preventive diplomacy) and supports individuals and community based schemes, which are engaged in a variety of counter-narratives against violent extremists (right wing, left wing and religious extremists).

+Of particular note is the work done for over 10 years to help people disengage from white power and organized criminal gangs (in EXIT and PASSUS schemes).

+Within the Swedish Muslim community that specifically address the narrative of jihad, these community schemes have a vital role to prevent young people from becoming involved in VE and/or assist them to disengage.

+The QIASS team concluded that they are explicitly and implicitly countering the narratives that attract and recruit young people to violent groups and terrorism.

+The role-played by these community-based groups and the charismatic individuals with credibility and deep understanding of the environment, culture, faith (...) cannot be underestimated.

+Sweden appears to be adopting a sensitive 'thinking' approach to the challenge; state actions are based on lessons learned from other countries' experiences.

+Openness and information sharing (about threats; government responses; societal priorities and societal expectations are also features of the Swedish approach to CT.

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## NORWAY

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Norway’s official antiterrorism and counter narrative program is called the Action Plan to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism. An accompanying document is entitled *Collective Security—A Shared Responsibility*,” colloquially referred to as the Action Plan.<sup>3</sup> The program is housed at the Ministry of Justice and the Police, but it is administered in part by the Ministry of Defense and the Special Police (equivalent to the U.S. FBI or UK’s MI5). According to officials interviewed, it is too early to talk about measuring effectiveness, as the program was only recently established. The Ministry of Justice is tasked with tracking results, and there is a twice-yearly requirement for reporting on the activities and results under the plan’s auspices. Ministry of Justice personnel describe the report as an “awareness tool.”

The Action Plan calls for participants to be screened at the local level—in the secondary schools—as well as in the prisons. Attentiveness to the particular behavior of individuals in schools, prisons, and elsewhere in society is the primary mechanism for weeding out potential violent extremists. Hateful language and violent incidents in school are among the factors officials look for. The Action Plan does not list the factors/characteristics of violent extremism but suggests that social alienation and lack of access to the benefits of the welfare state are major factors.

Recidivism Rates: There are no rates for Islamic extremists, as officials estimate that there is only a small percentage of radicals among Muslims, making up just 3 percent of Norway’s population. There is, however, a strong conviction that the counter-radicalization and de-

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/JD/Vedlegg/Handlingsplaner/Radikalisering\\_engelsk.pdf](http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/JD/Vedlegg/Handlingsplaner/Radikalisering_engelsk.pdf).

radicalization strategy used against right-wing extremists in the 1990s remains effective at preventing recidivism.

In the judgment of Norwegian authorities, the threat of potentially violent extremism would come from Islamists as well as left-wing and right-wing extremists. As the Action Plan notes, *“Even though autonomous groups, extreme and violent animal protectionists and violent demonstrators are part of the problem, it is especially extreme Islamist persons who have grown up in Norway that represent a new challenge that must be dealt with.”*

## **+Background**

The QIASS team met with a wide range of individuals, including officials and researchers from the Ministry of Justice and the Norwegian Police Security Service (Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste, or PST), the Norwegian Police University College, and the Ministry of Defense—the primary entities with responsibility for combating violent extremism. Together, they provided a wide perspective on violent extremism in Norway, from the global context to local encounters with young persons drawn to radicalization. We also met with a former right-wing extremist who had benefited from previous de-radicalization programs administered by the Norwegian government. Overall the government preferred policies that emphasized preventive de-radicalization and disengagement. Central to this policy is an emphasis on increasing “awareness” of radicalization and extremist violence for first-line responders and authorities, the police and immigration officials, schoolteachers and Muslim community leaders.

Norwegian officials clarified for the QIASS team that the Ministry of Justice contributes to screening methodology that begins at the local level. Its purpose is to detect potential vulnerability to radicalization and to provide research results and conclusions about patterns of radicalization. Implementation of any programs designed to create awareness of radicalization, however, is within the purview of police, immigration, schools, social services, and community leaders.

**Islamists.** Despite the July 22, 2011, Oslo attack by Anders Breivik, during which he killed 77 people, 8 in government buildings and 69 on the island of Utoya, and injured 319 (among the victims were Muslim youth), the general emphasis of the government remains focused on Islamic extremists who are seen as “a slow and steadily growing threat.” In terms of the threat itself, officials concede that there is a “large step from rhetoric to doing something.” Nevertheless, officials across the spectrum of agencies acknowledge a “growing concern” during the last three to five years over the dangers of an increasing radicalization among Muslims.

Within this category there are three focal points for potential radicalization:

**Somalis** are the major focus for most antiterrorism officials. The Somalis who become foreign fighters (that is, traveling to Somalia to fight, primarily with al-Shabaab) could return and radicalize other members of their community. In addition, these former foreign fighters possess combat experience, weapons training, and familiarity with explosives that could, under the wrong circumstances, forge a serious domestic threat. However, in the eyes of government officials, this group “does not see Norway as the enemy.”

**Second-generation global jihadists.** These are young men who do not have much connection with or affinity for their parents’ countries of origin but are devoted to global jihadist/al-Qaeda rhetoric. They believe that the suffering of Muslims across the globe is a call to action; that Islam is under attack and jihad is defensive in nature. The related narrative in this regard—the global jihadist message—is that if Muslims are oppressed *anywhere*, it is the individual responsibility (*fard al ‘ayn*) of Muslims *everywhere* to engage in jihad. As the PST described it, first-generation immigrants (for example, from Somalia) remain strongly connected to the problems in their home country. In contrast, the second generation is more directly influenced by the aforementioned global jihadist message.

The online al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula–sponsored magazine *Inspire* is one source of inspiration for the global jihadist movement, according to Norwegian officials interviewed. Sweden’s recent suicide bomber was a “wake-up call” to the possibility of homegrown Islamic terrorism. Among the second-generation jihadists, there is a Scandinavian connection—individuals in Sweden and Denmark are in contact with those in Norway—creating a “loose but growing” Scandinavian jihadi network. (Following interviews and discussions, it was unclear how Norwegian authorities define or assess a “loose” organization.)

Researchers at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt, or FFI) drew a distinction between European converts to Islam and those born into the Islamic faith. The FFI noted that they had only seen one case of a convert leading a cell in Europe: the Sauerland cell.

Finally, there was some concern over the growing threat of Iraqi Kurds in Norway. The potential threat of these individuals had not reached the same level of formalized concern associated with the threats mentioned above.

**“Lone wolf” or “sole terrorist”**—individuals who, without ties necessarily to a foreign terrorist organization (FTO), can engage in violence. These can be Islamists or non-Muslim extremists.

The most obvious and contemporary example of violent extremism in Norway was the deadly attack by Anders Breivik in 2011. Most CT officials see Breivik as a onetime incident, and not part of a movement that would merit the reorientation of current policies and procedures. (Today, gang-related crimes associated with the Hell’s Angels are also a concern, but there was no mention of an ideological component.)

**Right-wing extremist violence.** The country's threat assessment prepared by the PST (as directed in the Action Plan) mentions left- and right-wing extremism. It should be noted that during interviews no officials mentioned left-wing extremism.

Norway has a history of violent right-wing extremism, at its most acute in the 1990s and considered largely under control by the first decade of this century. Right-wing extremism is a local phenomenon, whereas Islamic violent extremism is tied to causes and ideologies (political and religious) beyond Norway's borders. Anti-immigrant sentiment from the 1990s has reemerged as an anti-jihadist movement against the Eurabia movement, which advocates violence in an effort to protect Europe from being conquered by Islam.

**Legal remedies focus on “restorative justice” rather than punishment.** The country has several terrorism laws, passed in 2003 and updated in 2008, but they do not cover issues such as material support. Further, conspiracy is difficult to prove. There is no Norwegian equivalent of the U.S. State Department's FTO list; instead, Norwegian officials follow the UN's FTO list. Authorities characterized the number of suspected Islamic terrorists as no more than a handful. However, one high-profile terrorist, Mullah Krekar, the founder of Ansar-al Islam, resides in Norway. In March 2012, Mullah Krekar was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison and subsequently received an additional year for communicating death threats. However, in December 2012, the appeals court overturned the terrorist threat counts and instead convicted him of intimidation, reducing his sentence to less than three years.

The pivotal event in the emergence of Islamist violence in Norway (and in Scandinavia generally) was the 2005 incident in which a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, setting off worldwide protest and violence. The incident still affects Norway. When cartoonist Kurt Westergaard came to Norway, the police perceived possible threats and convinced him to leave the country.

## +CVE Norway

The initial CVE strategy was described as being similar to that of France—an intelligence-based approach that sought to prepare the government to interdict an attack rather than one that focused on identifying and mitigating socioeconomic factors. This was followed by a more multidimensional plan (the current Action Plan) that was influenced by the CVE models in Denmark and the United Kingdom.

**The current counterterrorism strategy in the country grows out of a model for countering crime.** The basic governmental CVE initiative in the country is outlined in the Action Plan. The Ministry of Justice and the Police compiled the report, with substantial contributions from experts across the relevant government departments, including the Ministry of Defense (specifically the FFI) the Ministry of Justice, and the Police Academy. The Action Plan is part of an overarching government mandate to create a plan for criminal justice generally in Norway, an overall strategy aimed at prevention. According to the document:

This plan has been based on four priority areas: knowledge and information, strengthening the authorities' co-operation, strengthened dialogue and greater involvement and support to vulnerable and at-risk persons. The plan consists of 30 measures, which enhance awareness, cooperation with the authorities and support for “vulnerable and at-risk persons.”

**There is little NGO coordination.** There is, however, a reliance on social workers (government employees) in the schools and in local communities who are there to help implement the action plan. One group, Adults for Children, was mentioned as a helpful NGO, but not one that worked in any apparent official capacity.

# STRATEGIES

The underlying strategy of the initiative is on **Prevention**, with a strong emphasis on “awareness” based on the proper knowledge about radicalization and extremist violence. The Action Plan relies on a strategy employed in the 1990s to counter right-wing extremism. Known as the Exit Strategy, it employed a technique called Concerned Conversations and was essentially, a “youth management program.” These conversations were discussions between the police (local police, as opposed to the security services) and young, at-risk males who possessed a record of behaviors that would render them more likely to become violent extremists. Wherever possible, these conversations also involved the families of these high-risk youths. A commonly cited example of a youth at risk had traveled to Somalia to take part in the global jihad. Despite the fact that these violent activities took place outside Norway, authorities believed that experience was likely to influence the individual’s outlook on violence and his belief that jihad must be pursued wherever Muslims were threatened—and whether the threat was real or imagined.

The research into right-wing extremism detailed the kinds of emotional motivations that led individuals to be drawn to racist and nationalist ideologically inspired violence. Schoolteachers and other local community members were encouraged to look for signs of radicalization and to reach out to the authorities to initiate these conversations.

When it comes to Somali and other immigrant communities at highest risk of radicalization, integration is an important component of the prevention program. As the Action Plan explains, “An inclusive work and social environment and a good welfare policy are important in preventing marginalization and ensuring social inclusion.” A number of the government’s initiatives focus on making immigrant communities aware of Norwegian culture—through courses on Norwegian social conditions, social welfare services, and information about the Norwegian National Housing Bank that are available to enhance integration. The target immigrant community

is mainly the Somalis. The Pakistani population in Norway, according to reports, has been in place longer and is much more integrated in the social-economic-political life of the country.

## **+Norway's EXIT STRATEGY**

As noted above, the Exit Strategy's Concerned Conversations are often held with the parents as well as the youths. They focus on consequences for the individual and for the family. As related to the QIASS team, such conversations entailed warnings from a police officer to the high-risk youth stressing future impact. As an example, an officer might say: "Here is what is likely to happen to you if you continue to go down this path. It will lead to trouble with the law, as well as to embarrassment and damage to your family's reputation."

Parents are asked to pool their efforts to counter growing radicalization in their sons. These conversations were aimed initially at individuals who had expressed a desire to escape right-wing extremist groups but were unable to do so. (Note: Several government representatives related how difficult right-wing groups have made it for those who wish to leave the fold. Punishment in the form of physical violence is common.) According to a former right-wing extremist interviewed for this study, there was an element of promoting alternatives as well. The focus for this approach involved identifying the hopes and dreams of individuals in danger of radicalization. Authorities hoped to decrease the levels of unhappiness, alienation, and anger in the individual. Overall, the approach was focused on individuals (especially youth) rather than on communities.

There is no parallel strategy for conversations with adults. This may prove problematic, as officials commented upon a new trend toward threats from adults. Even the Action Plan's measures for CVE work in the prisons focuses on "young offenders," not adults.

## +The Action Plan

Overall, Norway considers itself vulnerable to the threats that face Europe more generally. But Norway's main focus for lessons learned from other countries is on the two other Scandinavian countries, Denmark and Sweden. As a point of comparison, Denmark has had greater confrontation with Islamic extremism than Norway. Denmark's 2009 Action Plan to prevent extremism and radicalization was a model for Norway. Denmark's emphasis on increasing awareness about violent extremism—for instance, asking Muslims to be aware of where their

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Government experts referred to the relatively good relations—the “high degree of trust”—that they consider the government to have with Muslim communities.

charitable contributions (*zakat*) were going—was also a useful model. The UK Contest Strategy, updated in 2011, was useful for its emphasis upon prevention, as was the Netherlands' 2011 plan to reduce alienation as a form of prevention. The United States was seen as a model of what NOT to do. As one expert bluntly put it, “The American response [instituting widespread security measures that significantly affect elements of daily life, and the appearance of a suppression of certain civil liberties] was a negative role model here.” In part by moving away from this American model, there was a sense that “young Muslims in Norway don't feel as marginalized.”

There was a sense of pride in the success of integration in Norway. Government experts referred to the relatively good relations—the “high degree of trust”—that they consider the government to have with Muslim communities, as well as the fact that the Deputy Prime Minister,

Akhtar Chaudry, is Pakistani-Norwegian. Much of the Action Plan focuses on open communication between Muslim communities and their leaders, including religious leaders. Six of the thirty measures in the Action Plan emphasize .“strengthened dialogue and greater involvement.”

The Action Plan was published in March 2011; thus there has not been enough time to measure effectiveness. The oversight agency for the plan is the Ministry of Justice and the Police—the agencies that administered the report. The plan calls for reporting on the Action Plan—with reports to be made available online—but there is no specified timetable until 2013, when the plan expires. It is worthwhile to note that the previous program, the Exit strategy, was considered to have been an effective counter-extremist strategy, at least anecdotally.

## **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

The government’s counter-narrative is not about politics or religion. In fact, police work initiated for political or religious motivation is against the law. Its narrative tends to emphasize morality, life situations, and life consequences. As one expert told us, “You can work in ideology afterwards.” While the goal of most narratives is to establish new norms for violence (an escalation of what is considered acceptable), the objective of the counter-narrative is to reset those norms from extremism back to prevailing societal standards.

The targets of the government’s activities are children, in particular within the Somali community. As was pointed out on several occasions, there are no ghettos or *banlieues* in Norway as found in the Parisian suburbs, in Denmark, and elsewhere. And there is no contingency for countering violent extremism once children become adults. Despite recent events, there is little concern over right-wing extremists. Integration of immigrants into Norwegian life is a high priority for the government, and the Foreign Ministry is charged with the responsibility of integration programs.

The ability to focus on “life conditions” is something unique to countries such as Norway, where government spending on social programs is exceptionally high on a relative basis. While chronic unemployment and poverty go hand in hand and have been cited as factors that may contribute to violent extremism, such is not the case in Norway. Through financial programs managed by the government, unemployed individuals retain approximately 60 percent of the income they earned while employed. While this reflects a significant reduction, it nevertheless provides a living well above subsistence or poverty.

Muslim religious leaders in Norway commonly portray violent extremism as contrary to the teachings of Islam. In addition to a recent *fatwa* against terrorism and suicide bombings, there have

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**Early intervention can help the individual achieve a specific goal or expand his or her educational or employment opportunities.**

also been counter-arguments that maintain that piracy, as well as any “booty” (*anfal*) that might result, is *Haram* (forbidden) by Islam.

Following from the lessons fighting the neo-Nazi movement in past years, PST would learn as much as possible about the individual (often through family members that reported their relatives’ activities out of concern for the consequences). In many instances, this led not to arrest and incarceration as expected but rather to a social intervention by PST authorities. Early intervention can help the individual achieve a specific goal or expand his or her educational or employment opportunities.

According to the Ministry of Justice and the Police, the overall responsibility for designing and implementing the counter-narrative is split between the government, non-governmental organizations and private sector entities. The government is very careful in how it interacts with NGOs or private sector organizations on CVE matters to avoid even the appearance (much less the reality) of undue influence or control over how they communicate their CVE vision.

There is some support for a counter-narrative that addresses conspiracy theories. The overarching conspiracy theory of jihadis is that the West is at war with Islam, a narrative that is largely propagated in Internet chat rooms and other online forums. One of the prevalent conspiracy theories asserts that al-Qaeda did not perpetrate the 9/11 attacks; rather, Israel and/or Western intelligence services are alleged to have planned and executed the attacks, then blamed Islamic extremists in an effort to condemn Islam. This conspiracy theory, while an enduring one, is viewed as having such little merit that no direct action has been taken to counter its potential effect. The most recent addition to the conspiracy theories is that bin Laden is still alive.

The government in Norway is acutely aware of the potential harm that any association with the government—in this case the PST—can cause (and it was repeated that Muslim communities have a “relatively good dialogue with the government”). PST coordinates with local Police Councils, and they are tasked with increasing police awareness of PST priority areas. Their goal is to have the plan work through local police, social workers, the schools, “other Muslims,” and other community service professionals at the local level. As mentioned above, six of the thirty CVE measures involve community dialogue. So there is much room for the government to engage with potential violent extremists.

There are basically three narratives employed by violent extremists in the country (see Tier 1, No. 1): The traditional AQ narrative; the Somali foreign fighter narrative; and the Islamization of Europe narrative (neo-Nazis). Some experts reported that the conspiracy narrative (noted

previously) is gaining ground. The overarching theme of this narrative is that the West is at war with Islam. This is largely fueled by images of Abu Ghraib and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, coupled with commentary in Islamic chat rooms and Web forums regarding “unfair” trials and inequities (toward Muslims) of Western criminal justice. However, Norway’s increased role in Afghanistan and Libya did not appear to have materially affected the narrative that targets Norway as an enemy of Islam.

The extremists have been unsuccessful when it comes to a domestic target, even though the number of global jihadists is growing. There is no sense that the Eurabia narrative is worrisome enough to develop a counterstrategy for—even in the wake of the Breivik attack.

## **+Research Gaps**

The Defense Ministry Research Institute identified gaps in the research including:

- + the need to track trends;
- + the need to know more about other countries;
- + the need to interview committed terrorists;
- + the need to assess efficacy in preventing violence;
- + the need to develop, test, and implement strategies for countering Internet-based radicalization;
- + the need to assess the role of former extremists for CVE programs and how to manage their relationship with the government (work closely and openly with government affiliation, work exclusively with private sector entities with no government connection, etc.);
- + the need to have control groups for studies of radicalization and de-radicalization.

Overall, there is a general concern with the fact that many of the conclusions of these researchers are based on anecdotal evidence, not representative samples or statistically reliable data. There is a general sense that more time is needed before making reliable conclusions to assess Islamic terrorism in Norway.

There seem to be very few, if any, obstacles in terms of funding, politics, expertise, and the like. In terms of gaps in policy, there is an absence of attention paid to countering extremist violence among adults and on the Internet.

There are no online counter-initiatives, despite the fact that the online al-Qaeda magazine *Inspire*, has helped fuel the growing global jihadist movement in Norway. One reason cited for the lack of attention to jihadist sites was that some of the leading sites have limited audience due to language—the sites are in Pashto and Kurdish.

There is, however, some movement toward increasing attention to this form of CVE.

- +The Defense Ministry's Research Institute hired a researcher to study online chatter and violent extremist rhetoric.

- +The Internet is seen as a way to educate local officials and others to increase their "awareness" about the signs of extremist violence.

- +There is at least one Norwegian-based NGO that monitors Islamist websites, including the Islamist website Islamnet.com. This latter site has offered to share that information with the Ministry of Justice and PST.

## +Best Practices/ Lessons Learned

(Derived from Tore Bjørgo, Professor of Police Science at the Norwegian Police University College and Adjunct Research Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs)

A research project at the Norwegian Police University College called Strategies for the Prevention of Terrorism and Violent Extremism seeks to identify what supporting strategies should be included as part of a comprehensive strategy for preventing terrorism and violent extremism. The study focuses on eight strategies, which are based on eight different preventive mechanisms—causal connections that are instrumental in reducing the risk of acts of terrorism:

- +Rendering threatening individuals harmless by denying these “potential” terrorists the ability to carry out acts of violence (for example, through expulsion from Norway).

- +Deterrence through threat of punishment or reprisals. Bjørgo noted that deterrence is not particularly effective in cases of terrorism, due to an individual’s willingness to accept the consequences of his/her actions (punishment if caught, death as part of a terrorist act, etc.). There seems to be a greater fear of failure in carrying out an attack than of the consequences if caught.

- +Averting a planned terrorist attack through intercepting the participants before they manage to carry out the attack.

- +Protection of vulnerable targets by making attacks more difficult to carry out and at higher risk (for example, through the use of surveillance cameras positioned around potential targets).

- +Reducing the “spoils” (results) from terrorist attacks by not reacting the way terrorists want

us to react.

- + Establishing norms against acceptance of violence and terrorism.
  
- + Reducing the reasons for the growth of terrorism in society and reducing radicalization and recruitment of individuals to violent extremist groups.
  
- + Motivating terrorists to stop engaging in violent activism.

Each of these strategies is aimed at different target groups: entire communities, at-risk groups or people who are already involved in terrorism, or some combination. A number of different public and private parties play key roles in certain strategies but have only marginal roles (or no role) in others. A few of the strategies are short-term and repressive, whereas others are long-term and integrating. Each of the eight strategies has its strengths, weaknesses, and side effects, and they will have a limited impact individually. The greatest preventive impact against violent extremism may be achieved, both in the long and the short term, through using all eight of the substrategies in a comprehensive and coordinated initiative.

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# UNITED STATES: SOMALI-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN MINNESOTA

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The QIASS Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) team met with law enforcement officials, including members of the Minneapolis Police Department and the St. Paul Police Department. The team also met with: representatives from the U.S. Attorney’s office; a defense attorney who has represented the Somalis in court; a policy aide on the Minneapolis City Council; and nine men and women from the Somali-American community, ranging from prominent businessmen to teachers at one of two major mosques in the area, including the Abu Bakr Mosque. Following the trip to Minneapolis, the QIASS team met with the head of Somali-American affairs at the Department of Homeland Security. (Note: The FBI was contacted with a request for an interview but declined to participate in this study.)

## **+Background**

Unlike other country studies included in this report—which inherently provide a macro view—this section is based exclusively on a locality within a country, the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the United States. While, as a consequence, it provides only a slice of the general picture in the USA, it also provides a unique view of the CVE-related dynamics at the micro level.

Several cities in the United States are considered to be at risk for jihadi terrorism: Detroit, Minneapolis and St. Paul, and New York City. Terrorism in the United States consists of a universe

of potential threats, among them: South Asian and Middle Eastern noncitizens who are committed to violence in the name of jihad; homegrown citizens, from a variety of backgrounds, radicalized in the United States, who target U.S. officials and citizens in the name of jihadist causes; and citizens and residents who choose to travel abroad to fight in a foreign battle in the name of jihad. There is also concern about homegrown terrorists whose ideology reflects either right-wing (for example, neo-Nazis, anti-abortionists) causes or left-wing causes (for example, eco-terrorists).

This report focuses on the Somali community in the twin cities. Countrywide, Somalis (not all of whom are American citizens) account for nearly a quarter of the terrorism indictments in the United States since 2009. About two-thirds of these indictments were for traveling or attempting to travel abroad to fight in Somalia or to send others to fight, while the other third involve financing to al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based Islamist organization affiliated with al-Qaeda (source: The Fordham Ledger: Facts and Figures in National Security).

In recent years, twenty young Somali-Americans left the United States for Somalia with the intention of fighting with al-Shabaab. Some news reports consider them to have been “kidnapped” by al-Shabaab supporters, whereas other sources assert that they were radicalized through various means (including the constant stream of Internet-based news emanating from Somalia), and not actually coerced. These twenty youths—referred to as the travelers—eventually wound up in Somalia, where between three and five of them were engaged in militant activities as suicide bombers. They have since disappeared. Ever since, the Somali-American community has searched for ways to protect its members (and especially its youth) from radicalization and to work within the legal system. Further community members have made efforts to integrate into American institutions of higher learning, business, and politics—for example, there is now a Somali-American serving on the Minneapolis Public School Board.

To this day, the disappearance of the twenty young people dominates discussions within the Somali-American community and in law enforcement circles. Accordingly, there has been a focus on resisting an ongoing radicalization phenomenon that centers on fighting in a foreign war. There is, however, a lingering sense that the disappearance of the youths could mean trouble at home as well, though the exact nature of that trouble remains undefined. (Elsewhere in the United States, law enforcement officials explain that the return of foreign fighters, trained in terrorist camps abroad, could have a dire impact on security within the borders of the United States.)

## **NARRATIVES AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES**

Several government initiatives at the federal and local levels have been aimed at identifying the signs of radicalization and embryonic violent extremism in the Somali-American community. The programs are designed not only to detect radicalizing indicators but also to establish strong programs for integrating Somalis into the local community, in order to counteract the perceived pervasiveness of tribalism among Somalis.

### **+Federal Programs**

The Department of Homeland Security has initiated a series of roundtables to discuss radicalization in the community. This program is designed to bring together local, state, and federal officials with members of the Somali-American community to address problems, perceptions of radicalization, and related topics.

The U.S. Attorney's Office has created the Young Somali-American Advisory Council, targeting Somali-Americans in their late twenties, to encourage an active discussion of socioeconomic and political issues. Furthermore, the U.S. Attorney's Office helped produce a film intended for young members of the Somali community to discuss al-Shabaab, its cruelty, and its destructive political aims.

## **+Local Police Department Programs**

The Minneapolis Police Department has established a six-person Community Engagement Team, one member of which focuses on the Somali-American community. The program works in the following way: An officer spends time embedded within the community, learning about day-to-day problems and issues that have to do with education, generational divides, and parenting. This officer serves as the department's primary liaison to the local Somali-American community. As part of the department's outreach program, it has set up a Police Athletic League as a constructive outlet for teenagers. The program sponsors both a Youth Citizens Academy and a soccer team.

The St. Paul Police Department also runs an outreach program aimed at building trust between the local police and the community. There are several local initiatives by Somali-Americans, aimed at integrating Somalis into the sociopolitical context of the twin cities through educational programs, as well as business programs such as the African Development Center.

## **+CVE Strategy**

The CVE strategy for the Somali-American community is part of a broader strategy. For DHS, the goal is to counter the growth of radicalization countrywide and to educate local authorities on how to recognize radicalizing tendencies. For the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ), outreach programs such as Arab/Muslim/Sikh Engagement attempt to keep individuals engaged in outreach at the federal level in touch with one another about prospective issues and challenges. At the local level in Minneapolis, the police department includes programs directed at Somali-Americans and numerous other at-risk communities, including Asians, East Africans, Latinos, African-Americans, and those with mental health problems. At the local level in St. Paul, the police department includes programs directed at an array of immigrant communities, including the Hmong (an Asian ethnic group that originates from the mountains of China, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand).

Within the twin cities' organization and agencies, a determination was reached to create the impression that "law enforcement is a friend," with many of the programs at the local level (for example, the police and U.S. Attorneys) concerned with building trust.

The strategy has evolved over time since 2006. In addition to the fear of more travelers leaving for Somalia, there were two motivators for CVE efforts, both occurring during this time period. First, the Republican National Convention was held in St. Paul in 2008. Second, a major effort was undertaken to curb the problem of gang violence.

Referring specifically to the challenges in the local Somali-American community, there is concern that tribalism and clannishness are prevalent within this community and, as a result, more individuals will venture abroad and join the Shabaab movement. Additionally, there are concerns about a perceived lack of guidance at home due to fact that fathers do not seem to take leading roles in matters related to parenting and the household. According to the authorities, the Somalis arrive in the United States without communal or family structures. In addition, many of the elders in the community do not understand American culture, do not speak English, and cannot provide sufficient guidance to their children in how to integrate into the larger society.

The Minneapolis Police Department officially created a liaison/outreach position in October 2008 (though it had operated since 2007), which is still in existence. Most of its materials are targeted at the local immigrant communities, with emphasis on outreach to the Somali-American community. The U.S. Attorney's outreach program for Somali-Americans began in 2011 (an extension of general community outreach, as that has been a part of this office for over twenty years).

Examples of the programs can be found on YouTube at: "Know Your Rights" Handbook (on basic civil rights); "Community at Work" Leadership Guide; "School Safety: Lessons Learned"; and "Eagle Ed."

## +The African Development Center

In Minneapolis, there is an NGO-like organization aimed at economic development that has as its mission the goal of helping new Americans from Africa establish local businesses. This organization—the African Development Center—offers guidance and training for entrepreneurial activities such as financial planning, lending, and micro lending. The organization emphasizes

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The organization works from the premise that ‘the only way to be a part of the community is to work.’

education and ownership. Similarly, the YWCA and local Islamic centers are also important for keeping youth off the streets and engaged in constructive activities. The organization works from the premise that “the only way to be part of the community is to work,” a goal in keeping with the government emphasis on integration as a means of CVE.

The nature of the relationship between NGOs engaged in CVE and official agencies varies from program to program. The Young Somali-American Advisory Council suggests that there exists a relatively good working relationship between that NGO and the government, with the Young Somali-American Advisory Council functioning at a level of candid discourse, as our meeting with them illustrated (a meeting initiated by the U.S. Attorney’s office on our behalf but led entirely by the members of the council themselves). However, reports from individuals in the Somali-American community consistently criticized the DHS roundtables as merely cosmetic.

One additional note: While the local authorities and the local community seem to be deeply engaged in addressing the problems of potential radicalization within the Somali-American

community, some expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the role of the federal government (other than the local U.S. Attorney's office).

## +Strategies

**The underlying strategy of government and NGO initiatives in Minneapolis/St. Paul is one of Engagement for the purpose of Prevention.** The basic goal of the programs is to build trust between the Somali-American community and both the local and federal government. The intention is to undermine the attractiveness of the narrative of joining or supporting al-Shabaab. The counter-narrative is that al-Shabaab is a destructive force, engaged in cruelty, and that it threatens to harm the community. Beyond that, the CVE strategy aims to assimilate the Somali-American community into the larger American economic, political, and social landscape. As a member of the St. Paul Police Department phrased it, their program's aim is to treat Somali-Americans "like other immigrants." In particular, the authorities are determined to counter the lack of basic English language skills, the lack of familiarity with American laws and customs, the detachment of the community elders to the younger generation, and concerns about the isolation of the community.

DHS's view of radicalization and counter-radicalization in the twin cities was relatively different from what the QIASS team encountered from locals (officials and citizens). We met with Abdirizak Farak (Policy Advisory, Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at DHS, a Somali-American). Farak, who oversees the DHS roundtables, explained that the twenty youths who traveled to Somalia (as described previously) were religious fundamentalists and jihadis. Therefore, it was crucial to counter the narrative from a religious perspective—to address the notion that America was "at war" with Islam. The strategy of the DHS roundtables in Columbus, Minneapolis, Seattle, and fourteen states nationwide is to educate parents in order to inoculate the children.

The initiatives at the local level differ from those at the federal government level. The Minnesota-based initiatives (including the U.S. Attorney's programs) are directed at young adults, ages 18 to 35. Minimally, they are expected to serve as the communicators to the elders and mentors for young individuals. Beyond youth, these programs are directed at families.

The DHS strategy targets parents and civic leaders within the Somali community in the hope of educating them about the threat of radicalization and the existing vulnerabilities to terrorist recruiters and drug dealers. DHS also emphasizes educating adults about their rights, citing, for example, the Citizens Academy.

### **+Best Practices/Lessons Learned**

The U.S. Attorney's Office has met with individuals from Norway who came to study counter-radicalization programs, although the extent to which any Norwegian strategies or practices have been studied or adopted is unknown. Of note, the private initiative reference earlier (the African Development Center) bases its model on the integration of other immigrant communities (for example, Irish and Swedish Americans).

Additionally, there is an online "best practices forum" among federal offices and the U.S. Attorney's offices in which the various agencies participate as the need arises. They report on community events and the success of each in terms of the quantity and quality of the audiences.

### **+Efficacy**

There does not appear to be a plan for applying metrics to measure the problems of radicalization among Somali-Americans. The programs are not data-driven and lack effective oversight. Nevertheless, there is considerable attention given to qualitative assessments. The outreach program under the auspices of the U.S. Attorney's Office evaluates the individuals who attend events, determines their positions in the community, and gauges success rates (how

prominent/successful they are, attendance, etc.). The private initiatives measure success using socioeconomic measures of individual Somalis. The St. Paul Police Department measures success by the degree to which Somalis identify themselves as Minnesotans rather than Somalis (or Muslims). One measure has been the extent to which the Somali community will engage in discussions with law enforcement—for example, by providing tips to the police and discussing grievances.

Somalis have been successfully encouraged to share their grievances in the federal programs that function at the local level (the initiatives that emerge from the U.S. Attorney’s office) as well as in response to local programs.

The national, state, and local government agencies have taken an active role in developing and employing counter-narratives in a variety of ways. There are, for instance, ample opportunities to convey messages that foster trust and that teach about the rights and responsibilities of being an American citizen. The government has done this in a number of ways:

- +The counter-narrative at the local level employs what is best described as a narrative of “How to Become an American.” It is not religious, and not especially morality-driven; instead, it is based on democratic principles of inclusion, integration, rights, and opportunity. In particular it encourages a trusting relationship between the communities and government agencies and officials.

- +DHS stresses the importance of countering the message that America is at war with Islam, as this is an important part of the violent extremist narrative. DHS emphasizes the need to tackle the “grievance narrative”—to show the community the clear avenues to redress their grievances. In this way, DHS is aligned well with the outreach programs at the local level.

The formal programs are not aimed at former radicals but rather at preventing

radicalization of the youth. Apart from recidivists, there are individuals who might otherwise have turned to gangs (or even have been involved in gang violence). All of the programs described in the report were formal. Both the Minneapolis and the St. Paul police departments have units devoted to outreach for the Somali-American community, and one person dedicated primarily to that task. Minneapolis has a six-person City Engagement Team, with 6 officers and 1 sergeant to cover all the ethnic/immigrant communities in the area.

There are additional Partnerships at the DoJ level:

- +The Young Somali-American Advisory Council, wherein law enforcement (local police) works with communities to address grievances;

- +Dialogue (the DHS roundtables) encourages avenues for communication between Somali community leaders and the government.

- +The Minneapolis Police Department has established a Somali-American Parents Association, as well as a sports league and workshops for non-English speakers to discuss domestic violence, prostitution, and other issues about which elders may not have knowledge.

Based on interviews with members of the community and local law enforcement, the narrative of Somali-Americans is more political than religious. It is largely divorced from any ideological jihadist narratives. As one law enforcement officer put it, “The narrative is political with religious overtones.” Another explained that it is about “tribe, family, Somalia, and Allah,” in that order. As one young Somali-American said to us, “If those who went to Somalia wanted to fight jihad, they would have gone to Pakistan and other places before this.”

The Somali-American narrative of violence is driven by a deep nationalist concern for the future of Somalia. The narrative is multifaceted and includes the idea that Somalis deserve their

own country; that many Somalis do not belong to al-Shabaab; that helping Somalis with *hawala* (informal money transfers that abide by Islamic rules against usury) and with food does not constitute helping al-Shabaab; and finally, that the U.S. government's support of African Union Forces inside Somalia is unacceptable.

In contrast, DHS has emphasized the religious component and jihadi motivations of those who went abroad to fight in Somalia. This appears to be a narrative that links fighting abroad with helping relatives in the homeland.

In terms of formulating an effective CVE strategy, there is a need to address the *hawala*. The Somali-American community, in the face of the famine in Somali, is accustomed to—and committed to—sending remittances abroad to family members and others in need. But there is always a risk that funds will end up inadvertently or intentionally in al-Shabaab's coffers. The additional risks involved in simply transferring the funds to the intended recipients have proven to be an obstacle to both the government and the private sector responsible for facilitating these financial transfers. This impasse has been a source of tension between the Somali community and the U.S. government. The local authorities are trying to determine how best to influence policy on *hawala*; however, more research is required into how banks assess the risks involved. (Note: To date, the U.S. Department of Treasury has handled this issue primarily through the lens of preventing terrorist financing; there is now a call in Congress, and elsewhere, for a broader network of agencies devoted to understanding the issues involved and their possible interface with CVE efforts generally.)

The U.S. government recently convicted two women in the twin cities area of using *hawala* to support al-Shabaab, which is prohibited under U.S. laws governing the providing of material support to a foreign terrorist organization. The local authorities are concerned that cutting off the banking and financial avenues for Somalis to send remittances home in order to thwart support of al-Shabaab will negatively affect the community's ability to provide humanitarian assistance in times

of great need—for instance, during periods of drought. Government officials are aware that alternative means of transferring funds abroad in a legal way need to be instituted.

One of the major obstacles mentioned during the site visit was the competition for scarce resources and the damaging role it played in the development and staffing of the outreach and CVE programs. Where there is competition for finite resources, the resources tend to go to existing programs, while new programs that might better serve the community are not developed and new areas to be targeted are not pinpointed.

## **+Diaspora**

The entire CVE strategy involves the Somali diaspora. The Somali-America community in the Minneapolis area began to grow in the early 1990s, shortly after the war broke out in Somalia in 1991.

Leadership is supportive of local efforts such as those that are in partnership with the police departments and those that involve Somali NGOs.

## **+Online and Offline Initiatives**

The Internet as a source of radicalization and potential CVE has garnered much attention compared to less robust offline initiatives. See this video about Somalia and al-Shabaab, created as part of the joint government and Somali-American community effort.<sup>4</sup>

The target communities would benefit from educating the older generation about the United States. As described above, a number of programs aim to reduce parents' and community leaders' (elders') lack of knowledge about the United States. There is also a need to provide activities and opportunities for young Somalis to reduce their vulnerability to mobilization into criminal

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8lZuUyqoc&list=UU\\_rhjkIMSloyw\\_srUPOjPnA&index=13&feature=plpp\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8lZuUyqoc&list=UU_rhjkIMSloyw_srUPOjPnA&index=13&feature=plpp_video).

gangs and/or terrorist activity.

However, there is little coordination between the CVE programs and CT efforts. CVE programs were not set up to be able to support government activities. On the contrary, there was an intentional firewall between the officers assigned to community outreach with the Somali community and law enforcement. It was based on legitimate concerns that combining these disparate efforts would diminish trust, which is at the heart of the outreach program. There is an effort to establish clear distinctions between individuals involved in outreach versus those involved in criminal investigation. A concern is that blending the two would render the program ineffective.

At the same time, financial support for the programs is limited. The U.S. Attorney's office program is overseen by the Executive Office of U.S. Attorneys (EOUSA) in Washington, D.C. However, there is no discrete budget for the outreach programs, which form the centerpiece of the strategy. In the local police departments, the outreach CVE programs are embedded in the larger immigrant community-directed programs.

The U.S. Attorney's offices at the local and national levels took great pride in the outreach programs, although they were unable to provide hard statistics. They insisted that gang violence had decreased in the community and that there had been a decrease as well in the numbers of young people leaving the United States to join the fight in Somalia.

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# UGANDA

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The Counter Narratives Study Team visited Kampala, Uganda, in February 2012. The site visit included a semistructured interview as well as open discussions with Ugandan government officials and members of private NGOs.

## +Background

Over 40 ethnic groups live in Uganda. The Baganda form the largest group, comprising almost 17 percent of the population, and they live in the south. Originally, Uganda had four kingdoms that enjoyed a certain level of autonomy under British colonial rule. The Buganda Kingdom was one of these; the others were the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Toro, and Ankole. Other important ethnic groups are: Ankole (8 percent of the total population of the country), Iteso (8 percent), Basoga (8 percent) Bakiga (7 percent), Banyarwanda (6 percent), Langi (6 percent), Bagisu (5 percent), Acholi (4 percent), and the Lugbara (4 percent).

Since none of these ethnic groups constitutes a majority, there is a limit to any one group's ability to control the others. Inter-ethnic conflicts do occur, though not on a large scale. An example is the repeating clashes between the Karamojong and other groups over cattle. Ethnicity does play a role in the protracted conflict in northern Uganda, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony, has engaged in violence since 1986. This conflict is, however, not a purely inter-ethnic conflict.

The most prominent cleavage is between the north and south of Uganda. This divide goes back to pre-colonial times, but conditions worsened under colonial rule. The British stimulated

economic and political activities in the south of Uganda and especially among the Baganda. They invested in infrastructure and education. The south grew wealthier. In the north, the Acholi produced raw materials for the south and served in the army.

Apart from socioeconomic cleavages, the ethnic groups are different in how they have participated in the political rule of the country after independence in 1962. The Baganda have traditionally delivered the political rulers of the country and are therefore often perceived as the dominating elite.

Since coming into power in 1986, the National Resistance Movement government has responded to violence by rebel groups in two ways: by using military means and peaceful resolution. Some rebellions were crushed militarily, while others were ended through peaceful negotiations. Some of the rebellions, especially those orchestrated by the LRA, persisted.

In 1999, the government devised a policy to peacefully end the ongoing conflict. This came as a request by some Ugandans for a general amnesty for all involved in acts of war throughout the country. The intention was to promote peace and reconciliation. Countrywide consultations ensued, and the majority of Ugandans supported the idea of amnesty. Consequently, the Amnesty Act was passed in January 2000. It provides for a blanket amnesty for all Ugandans who engaged in war or were engaging in armed rebellion against the government from 1986 on. (“Reporter” is the term applied to an individual who takes steps to receive amnesty.)

Of all the groups that have operated inside Uganda, the only two that remain are the LRA and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). They operate primarily in rural areas, some with bases in the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Many of the rebel groups in Uganda since 1986 adopted violent methods. These include:

- +Persuading people initially to join their ranks voluntarily, through promises of quick money or employment, and subsequently forcing recruitment via abductions.
- +Attacks on civilian populations where the rebels loot food stores, raping, wounding, and murdering civilians.
- +Mutilating people and ambushing vehicles that travel in contested areas.

The Amnesty Act was passed by Parliament on January 1, 2000, and assented to by the president on January 17, 2000. The preamble states that rebel activities persist in parts of the country, resulting in unnecessary suffering. The people of Uganda want to end armed hostilities, reconcile with those who have caused suffering, and rebuild their communities. The government of Uganda is determined to genuinely implement its policy of reconciliation so that peace can return to the whole country. Amnesty has been offered to any Ugandan who has at any time since January 26, 1986, engaged in insurgency against the government.

The Amnesty Commission is the body established by the Act to oversee its implementation. At the time the commission was established, the Ministry of Internal Affairs put the number of potential reporters at 50,000. These include reporters from Kenya, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. By the end of 2008, a total of 22,995 people had reported to the commission. Most gave conflicting information on the strength of their respective former rebel groups. Apart from promoting amnesty, the commission receives the reporting insurgents and assists them in resettlement and reintegration into their communities. All insurgents and their collaborators receive individual protection from prosecution and punishment.

The Amnesty Commission is organized to create a supportive structure. The staffing structure is composed of four distinct teams that work together to satisfy the stated objectives. These

are: Chairman's Office; Commissioners; Demobilization and Resettlement Teams (DRTs) and their support teams; and Secretariat Support, divided into technical and administrative units.

The main funder of the Amnesty Commission is the government of Uganda, in partnership with a number of donor agencies. They include the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilization Reintegration Program (MDRP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Security program for northern Uganda, the AU Commission for ex-child soldiers, and the World Bank's Uganda Emergency Demobilization and Reintegration Project (UgDRP).

The only two groups that remain threats are the LRA and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). They have operated mainly in rural areas, some with bases in the Sudan and the DRC.

The ADF, headed by Jamil Mukulu, is a rebel group but is considered by the Ugandan government to be a terrorist organization. ADF opposes the government and is based in the western part of the country, with rear bases in the DRC. Between 1997 and 2001, the ADF targeted 48 bombs at Kampala. With current terrorist organizational links to al-Qaeda such as al-Shabaab, many Ugandans see an increased number of Salafist groups possibly appearing in the region.

The LRA is an extremist militant organization based on a cult belief in Christianity. While not considered a current or major threat to Uganda, it is a threat to the region. The majority of its top leadership has been arrested or killed.

## **+CVE Programs**

Under the Amnesty Act, amnesty is extended to all Ugandans who have been involved in insurgency through:

+ actually participating in combat;

- + collaborating with insurgents;
- + committing other crimes to support insurgency; or,
- + in any way assisting others involved in insurgency.

A reporter who has in any way been involved in insurgency and has renounced rebellion shall not be prosecuted for those crimes. A reporter shall receive amnesty if he or she reports to the nearest army or police unit, a subcounty chief or local council, or a magistrate or a religious leader.

Amnesty will be granted to the reporter who renounces and abandons involvement in insurgency. A reporter with weapons must surrender the weapons in his or her possession when reporting. After reporting and taking the above steps, the reporter will be issued a certificate of amnesty.

Reporters who are either facing insurgency charges or are detained for such offenses can be granted amnesty. The reporter must declare to a prison officer, a judge, or a magistrate hearing his case that he renounces insurgency and that he wants amnesty. A reporter who is detained shall only be released from custody, if the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) is sure that the reporter had indeed been involved in insurgency and that he is not currently facing other charges.

Reporters living outside Uganda must renounce insurgency and report to a Ugandan diplomatic mission or consulate. They may also report to an international organization that has agreed with the government of Uganda to receive reporters. After fulfilling the above, the reporter will be issued a certificate of amnesty by the commission.

Other organizations involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the amnesty process include the following:

- + The Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) and other security stakeholders (police) are involved in ensuring security for reporters and handling weapons received from them. The

army and other security agencies are partners in the implementation process of Amnesty Commission activities in Uganda. Most of the ex-combatants who have either escaped from the rebel ranks and surrendered to UPDF or have been captured by the army in battle have been handed over to the commission.

+The DPP investigates the cases of all those charged with or detained for any criminal offences. If these individuals qualify for amnesty, they are released. The DPP collaborates with other officials, including the police, judges, magistrates, court officials, and advocates.

The NGOs working with the people in affected districts are another significant group in the implementation of the Amnesty Act:

+The Amnesty Commission has been working closely with groups such as Participatory Rural Action for Development (PRAFORD), the Trans-Cultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), and Action Against Hunger-ACF.

+The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in 2010, undertook the responsibility to ensure safe and secure access to ADF combatants. It further undertook to carry out the disarmament of these combatants based in Congo and general facilitation of operations, including obtaining from the authorities in DRC and Uganda.

+Give Me a Chance (GMAC), a local NGO founded in 1997, has been responsible for assisting the commission in repatriating, rehabilitating, and reintegrating former combatants of the various armed groups, particularly in West Nile and western and eastern Uganda.

+World Vision Uganda is a child-focused organization that has handled children affected by war since 1995. It has provided psychosocial support, skill training, and entrepreneurship skills to children and reporters. The organization has opened a second center, dedicated to handling reporters who are benefiting from the amnesty process. The Amnesty Commission has supported this organization in its activities.

+The United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) has helped child soldiers by offering them resettlement kits and other support.

+The Gulu Save the Children Organization (GUSCO) works in Gulu district to provide psychosocial support to children who were abducted and are returning from Sudan and elsewhere.

+Save the Children Alliance supports the education component of the reintegration program of former child soldiers, community reconciliation, and the resettlement of ex-combatants. This support is given through GUSCO.

## **+Best Practices/Lessons Learned**

The Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) of the World Bank's MDRP supports demobilization and reintegration of former regular and irregular forces in the greater Great Lakes region of Africa.

The countries include Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. The objective of the strategy is to enhance prospects for stabilization and recovery in the region.

Faced with inadequacy of funding to carry out its mandate, the government in early 2003 applied for funding to the MDTF. After various consultations, meetings, and fruitful exchange of

information and views, a grant agreement between the World Bank and the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development for \$4.2 million was signed August 2004 for demobilization and reintegration of former irregular forces.

The MDRP Special Project was aimed at providing the Amnesty Commission with sufficient resources to provide basic assistance to reporters to enable them to resettle into the community with minimum difficulty in terms of living provisions.

Under this project, 15,310 reporters would be reintegrated into the communities. This includes a backlog of about 12,000 reporters and potential rebels who were to return to embrace amnesty.

The overall objective of the project was to consolidate peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction in Uganda through the return and reintegration of reporters into normal civilian life. The project ran for two years, ending in February 2007. The period was then extended to June 2007.

By February 2007, the project had achieved 105 percent of its demobilization target (16,193) and 95 percent of its resettlement target (14,527).

The Ugandan government has also studied counter-extremism programs in Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Indonesia. The European Union and Turkey organized an event in Dar al-Salam that focused on how to decontaminate extremist messages and focus on the real/peaceful/moderate ones.

A counterterrorism coordination center in Kenya provides a way to learn from regional partners and share lessons.

## +Road Ahead

As noted above, the Ministry of Internal Affairs initially put the number of potential reporters at 50,000. This number included potential reporters from Kenya, Sudan, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Of the above-mentioned 22,995 who had reported to the commission by the

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The Amnesty Commission is making all efforts, together with other stakeholders, to persuade the LRA and the ADF, who are still in rebellion, to come back to the community.

end of 2008, GUSCO resettled over 10,000 abductors, not only offering basic services but resettling them in their communities. Within the communities, the Ugandan government has engaged moderate Muslim scholars and other influential individuals.

The Amnesty Commission still has a large number of potential reporters to handle, particularly from the LRA and ADF. It is making all efforts, together with other stakeholders, to persuade the LRA and ADF, who are still in rebellion, to come back to the community.

The Amnesty Commission will continue with the implementation of the Amnesty Act and provide overall leadership, guidance, coordination, support supervision, joint monitoring, and evaluation of the work of NGOs who act as implementing partners of the amnesty process.

## +Conclusions and Observations

Uganda is not trained to handle transnational terrorism and therefore not prepared to preempt future problems. It deals with them as they arise. The main efforts are undertaken after an

attack. As an example, after the Kampala World Cup bombings, the Somali diaspora was targeted. The government engaged in calming matters by differentiating between Somali and terrorist.

The LRA is for the most part defeated and now operates outside the country, mainly in DRC, South Sudan, and CAR. As such, the government has opted for a policy to fight the group outside of Uganda. LRA is no longer a great concern to the Ugandan government.

LRA was supported by the Sudanese government; politically, however, Khartoum needed to create a group with strict Islamic/Salafist ideology, and this was how the ADF began. Some ADF leaders trained and fought in Afghanistan and benefited from bin Laden's presence in Sudan (1992–96). Regarding the ADF, some general comments can be made:

- +Khartoum financed and supported ADF over the years, and it has a close relationship with Sudan's Special Forces.

- +ADF was strictly an Islamic organization. They've been recruiting and preaching in western Uganda and have established military/training camps.

- +ADF began to fight Ugandan forces in 1996. They were weakened in 2003 and, the ADF threat has been minimized with Southern Sudan's independence.

- +There is no relationship between ADF and LRA, and no direct talks have taken place between the two.

Security forces found considerable religious literature (brochures, audiocassettes) and claimed that extremist messages were consciously prepared. The Amnesty program faced some problems stemming from members of the population who could not accept certain individuals with a history of killing or committing atrocities. Local communities wanted to use "traditional justice."

Uganda's Joint Intelligence/Security Committee and district administration have their own areas of responsibility. Finally, as a general rule, extremism is tempered by politics. Political progress reduces extremism.

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# KENYA

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As part of the International Study on Countering Violent Extremism sponsored by the Qatar International Academy for Strategic Studies, the QIASS Counter Narrative Study team conducted a site visit to Nairobi, Kenya, February 7–11, 2012.

Interviews were conducted with a variety of individuals with direct knowledge of the violent extremist threat within Kenya and the Horn of Africa. These individuals represented the Kenyan government, the media, and non-governmental organizations.

The interviews were driven by, but not limited to, the questions set forth in the Counter Narratives Study team survey guide. Kenya does not have what can be realistically described as a formal or integrated CVE program, particularly in the area of the counter-narrative, a fundamental focus of this second-phase study. As a result, little or no information could be obtained in several of the areas addressed by the survey.

## +Background

The Somalia-based group al-Shabaab poses the primary threat of violent extremism in Kenya and, in fact, much of the Horn of Africa. The origins of this threat can be traced to the Somali crisis (see below). The threat became more evident in 2006, when al-Shabaab emerged from the remnants of the defeated Islamic Courts Union. It has only gained momentum with time."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> After Siad Barre was ousted from power in Somalia in 1991, the international community made 14 attempts but failed to put a government in power that could address the internal threats.

While al-Shabaab was primarily a Somali problem at the beginning, it has since transformed into a serious challenge facing Kenya.

Arising from the absence of centralized governance in Somalia during the 1990s, al-Shabaab evolved into a complex and, at times, enigmatic group, combining the operational structure and capabilities of a local insurgent uprising with the vision and affiliations of a transnational terrorist organization. The insidious nature of the threat comes into clear focus when one considers the overarching goal of Somali irredentism—the creation of a “greater Somalia” in which all ethnic Somalis within the Horn of Africa (which includes Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia), as well as nearby Kenya, will be gathered together. Just prior to the 2012 site visit, the International Crisis Group (ICG) issued a policy briefing, *Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization*, which accurately summarized the nature of the threat:

Somalia’s growing Islamist radicalism is spilling over into Kenya. The militant Al-Shabaab movement has built a cross-border presence and a clandestine support network among Muslim populations in the northeast and Nairobi and on the coast, and is trying to radicalize and recruit youth from these communities, often capitalizing on longstanding grievances against the central state. This problem could grow more severe with the October 2011 decision by the Kenyan government to intervene directly in Somalia. Radicalization is a grave threat to Kenya’s security and stability. Formulating and executing sound counter radicalization and de-radicalization policies before it is too late must be a priority. It would be a profound mistake, however, to view the challenge solely through a counterterrorism lens.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, *Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization*, Africa Briefing No. 85, January 25, 2012, p. 1.

## +Unprotected Borders/Failed States

The Kenyan-Somali border is arguably the single most vexing national security issue facing the government in Nairobi. This is highlighted in a 2011 white paper on military cooperation with the United States issued by the Kenyan Ministry of Defense (MOD) that includes a section detailing the many challenges inherent in managing what are described as “long and porous borders with five neighbors and [a] long coastline.” The MOD readily concedes that maintaining constant surveillance of the borders is simply not possible, with security an unachievable and unsustainable goal.

The massive flow of Somali refugees has been a challenge beyond Nairobi’s ability to effectively manage. In addition to geography, there are other fundamentally intractable problems—both structural and legal—that thwart resolution. The structural challenge arises from the fact that the government presence on the Kenyan side of the border has no parallel on the Somali side. The feeble Transitional Federal Government in Somalia lacks the resources for and, more importantly, an interest in securing the border in any meaningful way. This inability to maintain even a semblance of border control is one of the primary reasons Somalia has been included, along with Chad and Sudan, on the list of “Failed African States” compiled by foreign policy experts in the West.

The sporadic yet never-ending waves of violence and the desperate lawlessness that pervade the border region are but a reflection of what is unfolding deeper within Somalia. A report issued by the U.S. Agency for International Development eloquently captured the complex essence of the environment near the Kenyan-Somali border when it described it as “not peace, not war.”

The task of securing the border from the Kenyan side is made still more difficult by international law that limits Kenya’s ability to restrict the flow of Somali refugees fleeing political,

social, and environmental disasters at home. As a result, these refugees, in the desperate pursuit of safety and sustenance, have entered Kenya in vast numbers.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of the refugee flows has been the exponential growth of the Dadaab refugee camps. The refugee population has transformed an external crisis into an inescapable and ever-expanding internal security challenge. The camp, located approximately 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Kenya's eastern border with Somalia, has grown at an astonishing rate, with an average of 2,000 to 5,000 new refugees entering Dadaab every month. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees, as of September 2012, the camp housed

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**The refugee population has transformed an external crisis into an inescapable and ever-expanding internal security challenge.**

nearly 450,000 refugees, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. To put this in even more relevant context, if Dadaab were a municipality, it would rank as the third largest city in Kenya. Almost all of these refugees are of Somali nationality without Kenyan documents. As noted above, efforts to stem this flow have been stymied by international law that prevents Kenya from simply turning away refugees seeking to escape a bona fide political and environmental crisis in Somalia.

Established in the early 1990s, the Dadaab refugee camps are now home to a growing number of young people who were born there and have never set foot in Somalia. The prospect of living in the camp over the long term has inspired enterprising residents to pursue business opportunities that have helped build out and expand Dadaab's infrastructure. For example, some residents have progressively built ongoing business ties with local ethnic Somalis living in Kenya and have established banking and telecommunication networks within the camp.

The government in Nairobi has increasingly viewed the Dadaab refugee camps as a “cancer” that must be addressed more aggressively. According to Kenyan government officials, Dadaab has become a de facto rest and relaxation site for al-Shabaab fighters, as well as a target-rich source for recruiting. This has not been lost on national security officials in the Kenyan government. The government—along with media and non-governmental organizations—see Dadaab as a breeding ground for terrorism and as a base to support the growing al-Shabaab presence in Kenya.

Given its relative proximity to the southern region of Somalia and the ease with which men and materiel can be moved across the porous border, the Dadaab refugee camps are an exceptionally useful staging point for al-Shabaab’s expanded presence in Kenya.

## **+Narratives**

Leveraging its increasingly robust presence at Dadaab, as well as within communities in the capital and the North Eastern Province, al-Shabaab continues its two-step strategy of radicalization and recruitment, employing a narrative that focuses on social injustice and economic disparity facing ethnic Somalis in Kenya. This narrative paints the central Kenyan government as corrupt, self-serving, and discriminatory against the ethnic Somali population in the country. The campaign has proven effective in large measure due to the fact that it reflects the unfortunate political reality within Kenya. While the entire country has long suffered from a degree of deprivation, the North Eastern Province—inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis—has struggled with the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, and a myriad of other socioeconomic ailments. Whether these troubles can rightfully be blamed on the inequitable policies of the central government is less relevant than al-Shabaab’s ability to exploit the seeming systematic discrimination against ethnic Somalis.

Al-Shabaab recruiters have increasingly leveraged the power of a narrative that incorporates a number of issues, most of which deeply resonate within the Somali community (ethnic and refugee populations). A worrisome number of Somali youths are radicalized by such themes that include social injustice and economic disparity. This narrative arguably derives its power from the fact that it has a firm, undeniable basis in the real-world experience that ethnic and refugee Somalis<sup>7</sup> face every day.<sup>7</sup>

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**A worrisome number of Somali youths are radicalized by such themes that include social injustice and economic disparity.**

It was predicted Kenya’s national elections (held in March 2013) would inflame rhetoric against the growing Somali population, a campaign theme that would likely have a profound and lasting influence on the political and emotional climate in the country. The ICG report offers the following description of the dynamic:

. . . unreasoned anti-Somali sentiments, discrimination and harassment may get worse, not least because powerful constituencies are fuelling public alarm and unease. “Somalis are taking over the country” is a refrain in Nairobi and elsewhere. With the war against al-Shabaab and a highly charged political atmosphere, some may seek to milk the palpable fear of Somalis for advantage in the hotly contested elections... The community may be demonized—much like Kenyan Asians were in the 1970s and 1980s

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of the report, “ethnic Somalis” refers to those individuals of Somali origin who are citizens and/or long-term residents of Kenya. “Refugee Somalis,” as the term would imply, identifies those individuals of Somali origin who fled to Kenya and who possess no formal status or residency documentation there.

—with a “non-indigenous” minority portrayed as greedy and exploitative, wallowing in wealth as the country sinks ever deeper into poverty.”<sup>8</sup>

Through the Muslim Youth Center (MYC) and the rhetoric of radical imams, there is an element of the radicalizing narrative that can trace its lines of influence to the long-standing interaction of Kenyan Muslims with their “counterparts” in the Middle East. And while financing for jihadist activities in Kenya comes primarily from selected mosques within the country, according to U.S. security program officials in Kenya, additional support comes from external sources, particularly an array of organizations in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. (Note: Given this connection to the Islamic traditions of the Middle East, it may come as a surprise to some observers that women are more actively involved than men in the jihadist movement in Kenya. They serve in vital roles as couriers, housekeepers, and caretakers for people in transit.)

Another element of the threat stems from the growth of Reverts Centers, places where persons who previously followed Islam but drifted away from the religion come together with more devout followers who “encourage” them to revert to Islam. The narrative frequently espoused at these centers describes Islam as an avenue (perhaps the only one) to escape oppression, or as a supportive community that can help each member financially (such as in finding jobs). Because the Reverts Centers espouse a more radical interpretation of the Qur’an, this process may be (and has been) a gateway scenario for radicalization and becoming a jihadi.

Reverts Centers issue a formal “certificate of reversion to Islam” to those who acknowledge their conversions. These certificates are far more than a simple piece of paper; rather, each captures extensive personal details about the individual, including name, adopted name after conversion,

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<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group, *Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalization*, p. 8.

gender, date of conversion, and National Identification Number. Nonetheless, Reverts Centers are not viewed as posing a danger to the stability of the country, according to government officials.

Al-Shabaab and the Kenyan Muslim Youth Center (which is alleged to have gathered and channeled funding to al-Shabaab) have consistently employed a narrative that is a synthesis of nationalism and religious extremism. (Note: One finding uncovered during the CVE visit to Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, was that the nationalist narrative—the call to all Somalis everywhere to help fight against foreign troops invading the country—was the primary message that drove the young Somali-American men to travel to Somalia and fight alongside al-Shabaab.) Since al-Shabaab has formerly aligned itself with al-Qaeda, a result of this open affiliation is the somewhat increasing emphasis on the global Islamic narrative, in conjunction with the nationalist theme, in the overall narrative.

As noted previously, another major theme has been the focus on economic disparity between ethnic Somalis and the mainstream Kenyan population. The effectiveness of this particular theme results from its foundation in the real-life experience of most Somalis in Kenya, especially the youth segment, which continues to struggle against a 60–70 percent unemployment rate. The social and political inequalities commonly cited in the narrative also have a basis in reality, as Somali youth are frequently the targets of police brutality.

## **+CVE Programs**

The Kenyan government has yet to establish a formally structured program designed to counter violent extremism. While there has been considerable discussion about the need to implement some form of CVE program, no definitive action has been initiated to date. At the time of the country visit, all initiatives relating to CVE programs and the development of counter-narrative efforts relating to the threat in Kenya have been established and operated by foreign governments or non-governmental organizations.

In comparing the Kenyan approach to other countries visited during the course of this CVE study, **Kenya has yet to focus on the problem of a growing internal radicalization phenomenon fueled by external sources.** Instead, the Kenyan government has attempted to address the growing threat posed by al-Shabaab through efforts to contain the organization inside Somalia. This strategy was implemented with the 2011 invasion of Somalia by Kenyan military troops.

The fundamental objective of the military deployment was to create a buffer zone that would be subsequently managed by approximately 4,000 members of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the United Nations–approved effort to support the transitional government in shoring up its national security infrastructure and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. (Note: Kenya’s interest in supporting a robust tourism industry was reportedly a major reason behind the decision to invade Somalia.)

Neither the Kenyan government nor the Antiterrorism Police Unit (ATPU) is sufficiently well trained to manage the complex issues involving violent extremism and/or radicalization. Their widely feared reputation for employing abusive methods has arguably exacerbated the problem, resulting in higher rates of radicalization among the victims of this treatment. The government appears to be solely interested in internal social-economic issues as they may relate to maintaining (or increasing) the threats. The institutional capacity to process threats—that is, identify contributing factors, understand how they unfold in the natural milieu, and develop effective mitigation strategies—remains quite limited, primarily due to lack of specific training. It would be safe to describe the Kenyan plan for dealing with violent extremism as short-term and reactionary, with little or no responsiveness or long-term strategy.

Kenya’s only attempt to counter the narrative was to recruit individuals from refugee camps to fight on the Somali border. Nearly 3,000 youth, primarily children, were recruited and received 6

weeks to 3 months of training. Many of these child recruits deserted as a result of chronically poor treatment and the fact that they were not paid by the Kenyan government as promised. Most of these deserters ultimately sold their weapons (adding to the potential arsenals of violent extremist groups), while some used the power of their newfound weapons to go on looting rampages. Despite the relatively robust recruiting effort noted above, desertions have left only a surrogate force that is estimated at fewer than 2,000.

The Kenyan government has made efforts to engage with selected imams, but these efforts have thus far failed to produce significant results. If the Kenyan authorities gather information that establishes an imam's affiliation with al-Shabaab, they invariably arrest him and, in some cases, have carried out a "shoot to kill" policy.

The 2011 white paper produced by the Kenyan armed forces included a focused examination of the terrorist/violent extremist threat in Kenya. It does not, however, specifically address the requirement or potential role for a formal CVE program in the country. To be fair, the government of Kenya does not have the financial resources to launch an organized CVE effort. Instead, the general strategy is one of using directed forces (such as the 2011 military deployment in Somalia); and the National Security Intelligence Service (NSIS) continues to serve as the office of primary responsibility within the Kenyan government for dealing with anti-terror issues. The bottom line remains unchanged: The Kenyan government has little interest in resolving the situation in Somalia; rather, it views its interests as being best served by a program that would return Somalis back to Somalia, and this is largely weighted toward persecution rather than reform.

## **+International Community**

Programs in Kenya that might be defined as fitting within the CVE matrix are primarily the product of the international community rather than the national government. Even here, the

programs are poorly funded and basic. No single program can be described as exclusively, or even specifically, focused on the threat posed by radicalization.

One example is IIDA (Women's Development Organization), a non-profit organization founded in 1991 in Mogadishu by a group of Somali leaders to promote political, economic and social rights. According to the IIDA website, the organization is committed to achieving the following objectives:

- +Mobilizing the community in an effort to advance the goals of **human rights, equality, development, peace, and reconciliation** for all women in Somalia.
- +Supporting poor and most vulnerable people and communities, especially women and children.
- +Working in partnership with men toward the common goal of gender equality in Somalia.
- +Respecting and valuing the full diversity of women's situations and conditions and recognizing that some women face barriers to their empowerment.
- +Protecting the rights of women and girls as inalienable, integral, and indivisible.

In Kenya, IIDA has developed ongoing programs that focus on such critical socioeconomic issues as education, health care, and employment for Somali refugees.

Other small programs exist within the country and work to address an array of social ills that have the potential to feed violent extremism. These efforts focus on such activities as providing child protection services, building workers' unions, and the establishment of trade unions to enhance the employment environment and teach job-related skills. The slums in Kenya are

increasingly proving to be a hotbed for radicalization; nonetheless, there are no NGOs or United Nations programs that are examining this problem or working toward potential solutions. Similarly, there are very few international assistance organizations working to relieve the socioeconomic struggles that are widespread among the Somali refugee population. (Note: The U.S. Agency for International Development has sponsored a youth mentorship program.) Once again, however, none of these has a formal interest in dealing with the challenge of radicalization within that community.

## **+Relationship with NGOs**

There is no official relationship between the Kenyan government and NGOs on the issue of countering violent extremism. This is not to suggest that NGOs are not active in the country; there are a number of internationally sponsored outreach programs that are actively involved in an array of programs that target the endemic socioeconomic challenges that plague Kenya (and Africa). More than one hundred of these NGOs receive some level of funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Civil societies—community-based private organizations formed to address various socioeconomic problems—also continue to play an active role. As with the NGOs, there is no formal connection between civil societies and the government.

The U.S. government maintains a small civil and military presence at the military facility at Manda Bay. Since 2003, almost \$20 million in Department of Defense humanitarian aid funds have been used to support 50 to 60 health, infrastructure, and education projects.

Parallel to this, a number of foreign programs are being established with the objective of improving the quality of life in Kenya. These include PISCES (Public Innovation Systems for Clean Energy Security), a program managed by the African Centre for Technology Studies in

Kenya. The primary mission of PISCES is to employ research-based policies for the development of bio-energy and increasing access to energy for the rural poor in East Africa (as well as South Asia). PISCES is a partnership involving the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, India, and Tanzania.

Other foreign-sponsored programs target security issues. One, for example, has helped develop a more comprehensive and effective border security watch program that has enhanced the ability to accurately identify high-value targets (that is, terrorists) from information found on their passports and/or government-issued identity documents.

International support for schools, such as directed aid for education offered by the United Nations, have not been very effective thus far, largely due to obstacles created by the Sharia laws that govern how the funds might be invested—and for whom. The bulk of funds have been spent either only on schooling for girls or only in religious-based education.

## **+Strategies**

As described above, the 2011 Kenyan incursion into Somalia has thus far been the only strategy to counter violent extremism. In this case, the focus was on the attempt to push Somalis back into their country and subsequently create a workable buffer zone to prevent further refugee flow.

The majority of the CVE-related programs—those conducted by community groups, NGOs, and foreign government or government consortiums—are oriented toward two primary populations: the youth and Somali refugees.

## **+Best Practices/Lessons Learned**

While this topic was explored during the course of our country visit, it quickly became clear the Kenyan government hasn't pursued this avenue.

## **+Successes**

Not applicable and not evident.

## **+Role for Formers**

Thus far, the Kenyan government has neither officially nor unofficially sought out former extremists to play a role in countering the violent extremist narrative.

However, the African Union Mission to Somalia has established Marina Camp as a safe house for al-Shabaab defectors. The facility currently houses over 300 and is expected to grow; estimates suggest there may be as many as another 200 to 400 potential defectors in the area. For security purposes, each of these defectors is carefully vetted (to the degree possible) before they are authorized entry into the camp. This information could be extremely useful in identifying, screening, and recruiting potential former extremists to serve in a counter-narrative program.

## **+Role for Government**

The Kenyan government does not possess the financial resources to fund a dedicated counter-narrative program and does not appear to view violent extremism in any form as a sufficient threat to warrant substantial investment even if the resources were available. There are underlying economic reasons for the seeming tolerance of the threat posed by al-Shabaab and others. These may be primarily traced back to the fact that a majority of the Kenyan upper socioeconomic class and political elite have a considerable amount of personal wealth invested in Kenya's tourism industry.

Interestingly, Somali businessmen also are heavily invested in the tourism industry in Kenya. Kenyan politicians therefore feel relatively certain that Somalis will not bite the hand that feeds them and feel, further, that promoting CVE programs (an acknowledgment that there are violent extremists within the country) will scare away potential tourists. That, in turn, might decrease the flow of tourism revenue upon which a large cross-section of Kenyans rely as a primary and, in many cases, irreplaceable source of income.

## **+Research Gaps**

Neither the government in Kenya nor any of the non-governmental organizations provides any indications that they are pursuing research in the area of countering violent extremism or have reviewed the existing literature in the field.

## **+Diaspora**

Recognized religious leaders in various communities have delivered lectures designed specifically to compare and contrast “true” Islamic practices with those put forth by self-appointed religious “authorities” representing al-Shabaab (and other organizations) that have espoused a far more extreme interpretation of the Qur’an—ones that invariably emphasized violent jihad.

Similarly, imams at various mosques and Muslim centers have continued to work privately against the radicalization process by preaching to the youth about the perils (and lies) that are part of the al-Shabaab narrative. The imams in Eastleigh (the large slum on the edge of Nairobi that is inhabited almost exclusively by Somalis) have shown a degree of understanding—perhaps even sympathy—for al-Shabaab. But they are still willing to preach a message that counters the al-Shabaab narrative.

## **+Online and Offline Initiatives**

Media produced by al-Shabaab has been exceptionally influential within the Somali community in Kenya, and this influence appears to be growing. The campaign has incorporated the array of commonly accessed social media. Although officials in the government of Kenya routinely monitor this effort, *they have taken no action to obstruct or counter it*. Interestingly, the major target within these messages has not been either Somalia or Kenya but rather the West.

## **+Target Levels**

As described previously, the government of Kenya has not established a formal program for countering violent extremism. As a result, there is no relevant information about targeting.

The Counter Narratives Study team could not find any evidence that information gathered by the government of Kenya in the course of any activities relating to countering violent extremism was being used operationally to support counterterrorism programs.

## **+Business Operations**

The government of Kenya has not funded initiatives relating to countering violent extremism. In fact, the limited availability of financial resources is one reason (but by no means the only one) that Kenya has not established a formal CVE program.

Funding was requested from the UN and EU in June 2011 to cover the cost of 4,000 “green hat” AMISOM troops for operations inside the buffer zone that was created by Kenya’s invasion into Somalia. Ugandans will continue to lead the mission. In 2005, the U.S. government reversed its decision on Article 98, which protects U.S. military personnel who commit a criminal offense in the host nation. It restarted Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and the International Military Educations and Training (IMAT) program for Kenya. Funds had previously been frozen because

then-President Kibaki had refused to sign Article 98. Without a signed agreement, U.S. servicemen would face prosecution in Nairobi. As a result, Washington agreed to deliver \$1 million to Kenya in the form of FMF—funds designated for use in procuring military training and equipment—along with an unspecified increase in funding for IMAT. In addition, Kenya receives approximately \$60 million in foreign military financing from Jordan.

## **+General Observations**

+As a result of stability in the buffer zone, approximately 80,000 refugees from Dadaab's camps returned to Somalia. Although Mogadishu is stable now, many refugees will only return if they are promised better infrastructure, more land, and loans.

+The unemployment rate in Kenya is approximately 60 percent. Muslim Somalis who live in the country's North Eastern Province are acutely aware that they receive a disproportionately lower level of funding from the central government, a result they blame at least in part on the fact that government leaders are Christian. Regional leaders have been very public in their calls for change.

+The Muslim Youth Center that is being used for jihadist recruitment in Kenya has been outlawed in Tanzania. It has been instrumental in facilitating the radicalization process in Kenya. The center supplies the youth with jobs and decent living standards, providing answers to deep fundamental needs in the ethnic Somali population, something the Kenyan government hasn't been able to accomplish.

+The Muslim Youth Center is also recruiting many criminals from the slums. They give them jobs, which are funded by the mosques. It well known among many of the individuals interviewed in the course of the site visit that Saudis, Qataris, and Emiratis fund these

mosques. In doing so, they have created a sense of belonging. The lack of choices results in people being diverted to extremism.

+ There is evidence of abuse of Somali refugees by Kenyan security forces, yet there has been no accountability for the 1984 Wagalla massacre.

+ There is a systemic “Don’t ask, don’t tell” philosophy in place as it relates to finances, fundraising, and money laundering in Kenya. A growing number of radicals are integrated into, and substantially invested in, Kenya. Many high-profile Somali businessmen have also invested in Kenya. Movement in their finances will occur before any major strike is launched into Kenya.

+ Al-Shabaab can be found in the Hagadera refugee camp within Dadaab. Due to police aggression there, many refugees have fled back into Somalia.

+ A number of the hard-core al-Shabaab members look beyond clan affiliation and focus on the global jihadi agenda. A major factor for the success of the recruitment campaign is that they are not accountable. In addition, the lack of social prospects aids in the recruitment process.

+ The Muslim Youth Center is a significant force multiplier that successfully recruits from the Kenyan population. They are outreaching to a broader audience and marketing jihad to young radical extremists. They have so far taken responsibility for several bombings in Kenya.

+ Imam Aboud Rogo has been arrested a number of times for various offenses. The police have made no attempts to preserve the evidence to convict him.

+Somaliareport.com is theoretically independent but essentially just transfers and/or sells information.

+Nigerian nationals affiliated with Boko Haram came through Baidowa to train in Lower Shabelle. So far, AMISOM was able to document 90 nationals being trained at this camp (although this information has not been corroborated).

+There are 17 active training camps in Somalia. This is fueled by the fact that foreign Christian armies are fighting on Somali land.

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# MALAYSIA

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## +Summary

The Malaysian authorities perceive serious security threats from religious extremists and religious militants, distinguishing between *extremist* groups such as al-Maunah (first detected in 2000), which want to turn Malaysia into an Islamic state, and *militant* groups such as the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia, which staged attacks domestically in 2001. This distinction between extremist and militant groups, however, breaks down with Jemaah Islamiyah, which began as a pan-regional extremist group preaching the establishment, using military force, of an Islamic caliphate encompassing Malaysia, southern Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and the southern Philippines, and morphed into an affiliate of al-Qaeda in the late 1990s. JI attempted suicide missions from Malaysia in December 2001, with a planned truck bombing of the Woodlands checkpoint at the Singaporean side of a road causeway linking the two countries, and an attack on U.S. Navy vessels in the Strait of Malacca. Both plots were thwarted in joint operations with the Singapore Internal Security Department, which swept up a local network that included Malaysians in December 2001 and August 2002. Drawing members from Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, JI was about to launch several truck bombs targeting U.S. and Israeli diplomatic targets and other foreign and domestic institutions in Singapore when it was preempted by the December 2001 arrests.

The threat from JI is seen as ongoing; in 2006, there was a plot to mount a suicide attack on police headquarters in Bukit Aman, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, vital installations, and U.S. fast food restaurant franchises such as KFC and McDonald's.

Other external militant groups are also watched because they use Malaysia for transit, procurement of logistics, financial support, dissemination of extremist ideas, and to recruit new members. These groups include the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which operates

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**There is a concerted effort by the Malaysian police counterterrorism unit to rehabilitate terrorists, the majority of whom are detained preventively under the International Security Act.**

among the Tamil diaspora, and al-Qaeda, which has been recruiting in Malaysia. Indeed, according to Malaysian authorities, AQ selected five Malaysians for the planned attack on Library Tower (Chicago), a follow-up to the 2001 attacks, using Asian operatives. One Malaysian, Zaini Zakaria, was already in the United States for flight training when the plot was abandoned following the arrest of Hambali and two other Malaysians, Lillie and Zubair, in Thailand in August 2003.

The Malaysian authorities are likewise concerned that Malaysians may become radicalized through exposure to online extremist sites. Authorities have uncovered two cases involving lone wolf radicals. One person radicalized through the Internet subsequently “left for foreign jihad.” The other was a foreign student who frequented Anwar al-Awlaki's website.

Consequently, CVE has assumed greater significance in Malaysia's counterterrorism strategy since 2005. There is a concerted effort by the Malaysian police counterterrorism unit to rehabilitate terrorists, the majority of whom are detained preventively under the Internal Security Act. The program includes religious counseling by academic theologians and clerics, and discussions with former senior JI members, as well as post-release help in finding jobs and some financial support for families.

But building rapport with detainees as a means of persuading them that the Malaysian state is not their enemy appears to take precedence over countering JI's religious narrative. Detainee case officers and theologians interviewed highlighted the importance of proving their sincerity to detainees and creating bonds of trust to ensure the detainees keep their word to not reengage in terrorist activity on release. (The Royal Malaysian Police Special Task Force for Operations and Counterterrorism, or STF, uses the term "case officer" to refer to an officer assigned a detainee case, not in the context of intelligence operations functions.) Many released detainees remain radical but are subject to both formal and informal as well as covert monitoring. They are invited to attend "alumni reunions" in the cities they live in and to see their case officers as "friends.

The Malaysian police counterterrorism special task force also gives talks on the dangers of radicalization in schools and college campuses. Speakers, however, do not address the religious texts that form the basis of JI's arguments but focus instead on the process of radicalization, warning students against accepting invitations to private Qur'an study sessions such as *usroh* and *taklim*. This approach has been taken because most students do not have enough familiarity with the Qur'an to appreciate how the JI's distortions have strayed from mainstream interpretations, officials say.

Since the Malaysian and Singapore JI cells were grouped under *mantiqi* (regions) by the JI leadership, their members know each other and went through similar radicalization processes employing the same set of narratives designed to overcome moral qualms about killing others.

Indeed, many JI members from Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia were introduced to radicalism in a JI school in southern Malaysia run by fugitive Indonesian clerics.

But while all three Southeast Asian countries acknowledge the centrality of terrorist rehabilitation programs in their CVE strategies, the tactics employed differ.

Malaysia and Singapore use indefinite preventive detention—both countries inherited Internal Security Acts and Emergency Ordinances from the British colonial governments—to deter and respond to extremist activity. The Malaysian government announced on September 15, 2011, that it was repealing the ISA and replaced it in April 2012 with the Security Offences (Special Measures) 2012 Act, which allows the STF to detain suspects for up to 28 days before deciding whether to release them or to charge them in court.<sup>9</sup> The Indonesians charge suspects in court (although about 10 percent of suspects have been killed in police raids), and those convicted have been sentenced to varying prison terms, usually not more than seven years, of which one-third is often commuted.

What the Malaysians call “de-radicalization seminars” appear to be more like the “ad hoc cultural approach” the Indonesian police employ with arrested JI leaders to obtain their cooperation (see Chapter 9), in contrast to the structured counseling undertaken by the Religious Rehabilitation Group in Singapore.

The Singapore approach is clinical, with regular psychological testing and risk assessments, and the RRG counselors use a de-radicalization manual with nine predetermined topics “to ensure uniformity and consistency in the rehabilitation process.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shahanaaz Habib, “A Matter of Trial and Error,” *The Star Online*, <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2012/4/22/nation/11153338&sec=nation>

<sup>10</sup> Religious Rehabilitation Group, *Winning Hearts and Minds, Embracing Peace* (Singapore: Khadijah Mosque, 2008), 70.

The Malaysian counselors appear to find empathy more useful, leveraging detainee claims that they did not know they had joined a terrorist network but were concerned Muslims trying to alleviate the suffering of other Muslims. Malaysian officials take pains to show that they do not see the extremists as the enemy of the state but rather as “misguided” individuals they want to help. “We talk to them as Muslim brothers gone astray. We tell them they have a second chance to go back,” said a cleric involved in the program.

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Malaysian officials take pains to show that they do not see the extremists as enemies of the state but rather as ‘misguided’ individuals they want to help.

But in terms of preventing reengagement, the Malaysian program appears to be as successful as the Singapore program. So far, only one released Malaysian detainee, Yazid Sufaat, has been re-arrested by the STF—for inciting violence in February 2013. He was allegedly recruiting Malaysians for suicide missions in Syria.

## **+Background**

The Counter Narratives Study Southeast Asia team visited Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, November 1–2, 2011. The team received a comprehensive briefing on the security threats faced by Malaysia from the STF and interviewed officials responsible for various aspects of the CVE program—senior management, analysis, operations, detainee case management—using a semistructured questionnaire as well as informal discussion. The STF also arranged for the visit

team to interview two clerics and two former Jemaah Islamiyah members involved in the detainee rehabilitation program.

The STF was established as a specialist police unit independent of the Malaysian Special Branch, or MSB (which traditionally deals with all domestic security threats), on March 1, 2009, to “enhance operational and intelligence strategies against terrorism, organized crime and money laundering as well as to strengthen existing ties and foster new relationships of mutual cooperation with international and other states’ law enforcement and counterterrorism components.”<sup>11</sup>

Headed by a Commissioner of Police who reports directly to the Inspector-General of Police, the STF is still largely staffed by Special Branch police officers. But as the STF deputy commander told the visit team, being a separate entity from the more secretive Special Branch allows the STF to engage more actively in community outreach and to interact openly with the media, NGOs, universities, and researchers. The STF also began to publicize Malaysia’s counterterrorism successes in 2010, apparently to deter terrorist recruitment after the discovery of a cell involving foreign students.

The clerics interviewed by the visit team are faculty members of Islamic universities in Malaysia. One spoke in English and the other in Malay, with interpretation provided by an STF officer.

The former JI members are Malaysians who held senior positions in the group. One was a former JI Secretary-General who was on the run for six years (one-third of the time with Hambali) before surrendering to the STF from his hideout in South Asia. The other had been detained for a number of years in Singapore along with his brother and had undergone the Singapore terrorist rehabilitation program prior to deportation to Malaysia. The two interviewees were detained under

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<sup>11</sup> Statement by the Honorable Mr. Abdul Rahman Dahlan, Member of Parliament and Representative of Malaysia, on Agenda Item 107: Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism at the Sixth Committee of the 65th Session of the United Nation General Assembly, New York, October 5, 2010, <http://www.un.int/malaysia/GA/65/65unga02.pdf>.

the Malaysian Internal Security Act on their return to Malaysia, went through the Malaysian rehabilitation program, and, following their release, are now business entrepreneurs. They agreed to travel to STF headquarters to be interviewed by the Counter Narratives Study team visit team at the request of the Malaysian STF officers. They were interviewed separately but in each other's presence, and with STF officers looking on, occasionally helping with translations.

## +CVE Program

The STF revealed that from December 2001, when it started joint operations with the Singapore Internal Security Department, to November 1, 2011, Malaysia arrested a total of 203 militants, of which 106 were Malaysians. The foreigners were deported, five Malaysians were charged in court, and the remaining Malaysians were detained under the Internal Security Act for rehabilitation. By November 1, 2011, only six were left in detention. See table below for details.

Organization/Affiliation	Number arrested	Details
Jemaah Islamiyah	131	
Daru Islam	16	
Abu Sayyaf Group	7	ASG members who fled to Sabah and regrouped in hiding
Al-Qaeda	21	AQ cadres were recruiting and disseminating ideology
LTTE	7	LTTE members who fled from Sri Lanka or were procuring logistics in Malaysia
Other separatists using Malaysia as base	21	Includes 11 Uighurs escaping arrest and regrouping; the remainder were Mindanao rebels
<b>Total</b>	203	

Nationality	Number arrested	Details
Malaysian	106	5 were charged in court for false documentation: 3 have been released and 2 are pending trial
Foreign nationals	97	Deported to home country; the Uighurs were sent to China
<b>Total</b>	203	

The STF defines its counter-measures as:

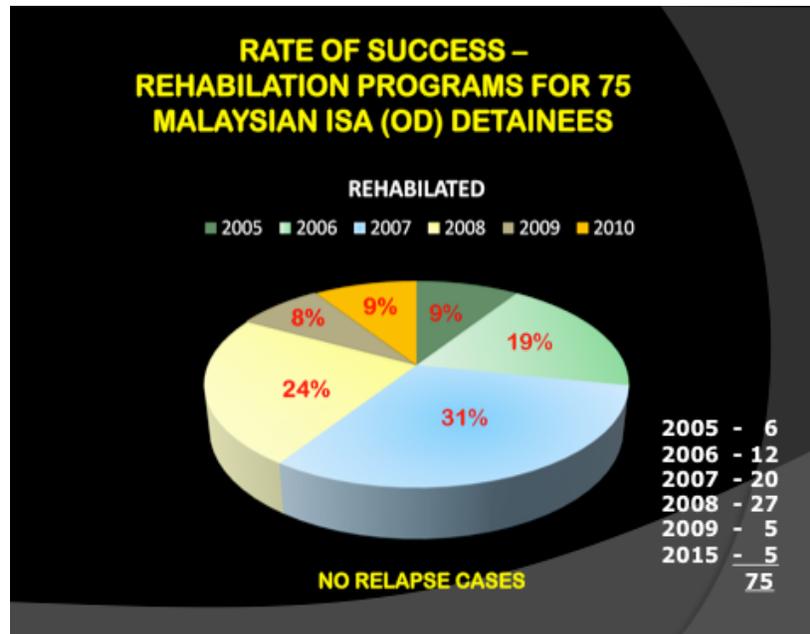
- +intelligence/arrest operations;
- +Special Rehabilitation Program (SRP);
- +Community Outreach Program/SREP;
- +close monitoring of remnants, ex-detainees, and other extreme religious activities;
- +de-radicalization Program/Identifying root causes.

It sees de-radicalization as persuading the militants to disengage. But there is also an ideological component, as the extremist ideas spread by the militants are deemed a threat to Malaysia's multicultural harmony.

The process of rehabilitation begins at the time of arrest. "How we handle him is important; first impressions count," said a program manager whom the Counter Narratives Study team interviewed.

The process ends when the detainee is prepared to tell "his community the government is not the enemy." The STF does not see the militants as the enemy, either. "They are lost" is the mantra. Success is when the detainee "says with tears, thank you for arresting me, sir."

Released detainees are encouraged to go back to their old jobs. “We appeal to the employer to take them back.” The first detainee releases took place in 2005, where 6 were considered successfully rehabilitated.



Source: Handout provided by Special Task Force for Operations and Counter-Terrorism, Royal Malaysian Police. (Shown as published. In addition to the misspellings, “2015” should be “2010.”)

The CVE program is run solely by the STF, although the Religious Affairs Department in the Prime Minister’s Office does send clerics to prison to preach to the detainees. An STF officer recounted, quite proudly, that when a UN investigator asked why the police (rather than the prisons) were in charge of the rehabilitation program, he was told that prison officials did not have the necessary in-depth knowledge of the detainees.

The STF said it developed its own rehabilitation model after studying the efforts of other countries and the lessons from Malaysia’s own past—the decades-long struggle against the

Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) from the 1960s to the late 1980s, when the CPM finally surrendered.

The current CVE program does “not cost a lot of money,” perhaps a few thousand Malaysian ringgit per seminar for food. (One thousand Malaysian ringgit is equivalent to \$323; expenditure for each seminar typically does not exceed \$3,000.) What it has are committed, good officers and volunteers, including police officers who act as facilitators. On release, the detainees return to their own homes. “We’re not Saudis,” said the STF deputy commander. “There is no resort.”

Non-governmental organizations are not involved in CVE because they are not prepared to accept the Internal Security Act, under which terrorist suspects are detained. As an STF officer said: “Our NGOs are opposed to what we do. We arrest in the morning. By afternoon, the bloggers are attacking us.” (Bowing to public pressure, and as noted above, the Malaysian government repealed the ISA in 2012.).

### **+The “De-radicalization Seminar”**

Detainees suspected of terrorist activity or involvement with terrorist groups are held in Kamunting Detention Center, run by the Malaysian Prison Service. STF officers “invite” up to 10 detainees at a time to a “seminar” in a separate and secluded location, where clerics and STF officers engage them in roundtable discussions for 10 to 12 days. The STF emphasized that these are dialogues and not lectures; detainees get lectures in prison from clerics sent by the Religious Affairs Department (JAKIM) of the Prime Minister’s office. In the STF’s view, such lectures “do not penetrate” and do not work.

The clerics who help the STF at the seminars are selected based on the level of ideological indoctrination of the detainees. The STF has found that clerics with *pondok*, a rural *madrassah*

(parochial school), understand JI culture. As a result, the detainees are more receptive to them. STF also uses university lecturers with theological backgrounds to engage with the detainees; their pragmatism makes them better counselors than clerics from the mosques are. Care is taken to ensure that they are not from foreign universities that espouse conflicting schools of Islamic thought (*fiqh*). Women *Asatidza* (instructors) appear to be well received. For detainees who refuse to speak to “government clerics,” those from the opposition PAS political party are brought in. “Our objective is to stop the violence,” explains a program manager who spoke of his efforts to placate detainees.

The clerics are important in countering JI’s deviations from the teachings of Ahlus-Sunnah Wal-Jamaah. Their approach is also conciliatory: They offer the detainees interpretations and evaluations of the Qur’an and explain that not everyone understands it, helping the detainees see that their previous religious teachers might have been misguided.

Ex-detainees are also engaged as lecturers. They are still “radical but are out of the circle of militancy,” stresses a program manager. Since the STF is both an intelligence agency and law enforcement, it can monitor these ex-detainees openly and covertly and so is confident they have not returned to espousing violence. Any former detainee suspected of trying to influence seminar participants to become more radical is immediately removed from the program and cut off. The STF revealed that JI has been trying to influence former members to “re-*bai’at*,” that is re-take their vows of allegiance to the group.

The STF also pays heed to JI’s hierarchical structure in choice of former detainees invited to speak at the seminars, avoiding situations where “younger members might challenge those who recruited them and ask, ‘Where are your principles?’” advised the program manager. Such challenges presumably upset the friendly atmosphere the STF strives to achieve during each seminar.

Counseling is conducted in groups, led by police officers trained as counselors. They invite the detainees to tell stories about themselves. They usually comply because they want early release.

The priority is disengagement, as “you can’t change minds overnight.” “We only have two, three weeks to change years of indoctrination,” the STF program manager explains. One analyst

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**During the de-radicalization seminar, the break periods are the most crucial, for this is the time when detainees are more susceptible to approaches by STF officers.**

estimated that it would take six to eight years of counseling to change the minds of hard-core militants. The STF case officers and clerics thus focus on building rapport with the detainees and attempt to “make them ashamed” of their previous activities. Each detainee generally goes through several seminars.

For example, an STF officer recounted how a hard-core detainee named Dr. Abdullah Daud, a former geological professor who taught at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Skudai, Johor, refused to engage for the first six years he was under detention. STF sent a younger officer to sit down with him. Somehow they built a rapport, “like father and son.” To this day, Daud, now released, still looks for the STF officer whenever he is in Kuala Lumpur.

During the de-radicalization seminar, the break periods are the most crucial, for this is the time when detainees are more susceptible to approaches by STF officers. Everything counts—new clothes, food. STF also lends the detainees cell phones to call their wives and provides them with new clothes and trims their beards for family visits, telling them “to look good for their wives.” Case

officers eat with detainees and their families at the end of each visit, “eating like a family and carrying their babies.” Detainees with more than one wife are allowed separate visits with each.

The hand of friendship helps build trust. “They give their word they won’t reengage. They’re like our students,” says the program manager.

Trust, of course, only goes so far. Each detainee has to pass a polygraph test before he is released “to ensure he’s not saying whatever to get release.” STF tries to ask questions respectfully, couching them in the form of “have you done anything that will upset your mother?”

Some detainees volunteer new information during the test, such as where guns have been hidden, to ensure their release. Case officers familiar with the history and habits of individual detainees are involved in the release decisions.

### **+After Release Program**

Thereafter, STF engages in covert monitoring but is careful not to interfere in the lives of the former detainees. Some detainees openly tell the STF officers, “Don’t change my beliefs.” But because of the rapport established by the officers, the detainees promise that they will no longer engage in violence. As one officer puts it, “That is good enough for us.”

But at the same time, “whatever promises they make, we take with a pinch of salt,” related an STF program manager. STF’s optimism is tempered by three factors—the *bai’at* that the detainee swore to JI, the influence of the Internet, and the open nature of Malaysia, where borders are quite porous.

The STF admits that it is dependent on former detainees to provide intelligence on those trying to revive JI. Case officers continue engaging with released detainees through phone calls and regular meetings.

STF also holds reunion gatherings, “like alumni.” But it “invites” the former detainees instead of issuing warrants to appear. Says a program manager: “As Asians, we have a culture of

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The STF strategy is to make the released detainees ‘depend on us’ instead of their former network.

obliging friends. When someone is invited, he says, ‘*Inshallah*’ (If God wills it) but doesn’t mean he will come. So respect is important. Sincerity plays a very important role, too. There is a proper way of doing things.”

The STF strategy is to make the released detainees “depend on us” instead of their former network. “We’re their family and friends. When there is death or sickness in the family, we come. We give them money. If we don’t help them, someone else will,” said the program manager. If former detainees cannot find jobs, STF appeals to their former employers to rehire them.

This post-release care program may have helped convince other JI members to come forward voluntarily. These “remnants,” says the STF, fear being arrested, presumably on information provided by grateful former detainees.

### **+Community Outreach Program**

Outreach is comprised primarily of school talks, to sensitize students to the dangers of radicalization. The STF says they do not counter JI’s religious narratives during such talks because most students do not know the Qur’an well enough to understand how far JI has strayed from mainstream interpretations. Instead speakers focus on the process JI uses to radicalize and recruit.

They warn students against accepting invitations to private Qur'an study sessions such as *usroh* and *taklim*.

The domestic media is also beginning to give good accounts of the work done by STF, helping it explain to the community the work it does to counter security threats to Malaysia.

## COUNTERING THE JI NARRATIVE

### +Why they joined JI

Both of the former detainees interviewed by the visit team said they found the JI organization attractive because they wanted to help Muslims who were being killed in other countries and JI gave them a way to do so. Their entry paths were distinctive, but they both acknowledged that they were not well schooled in Islamic teachings and accepted uncritically JI's use of religious verses to justify its violence.

Former detainee Faiz Abu Bakar Bafana said he did not set out to join a terrorist group. He was led into JI because he took religious classes run by JI and found attractive its interpretations of how Muslims should practice Islam according to the *Sunnah*, the way of the Prophet. He recruited his own brother into JI, along with 30 others.

Former detainee Zulkifli Marzuki's business partner was close to JI leader Hambali, who asked him to join the group. Marzuki knew that JI was a "*mujahidin* organization that had been involved in the Afghan war and was linked to other organizations in South Thailand and the Philippines." A former army reservist, he admired the *mujahidin* for being "gentlemanly" in fighting the enemy face-to-face. He was flattered when Hambali and other JI leaders asked him to apply his business skills to set up front companies for the network. "They approached me because they could

see I'm honest and hardworking. They said that as an accountant and businessman, I have good financial ability and can help them manage JI as it grows.”

Marzuki justified his decision to join JI in more noble terms: JI “had plans to solve the problems of Muslims.” He explained: “The most important factor is that the world is not fair to Muslims. In Palestine, Thailand, Philippines, the TV and newspapers show how Muslims are dying every day. In Gaza and Bosnia, too. Why are we not helping the Thais or the Filipinos? When it happened to Christians like in East Timor, the world reacted and helped them to get independence. It made me angry and frustrated. Joining JI was a chance to help them.”

Marzuki was given a “very fast promotion” to Secretary-General of JI within months.

When JI began sending members to Afghanistan for training, they were told it was to prepare for jihad and that this was sanctioned by hadiths. It was the best part of being in JI for Bafana—going for training missions. “I felt I was doing something for my religion, to go to the front with the *mujahidin* and carry arms. The feeling of being part of a brotherhood was very strong.”

When JI began to plan bombings, neither Bafana nor Marzuki questioned the decisions. Marzuki had by then decided that bombings were justified.

According to Bafana: “I didn't really think about the laws in Islam, but the people were attacking Muslims and so it was right to attack them. We didn't bother to check if it was allowed by Islamic law, the Shariah. It was about anger and revenge.”

It was only in detention (in Singapore) that he began to ponder his religious beliefs. “They asked me, ‘Why do all this [violence]?’ I said they're killing Muslims. We must retaliate. They said, ‘You're not killing the perpetrators but people in the street.’ This triggered my thinking.”

He began to read Islamic books and learned that jihad was permissible only under certain conditions and that it had a wider meaning. JI had selectively used religious verses to teach him that

jihad was compulsory, that they were always at *qital* (war). “JI comes up with these verses and fails to show us the other parts that contain injunctions.”

He had hitherto never challenged the JI teachings. “They brought in *ustadz* [a religion instructor] for me to check my beliefs. They asked me questions. Is it Islamic to put bombs in a supermarket, to kill old ladies? What if one of them is your mother? I realized that in Islam, we are not allowed to kill women and children except in war zones. We are not in a war zone. I pondered and came to the conclusion that these actions were against religion. They must stop.”

Bafana then began to cooperate fully with the security authorities to stop the violence.

Marzuki fled to Thailand with Hambali when the Singapore and Malaysian crackdown on JI began in late 2001. After five years on the run, he began to have regrets. “I started thinking I had a good family, business. I killed people but we were not military. I had made a big mistake.”

Marzuki also feared that if he were captured, he might end up in Guantanamo Bay. In 2005, he contacted his family to arrange his surrender to the Malaysian police. His ex-business partner gave him the name of a Malaysian Special Branch officer to contact. After accepting MSB’s terms of surrender, he returned to Malaysia a year later.

His message for those on the verge of joining JI? “Think fast. There are many channels to express your unhappiness to the government or the UN. You still have a chance to change the world without violence.”

## **+Giving Them a Second Chance**

Former detainee Bafana offered a counter-narrative when asked why he was prepared to help the Malaysian police in rehabilitating detained terrorists. The actions of JI “helped tarnish the image of Islam when they were supposed to be upholding religion.” He wanted to tell people that JI’s actions were wrong because he did not want Muslims to be looked at as terrorists. Even if people

were angry at the United States, it was wrong to take up arms. He had made a mistake and did not want his children to repeat it.

Now a successful businessman with a family, he knew he had been given a second chance at life and believed other extremists deserved it, too. “We have been detained and punished. Give us a second chance to come back to the people. Allow us to be loved and guided. We’ll appreciate the kindness.”

This notion of a second chance is what rehabilitation is about, the clerics said. “Even the bad ones still have a sense of humanity. Look at them as humans with potential to repent and turn back,” said one cleric. “Tell them they have a second chance to go back.”

It is also important to deconstruct their ideology because they have absorbed very radical interpretations of jihad. “They’re willing to sacrifice their lives. They have no fear of death and are very sincere in waiting for heaven. They don’t realize they’ve deviated far,” the cleric adds. He believes it is impossible to completely abolish their beliefs but that it is possible to “corrode” them by opening them up to other perspectives.

More importantly, clerics have to replace the extremist mind-set with new ideas. “They have one-track minds. It is very difficult to show them other tracks. But you can’t have a vacuum.” He advised continuous education to help strengthen their understanding of Islam.

The religious reeducation is important because only religious issues have been exploited for violence, not social or political issues, says the STF.

But there is a political plank to the JI narrative, which claims that the Malaysian government is not Muslim but infidel because it works with the coalition partners. The STF officers thus use their dialogue sessions with the detainees to show them that the Malaysian police are

championing the cause of Muslims. They also explain to the detainees and their spouses why their actions are of a security concern.

But one issue remains intractable—Palestine. “We can discuss religion but we cannot deal with the hatred. When they bring up Palestine, we say it’s another country, a foreign policy issue. But we cannot reduce the hatred unless we reduce the fire on this issue.”

## **+Lessons Learned**

The STF explains its underlying counter-narrative strategy as three-pronged:

- +Don’t go directly into counter-radicalization; an indirect and gradual approach will improve the likelihood of eventual and continued participation.
- +Talk about assisting the people rather than the menace of terrorism.
- +Increase faith in the government—point out changes the government is making.

The main assumption: “If they don’t even like you, they won’t listen to you.”

But there is an implicit understanding that the STF cannot change the radical mind-set of those in their custody, especially given the public pressure to release all detainees with the repeal of the Internal Security Act. The main concession the STF seeks is that the detainees do not mount attacks in Malaysia. As one STF official says he tells the detainees: “Malaysia is not under attack. Palestine is. So go die in Palestine.”

Close monitoring thus is the most important element of the program. The STF says it gets its best intelligence from released detainees, especially those with reputations as being hard-core.

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# INDONESIA

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## +Background

When the Southeast Asia team visited Jakarta in August 2010 for the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) I study, the Indonesian President had just issued an executive decree to establish the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT), with a mandate to focus on “coordinating prevention and implementing activities to counter radical ideological propaganda and coordinating implementation of de-radicalization,” among other objectives.<sup>12</sup> In an interview at his office a month later, the designated BNPT Chairman, Inspector-General (Retired) Ansyaad Mbai, emphasized the importance of amending Indonesia’s legal framework to criminalize terrorist support activities, such as paramilitary training and encouragement of terrorist acts, through sermons, books, magazines, and the Internet. Indonesia was already using a counterterrorism strategy that simultaneously employed the “harsh action” of law enforcement, including use of deadly force if encountering armed resistance, with the “soft approach” of de-radicalization and counter-radicalization, with mixed results. The government’s efforts were not fully effective, he said, because of “sympathizers from within the government bureaucracy” who were not convinced radicalization and terrorism posed a threat to Indonesia, and turf wars between the military, intelligence, and police services.<sup>13</sup> The BNPT was expected to overcome the functional stovepipes and develop a national program of de-radicalization and counter-radicalization. (Regarding de-radicalization and counter-radicalization, the officials interviewed used the two terms

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<sup>12</sup> Article 3, Regulation of the President of the Republic of Indonesia No. 46 Year, 2010, Concerning National Counter-Terrorism Agency, issued July 16, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Site Visit Team, Jakarta, August 31, 2010.

interchangeably. Generally, officials used “de-radicalization” in the context of continuing and expanding on the program started by the Indonesian police to convince terrorist suspects to cooperate with them and to abandon terrorism. Counter-radicalization, in the most consistent context, referred to the wider efforts to prevent terrorist recruitment and radicalization. However,

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**His plan was to concentrate on four areas—reeducation, rehabilitation, reintegration, and resocialization.**

some officials also use the term de-radicalization here because they believe certain segments of the community have already been radicalized and require reeducation to bring them back to more mainstream views).

When the Counter Narratives Study team revisited Jakarta on November 3–4, 2011, the BNPT had just appointed its first Director for De-radicalization, Prof. Irfan Idris. He said his plan was to concentrate on four areas—reeducation, rehabilitation, reintegration, and resocialization—enlisting the help of religious clerics and Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has 45 million members. He already had “eight success stories”; eight NGOs were running various de-radicalization programs financed by the BNPT.

A promising start to the BNPT’s efforts had begun with the agency signing a de-radicalization agreement with NU in August 2011. Former NU chairman Hasyim Muzadi told the media he fully backed the government’s de-radicalization plan, as it could help reject the ideology that supported terrorism. “We are targeting two main groups. The first will be how to prevent the

silent majority from being influenced by radical ideas. The second one will be inviting all the radical figures to an open discussion about their ideas of Islam and jihad, for example,” he said.<sup>14</sup>

But it remained unclear if the BNPT had a coherent game plan or the wherewithal to carry one out. At the time of our second visit, it had only 37 staff when, said Ambassador Harry Purwanto, the Deputy for International Cooperation, the establishment strength called for 1,200.

Sidney Jones of the International Crisis Group told the visit team that none of the de-radicalization programs financed by the BNPT were required to meet any benchmarks or evaluation metrics. One program consisted of teaching the “Afghan veterans”—those who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan—how to do *dakwah* (missionary work). She was told that several of these Afghan veterans joined the program for the monthly stipend of 1.5 million rupiah (about \$155). Another program staged *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) performances in prisons to help terrorist inmates connect with Indonesian cultural traditions, which emphasize tolerance as they mix mysticism with faith. Jones suggested that Indonesian clerics might hesitate to work with the BNPT for semantic reasons. For example, clerics from Muhammadiyah, Indonesia’s second largest Islamic organization, with about 25 million members, objected to the term “de-radicalization” because their job was to urge people to be radical in defense of their faith. Being “radical” was not bad; Islamic radicalism has historically been associated with modernist and purist Islamic groups like Muhammadiyah in Indonesia.<sup>15</sup>

Standing up BNPT also appeared to have the unintended consequence of diverting resources from the Indonesian police’s ongoing rehabilitation work among captured terrorists. Detachment 88’s visionary chief, Brigadier-General Tito Karnavian, was promoted to a new role as Deputy for Action Enforcement and Capacity Building at BNPT, while a military general with no

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<sup>14</sup> Dicky Christianto, “BNPT Signs Deradicalization Agreement with Islamic Organizations,” *Jakarta Post*, August 11, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Pradana Boy ZTF, “Muhammadiyah and Radicalism: Relationships and Intersections,” *Jakarta Post*, November 20, 2012.

prior experience working with terrorists was made Deputy for Prevention, Protection and De-radicalization. Detachment 88's terrorist de-radicalization program, always dependent on individual officers acting largely on their own initiative, slowed down. Nor, it appeared, was there any improvement in interagency cooperation, leading a senior Detachment 88 officer to publicly complain in September 2012 that efforts to prevent future terrorist attacks were being hindered because "there is no sharing . . . [or] coordination [with other agencies] from the beginning." Of the 755 individuals convicted of terrorism, 23 had been caught re-offending, showing that rehabilitation programs in prison needed improvement, he said.<sup>16</sup>

Amid these rumblings of concern that BNPT was not making progress, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono tasked Vice President Boediono to oversee the coordination of counterterrorism programs, particularly the drafting of a national counter-radicalization plan. The Vice President chaired his first coordination meeting with several cabinet ministers in September 2012, where BNPT Chairman Ansyaad Mbai reportedly said he planned to involve 24 government agencies, religious organizations, universities, and NGOs in the national de-radicalization plan. Emphasis will be on the delinking of religion and violence; "the program should not have religious connotation, because radicalization can happen in any religion," his superior, the Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law, and Security, was also cited as saying.<sup>17</sup> An aide to the Vice President subsequently told a member of the Counter Narratives Study team that a committee was studying models in other countries and that Indonesia's national de-radicalization plan would be ready sometime in the first quarter of 2013.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, there has been some work in promoting counter-narratives. The BNPT has through 2012 been pushing reeducation in the religious schools. According to news reports, the

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<sup>16</sup> Pia Ackerman, "Jakarta Hindered on Terrorism," *The Australian*, September 28, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> "Extending the Deradicalization Program through the Entire Community Life: Government Sets Up National Counter Radicalization Program," *Berita Wapres* (News from the Vice President's Office), September 10, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Conversation with the Vice President's Senior Foreign Policy Adviser, Jakarta, October 11, 2012.

BNPT sees reeducation as providing “additional training to make students aware of any misleading religious doctrine or incorrect interpretation of the holy Qur’an or any religious holy book.” One Islamic boarding school in Java (they are called *pesantren*) publicly announced that it was making such de-radicalization training mandatory.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the support for the government’s efforts has to do with fears by the more traditionalist and syncretic groups like NU that radical ideas are encroaching on their constituencies and damaging their reputations. According to an *NU Online* news article, in September 2012, members of NU attacked a Shiite community in Sampang after a prominent NU member used a mosque loudspeaker to encourage local people to attack the Shiite students and teachers.<sup>20</sup>

But when the BNPT’s Prof. Irfan Idris proposed government certification of *ulema* (religious teachers) to weed out radical preachers, following a practice in Singapore, the idea was immediately rejected by NU, whose current Chairman accused the government of overstepping its authority. According to Said Aqil Siroj, “Terrorism is not rooted in Islamic culture. So if terrorists exist, it is not solely because of the *ulema* lacking in promoting religious de-radicalization.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Yenny Herawati, “Madium Embraces Deradicalisation: Religious Schools in the East Java City Move to Combat Extremist Ideologies and Misinterpretations of Islam,” *Khabar Southeast Asia*, October 2, 2012, [http://khabarsoutheastasia.com/en\\_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2012/10/02/feature-03](http://khabarsoutheastasia.com/en_GB/articles/apwi/articles/features/2012/10/02/feature-03).

<sup>20</sup> “NU Rejects Ulema Certification Idea,” *NU Online*, September 11, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> “Nahlatul Ulama Spurn Idea of Ulema Certification,” *Jakarta Globe*, September 10, 2012.

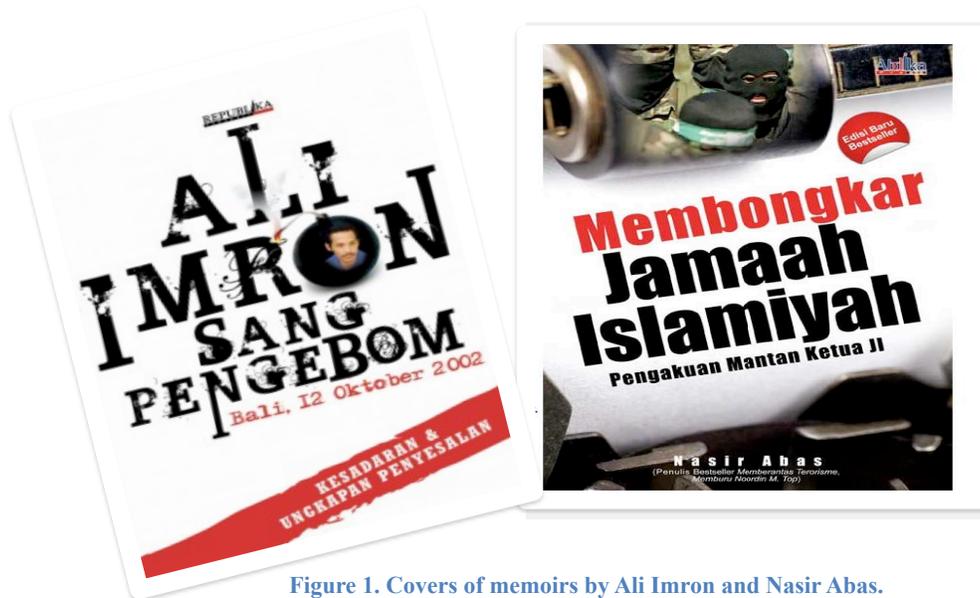


Figure 1. Covers of memoirs by Ali Imron and Nasir Abas.

Indeed, the Indonesian police appear to believe that convicted terrorists have a useful role to play in promoting counter-narratives. During our November 2011 visit, we also flew to Medan to interview a jailed religious cleric, Ustadz Khairul Ghazali, who had published a book, *Robbery Is Not Fa'i*, refuting the religious arguments used by extremists to justify the robbing of banks and jewelry shops as *fa'i* (spoils of war) to finance their “jihadist operations.” Ghazali had been arrested following a violent bank heist in Medan in 2010 by a group of his followers. When the Indonesian police manhunt resulted in the killing of several of the robbers and their planners, one “jihadist” group attacked a police station in revenge, triggering a cascade of raids and counter-attacks as the extremist movement labeled the police *thagut*, or evil, to justify their violence. Ghazali’s second book, *They Are Not the Cause of Evil*, earned a swift rebuke from the leading extremist ideologue, Aman Abdurrahman, who also published a monograph from prison titled *Yes, Indeed, They Are Thagut (the Cause of Evil)*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “Ya—mereka memang thaghut: bantahan atas manipulasi dan fitnah Khairul Ghazali dalam bukunya *Mereka bukan thagut*.” (Yes—They Are Evil: Counter-Manipulation and Slander Khairul Ghazali in His Book *They Are Not the Cause of Evil*.)

The Counter Narratives Study team also reinterviewed Ali Imron and Nasir Abas, whose lives, and regrets, were featured in graphic novels published by an NGO sponsored by a retired Detachment 88 chief.

## +The Second Visit

The Counter Narratives Study team Southeast Asia visit to Indonesia took place November 3–5, 2011. In Jakarta, the team interviewed Prof. Irfan Idris, Director for De-radicalization at the BNPT; Ambassador Harry Purwanto, the BNPT Deputy for International Cooperation; Nugroho Wahyujatmiko, Chairman of the Lazuardi Birru Foundation; Sidney Jones of the International

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Each former said that, following his arrest by the Indonesian police, he had time to reflect on the real meaning of jihad and had learned that his faith did not justify the violence.

Crisis Group; and former JI leaders Nasir Abas and Ali Imron. The interviews were conducted using a semistructured questionnaire and also informally. Imron, who is serving a life sentence for his part in the 2002 Bali bombing, was interviewed in a conference room at the Central Jakarta Police Detention Centre in the presence of Detachment 88 officials. He spoke in Indonesian, with Nasir Abas interpreting.

In Medan, the team interviewed Ustadz Khairul Ghazali in his cell in the South Medan police station lock-up in the presence of the local Detachment 88 Medan unit chief, who also provided an interpreter. Ghazali is serving a five-year prison term for involvement in the Medan

bank robbery in 2010. (He claimed that the robbers were his students but that he was not personally involved in the crime.)

Abas, Imron and Ghazali all agreed to the videotaping of their interviews.

## **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

It is noteworthy that during the interviews with the three former/detained terrorist leaders and ideologues (for the rest of this chapter, they will be referred to as “formers”), each spontaneously declared that he had a “personal responsibility” to correct the misinterpretations of Islam held by extremists. Each former said that, following his arrest by the Indonesian police, he had had time to reflect on the real meaning of jihad and had learned that his faith *did not justify the violence*. Each man said that, having changed his mind, he felt a need to lead others to the correct path.

As Ghazali, who considers himself a religious scholar, put it: “As such, I am responsible to guide those in the wrong, who had spread the wrong message to the community, to be led to the correct path. . . . The number of terrorists or those with terrorist mind-set is not large and there are only a few. But these few are the ones who destroy the image of Islam. . . . I am made the enemy by the other radicalized terrorists after I’ve chosen to return to the correct Islamic path. They consider me as a usurper who leaked their secrets. In actual fact, I want to return them to the correct path.”

Ali Imron, who proudly noted that telling his life story to other detained terrorist suspects had helped them change their minds and agree to cooperate with the police, explained his obligation: “We all have responsibility to do de-radicalization, personally or as a group, to help the police develop a program to de-radicalize people.”

Nasir Abas, a former Jemaah Islamiyah Mantiqi III leader from Malaysia who now moves freely through Indonesia, went further by calling on the Indonesian government to do more to involve the community in countering extremism: “The [party with the] most responsibility to do de-

radicalization is not the government but the community. . . . The government makes the strategy, but each of us has a personal responsibility. No budget? We do it voluntarily. The priority must be to prevent the young from becoming radicalized and to work on the ex-combatants.”

This community involvement is particularly important because he sees the nature of the extremist threat as shifting from violence carried out by a well-organized group like Noordin Top’s (a master planner killed by Indonesian police in 2009), to self-radicalized individuals planting bombs they learned to make from Internet recipes. These individuals were getting their “ideological education from the Internet and listening to Aman Abdurrahman, who preaches that the government is the enemy and Muslims who are not with them are *takfir* [exposed as apostates].”

Jl’s narrative justifies violence against the West by arguing that “the West created and brought systems that are destroying the values of Islam,” explained Ustadz Ghazali. “Many people in Indonesia believe the West controls the world. The West controls the economy, the politics. As such, all Westerners should be annihilated and never be allowed to step foot in Muslim countries, like Indonesia.”

Why have the Indonesian government, especially the police, been labeled *thagut* and a target for the terrorists? This is because, said Ghazali, “the Indonesian government, which is pro-Western countries, came up with laws and policies to attract the Westerners, as they bring investment, ideas, money, etc., to Indonesia. So the Indonesian government has a hand in bringing in the Westerners. Initially, only the Westerners are killed. Later on, the Indonesian government, [which] is seen to be collaborating with the West, is also targeted. Destroyed. The police, too.”

The most effective counter-narrative, the three formers said, was made up of their life stories, which tell how they became involved in terrorist activity, killed for a flawed belief system based on wrong interpretations of their faith, and now regret the deaths they caused. There was no

point banning books advocating extremism, Abas added. They would only become “instant bestsellers,” hawked by peddlers on the streets.

Nasir Abas, who has written a memoir, in the form of a comic book, called *Inside Jamaah Islamiyah*, said he initially resisted the idea of a graphic novel as “shameful.” The idea originated with NGO Lazuardi Birru, an NGO dedicated to countering terrorist propaganda through social media as well as traditional publications. He was asked to use his transformation from Afghan-trained militant to police ally as a lesson for the young against extremism. Despite his initial reservations, he agreed when “they said it was important because I’m an ex-JI and am asking people not to engage in violence. The comic book would be suitable for youth since I was myself recruited at 16 years old.”

Titled *I Found the Meaning of Jihad*, the book also tells the stories of bomb victims and suicide bombers. “They make people think of the effect of the bomb, creating sympathy for the victims, and show them the sorrow of the parents of the suicide bomber.” Abas was particularly proud that the novel shows the respectful treatment he received in jail, particularly from the Detachment 88 unit chief, a police general. “He is Christian, my enemy, yet he treated me well. The book shows readers that we can understand Christians. We can sit down with Christians.”

Ambassador Harry Purwanto of BNPT agreed that formers were most effective at promoting counter-narratives because they knew how to talk to extremists. “How do we counter-narrative? Can we speak the language of the terrorists? They are more likely to listen to someone who was once one of them than someone from the outside.”

A message the government can send is that people can do whatever they want through political avenues but not through violence.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The idea for the comic books featuring Ali Imron and Nasir Abas came to Nugroho Wahyujatmiko after he read the graphic adaptation of the 9/11 Commission Report. Focus groups run by Lazuardi Birru showed that younger Indonesians loved websites and comics as much as they

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**By disseminating the terrorist message, the mainstream media created the impression to the silent majority that the extremists represented mainstream thinking.**

liked listening to the radio at night. His foundation could not compete with the extremist websites, which were very popular because they used games to encourage shooting at the police, came out with e-books regularly, and offered DVDs of “jihad operations” in the Middle East with Indonesian subtitles. They were not only technologically more sophisticated, but their creators also used their expertise of Islam to mislead “more convincingly.”

Lazuardi Birru had no parameters for measuring how effective comics would be in promoting counter-narratives but decided to go ahead with funding from Detachment 88.

If Nasir Abas’s children are any indication, the colorful comic books do appeal to the young. His children were not interested in reading his memoir because it had no illustrations. But “all my four kids quarreled among themselves to be the first to read the comic when I brought home a draft,” he said. “They say to me, I know your past now. You’ve been in jail.” His children brought the novel to school to share with their friends.

It starts with scenes of *mujahidin* fighters armed only with assault rifles facing off against tanks in the Afghan desert. The danger now perhaps is that without parental guidance, younger readers of these comic books might identify more with Nasir Abas, the Afghan mujahidin and jungle fighter, than with Nasir Abas, the remorseful former terrorist.

Distributing the graphic novels has, however, been challenging for Lazuardi Birru. It originally planned to mail 20,000 copies to schools across Indonesia. But when several book bombs were discovered, the packages were intercepted by the police. The distributor declined to handle the books.

But the comic books as well as Ghazali's prison books attracted publicity. One outlet dubbed Nasir Abas "Captain Jihad." The counterreaction from the extremist movement has been swift. As Abas put it, "The extremists call the de-jihad programs a new program to intimidate Muslims to move away from Islam, to make Muslims disappear from Indonesia. We must act now, they say."

Compared to the mainstream media, the extremist websites have devoted considerably more space to covering BNPT de-radicalization seminars and the Ghazali book launches. Ghazali's arguments have been declared flawed, his motives questioned since he appeared at the book launches with police escorts. Yet, while he is not considered significant in jihadi circles, none other than Aman Abdurrahman, perhaps the most influential jihadi ideologue in Indonesia today, has written a rebuttal. Aman's monograph was translated into English within days of its launch and available for download from a website hosted in Australia. Ghazali's books, not particularly well written in Indonesian, have yet to be translated into English.

Does the media have a role to play in educating the public? Amb. Harry Purwanto noted that the mainstream media used to play up the comments of extremist ideologues. By disseminating the terrorist message, they created the impression to the silent majority that the extremists represented mainstream thinking. "But now people are fed up and have the courage to speak out."

As the government stepped up its counter-radicalization campaign, perhaps it was time not to blame the media but to encourage it to educate readers, he said.

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# SINGAPORE

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## +Background

The QIASS Countering Violent Extremism Study team first studied the Singapore terrorist rehabilitation program in 2010<sup>23</sup> and found its integrated approach to be “the gold standard.”<sup>24</sup>

A fully developed, multifaceted, resource-intensive risk reduction program for militant detainees, it is aimed at de-radicalizing individuals committed to radical Islam and engaged in some level of terrorist-related behavior. Their rehabilitation is planned along three core components—psychological, social, and religious—and involves not only government officials but also volunteer social and religious networks. Over 10 years, more than two-thirds of the 64 individuals detained preventively under Singapore’s Internal Security Act for terrorist activity have been through this rehabilitation program, and released,<sup>25</sup> usually on two-year supervised probation periods called Restriction Orders (ROs).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See QIASS, *Risk Reduction for Countering Violent Extremism: An Explorative Review* (Doha, 2010), 11–17.

<sup>24</sup> Zakir Hussain, “Report Lifts Veil on Life of Terror Detainees: Singapore’s Structured Rehab Plan Presented at Interpol Meeting,” *The Straits Times*, November 9, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs Committee of Supply Debate 2013—Speech by Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Teo Chee Hean: “Working Together to Keep Singapore Safe and Secure,” March 7, 2013, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4Mg%3d%3d-CJpKCAKXpRc%3d](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4Mg%3d%3d-CJpKCAKXpRc%3d).

<sup>26</sup> A person issued with a Restriction Order (RO) must abide by several conditions and restrictions. For example, he is not permitted to change his residence or employment, or travel out of Singapore, without the prior approval of the Director of the Internal Security Department (ISD). The individual issued with RO also cannot issue public statements, address public meetings, or print, distribute, contribute to or be involved in any publication, duplicate or disseminate any audio or video recording, hold office in, or be a member of any organization, association, or group without the prior approval of the Director of ISD. He must also report to ISD at specified times and dates and present himself for counseling and/or interviews as required by the Director of ISD. He may be re-detained should he fail to respect these conditions and restrictions. Source: Singapore Government press release, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=MTc0Nw%3D%3D-b%2BFxqAGHGA0%3D](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=MTc0Nw%3D%3D-b%2BFxqAGHGA0%3D).

Controlled by the Internal Security Department (ISD), which has primary responsibility for neutralizing terrorist threats to Singapore, the program operates independently of but in tandem with conventional intelligence-led and target-hardening antiterrorism measures and nationwide resilience-building activities. It enjoys significant political support at the highest level of government, which is parleyed into budgetary support and active involvement by community leaders.

There is no expectation, however, that every militant can be rehabilitated, much less de-radicalized. As the then director of the ISD told the CVE team during the 2010 site visit, the end goal is not “rehabilitation per se to release” the detainees. The mission is “to keep Singapore and Singaporeans safe from terrorism.”<sup>27</sup>

Detainees can choose to refuse to participate in the program, in which case they are considered “hard-core” and will be detained for as long as they are deemed to be a risk to society. A few of these “hard-core” militants have been detained since January 2002.

In one case, an individual released on RO supervision after three years of detention was re-arrested in September 2012 “for planning to take up arms against the foreign military presence in places that included Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Syria.”<sup>28</sup>

This case of recidivism is not seen to be a program failure but an anticipated risk that ISD ameliorates through close post-release supervision. Said Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean when he informed Parliament of the re-arrest of Abdul Basheer in March 2013:<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Interviewed in Singapore, August 24, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Singaporean government press release on Further Detention and Releases under the Internal Security Act, March 7, 2013, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4MA%3d%3d-IIG2pLH5sw%3d](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4MA%3d%3d-IIG2pLH5sw%3d).

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs Committee of Supply Debate 2013—Speech by Deputy Prime Minister, Coordinating Minister for National Security and Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Teo Chee Hean: “Working Together to Keep Singapore Safe and Secure,” March 7, 2013, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4Mg%3d%3d-CJpkCAKXpRc%3d](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=Mjc4Mg%3d%3d-CJpkCAKXpRc%3d).

Abdul Basheer is a timely reminder that Singapore must continue to invest efforts in the rehabilitation of our terrorist detainees. Since January 2002, 64 persons have been detained under the ISA for their involvement in terrorism-related activities. Of these 64, more than two-thirds have been released after they were assessed to have been rehabilitated and not to pose a security threat that warranted preventive detention. This is why the work of the Religious Rehabilitation Group in counseling the detainees is so important and must continue.

A Singaporean, Basheer has been described as “a self-radicalized individual . . . who initially made some progress in reintegrating into society after his release from detention.” While on RO supervision, he was “detected to have reverted to his earlier interest of undertaking militant jihad abroad” and re-arrested when he began making queries as to how he could leave Singapore illegally to pursue such plans.<sup>30</sup>

The initial Basheer case underscored for the Singapore authorities the threat of self-radicalization leading to terrorist activity. Indeed, senior government leaders have been warning since 2007 of the emergence of “a new breed of terrorists—those who self-radicalize.”<sup>31</sup> Until then, the major focus of security action, and the risk reduction program, was to disrupt and neutralize Jemaah Islamiyah, which had planned to carry out several suicide attacks in Singapore in 2001.

In an April 2007 speech, then Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng provided this definition of self-radicalized individuals:

These individuals are not directly recruited by terrorist groups, but obtain their ideology and skills from radical books as well as extremist websites. They are bound to other terrorists

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<sup>30</sup> Singaporean government press release on Further Detention and Releases under the Internal Security Act, March 7, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> ISD’s Intelligence Service Promotion Ceremony—Speech by Mr. Wong Kan Seng, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, April 9, 2007, [http://www.mha.gov.sg/news\\_details.aspx?nid=NTA2-bGv3a7NWYz8%3d](http://www.mha.gov.sg/news_details.aspx?nid=NTA2-bGv3a7NWYz8%3d).

by a common ideology rather than organizationally. As such, they tend to be “homegrown,” self-funded, and operate independently. In this way, they leave few footprints and tell-tale signs for intelligence agencies. They are difficult to detect, and typically surface on the security radar only when or just before they carry out their attacks.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, he added, countering the appeal of extremist narratives is beyond the ability of the government alone: “The internet, for example, is replete with extremist websites that are radicalizing a new generation of terrorists. But in countering the ideology, intelligence and security agencies have less of a role to play than the Muslim community itself.”<sup>33</sup>

This emphasis on countering self-radicalization is a corollary of the successful efforts by Southeast Asian governments—viz. Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore—to dismantle the JI network. With JI now unable to operate in Singapore itself, its recruitment and indoctrination mechanisms can no longer trawl for susceptible individuals within Singapore. The threat is thus perceived to emanate largely from the Internet and its unending source of terrorist propaganda and narratives designed to attract individuals such as Abdul Basheer, who are seeking to understand their role as religious persons living in a secular society.

Basheer, arrested in a Middle East country en route to joining the Laskar e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist group in Pakistan for training, and deported to Singapore, was the first self-radicalized extremist to be detained by the ISD. Since then, seven other self-radicalized individuals have been arrested. Three were issued detention orders, while the other four were released on ROs. Several other youths referred confidentially by members of the public have also been interviewed, found to still be in the nascent stages of radicalization, and thus not arrested but referred for counseling.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Basheer's reengagement with extremist ideologies and renewed interest in violent action within twenty months of his release raises questions as to whether a set of program interventions designed to de-radicalize someone who went through the JI indoctrination process can work on "self-radicalized" individuals. Those introduced to militant Islam by JI believe that the pledge of loyalty they give their group leader makes him the ultimate arbiter of religious doctrine. Break that hold and you break the individual's adherence to the JI belief system—this idea formed the basic premise of ISD's rehabilitation program in the early years: to unlock the pledge that the JI detainees considered sacrosanct. It was believed that only religious scholars could convince the JI detainees of the error of their beliefs. The early successes of the first few religious clerics led to the formation of the RRG.

Self-radicalized individuals, by definition, have no group loyalties to break down.

## **+Narratives and Counter-Narratives**

As the major terrorist threat to Singapore emanates from extremists who use religion to justify violence, security officials say it is only prudent to have religious clerics provide the counter-narratives. Religious counseling within the Singapore terrorist rehabilitation program is carried out solely by volunteer religious clerics who collectively form the Religious Rehabilitation Group. The clerics meet detainees only with their concurrence, and after evaluation by psychologists working for the ISD, which runs the detention center housing the terrorist suspects.

"In psychological rehabilitation, the detainees are regularly assessed by psychologists on their vulnerability towards radical influence. The detainees are then given counseling based on their psychological needs."<sup>34</sup> Detainees also receive counseling from clinical psychologists and are taught coping skills. In between counseling sessions, a detainee can borrow books or movies on DVD, but

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<sup>34</sup> Internal Security Department (Singapore), "The Stages of Change in the Rehabilitation of Terrorist Operatives," presentation to ACCOP 2013, Asian Conference of Criminal and Operations Psychology, Singapore, May 20 – 23, 2013.

all titles are carefully screened by the psychologists to either stimulate critical thinking or provide the sort of entertainment that might help him bond with his family during the weekly visits. For example, the animated movie *Finding Nemo* is popular among detainees with children.

Over the last ten years, the RRG's role has expanded beyond counseling and helping to de-radicalize violent extremists. The group now promotes messages of peace and harmony as well as moderation in Islam. Not surprisingly, the RRG titled its tenth anniversary commemorative book *Winning Hearts and Minds, Promoting Harmony*. Implicit in its rhetoric is that Singapore is multiracial and a country of many religions and that everyone must practice tolerance. Clerics from other major religions are often invited to RRG events to observe its commitment to interfaith dialogue and mutual respect. The RRG also invites senior government leaders to attend not only its work-related events but also its religious celebrations, such as the *Iftar* (breaking of the fast) meals during the holy month of Ramadan. Its members accept secular political rule and believe that the religious and the secular can coexist to mutual benefit. These occasions are covered by the local media and collectively reinforce the Singapore story of a secular state where many races, religions, and ethnicities live together in harmony and come together to fight threats to the country.

Commentators have celebrated the successes of the Muslim community in Singapore, especially the widely lauded work of the RRG, as a counter-narrative in its own right: "The fact that the Muslim community could be so successful and have good relations with other religious groups was a powerful counterexample to the rhetoric of JI and al-Qaeda," wrote Ali Soufan in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>35</sup>

Singapore officials invariably say that such success is not left to chance. History tells the story of the inflammatory nature of racial and religious tension, and when ISD first revealed the existence of the JI network in Singapore, in January 2002, no less than the Prime Minister led a

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<sup>35</sup> Ali Soufan, "Singapore's Counterterrorism Success: The City-State Has Played to Its Strengths as a Multiethnic Melting Pot," *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 2011. Soufan is Chief Executive of the Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS), which commissioned this study.

dialogue with 1,600 grassroots leaders . Muslim community leaders were also briefed on the arrests before public statements were released, allowing leaders to satisfy themselves that the ISD had reason to arrest the first group of JI suspects. A group of religious leaders from the different faith communities in Singapore subsequently issued a press statement condemning terrorism. Such public and private efforts ensured the local Muslim community that they need not feel under suspicion and gave many individuals impetus to both protect their community from extremist influence and help rehabilitate the detained JI members. The RRG was born from this crucible of trust and responsibility, overcoming initial skepticism and resistance from within the Muslim community to become a celebrated partner of the country's national counterterrorism infrastructure ten years later.

The Singapore story as counterpoint became much more important after the July 2005 bombings in London, when countries “woke up to the threat of self-radicalization,” as security officials put it. Until then, the RRG counselors focused on countering JI's interpretations of concepts such as *jihad*, *daulah Islamiyah* (Islamic state), *ummah* (community), and *bai'at* (pledge of allegiance to the group leader).

These concepts were crucial to the JI indoctrination process, as revealed by detained JI members, one of whom told a reporter in a televised interview in 2009 that he felt he had been cheated because he thought he was being taught to be a good Muslim when selected for a special retreat while attending a JI-run *madrassah* in Johor. Instead, Mamat (the pseudonym used by the former JI member) was being prepared for military training in Afghanistan with the Taliban.

At the retreat, I was taught a deeper meaning of Islam in terms of *jihad* and *bai'at*. The teaching of *jihad* was more towards war. They also shared with us how the Muslims around

the world such as in Palestine were suffering. They succeeded in convincing me to fight for the cause of Islam. They were able to make me hate the *kafir* such as America and Israel.<sup>36</sup>

Mamat said that by the end of the retreat, “I was angry and my passion for jihad was at its highest.” He was in Afghanistan undergoing military training when the 9/11 attacks took place. Some trainers brought a television set to his camp, and as he watched the attacks, he felt “very happy.” Remorse later set in when he realized that women and children had been killed.

I felt remorseful after I saw the 9/11 attacks. I started to ask myself whether whatever I had done was right or not. Whatever I had seen was totally the opposite of what Islam had taught me. Islam taught me not to kill innocent people but in fact in the 9/11 attacks there were many innocent children and women killed. Then I asked myself whether whatever I had fought for was on the right or wrong track. In Afghanistan there was no one I could speak to. I was afraid to share because they would feel that I had changed. After two years, when I was captured, I realized what I had done was wrong.

Mamat’s arrest and detention by the ISD gave him time and space to reflect on his beliefs. It took six months, but the RRG counselors taught him the true meaning of jihad—that it “has a greater meaning other than just about war,” he recounted.

Another former JI detainee has written of how he “learnt the true meaning of Islam” during his detention. Using the pseudonym Abu Harith, the former JI trainer and recruiter was in detention for several years and on an RO at the time he wrote a piece for *Winning Hearts and Minds, Promoting Harmony*. His account provides an insight into how extremists in detention in Singapore perceive attempts to counter their beliefs, and the circumstances under which religious and psychological counseling can be effective:

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<sup>36</sup> Exclusive Interview with ex-JI member Mamat by Daud Yusof on Bicara, Suria Channel, telecast on July 16 and 23, 2009. The interview was conducted in Malay.

There were many questions about Islam that only a qualified religious teacher can answer. I needed to identify the misconceptions and find the true Islam as delivered by [the] Prophet Muhammad. I wanted to tackle my misgivings and put all my doubts about the JI to rest—where JI's teachings were wrong and where I went wrong.

I wanted to come to terms with my wrongdoings in JI and heal my soul. For these reasons and the fact that the RRG volunteers were neutral since they did not represent JI or the

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The *ustaz* were very compassionate and understanding. They did not judge me and treated me with respect.

government, I agreed to the RRG counseling. It was a privilege to have someone talk to me on Islam, a subject close to my heart. Still, I was apprehensive as I fear[ed] that he might have a negative perception of me. After all, my actions in the JI had put Singapore's entire Muslim community under the spotlight.

My worries were soon put to rest. The *ustaz* were very compassionate and understanding. They did not judge me and treated me with respect. I opened up to them and we got along well. The key thing I sought was redemption. I wanted to be a better Muslim. The sessions were fruitful and beneficial, helping to clarify my doubts, and I looked forward to them. My relationship with the *ustaz* remained strong throughout. My interactions with the psychologists were also positive. I shared my concerns and fears with them and we discussed many issues. The sessions had a calming effect on me. Some of the psychologists were non-

Muslims but they did not judge me. I realized that we could forge relationships regardless of whether we were Muslims or otherwise.

They taught me skills to cope with the stress of detention, and manage my anxiety, worries and emotions, especially at times when I was worried about how my family was coping. Their advice strengthened me, helped me to see things differently and gave me hope. The fears that haunted me faded, and I started to forgive myself.

Through their counsel, I overcame my emotional baggage. I became a new man with new hope for the future.<sup>37</sup>

Abu Harith's piece is unusual, as Singapore program officials do not generally encourage former detainees to offer "words of advice to other Muslims, especially the younger generation who

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**It is not just the attainment of true religious knowledge but also empathy from their jailers and counselors that make them more receptive to idea that challenge the JI narratives.**

are looking for a purpose in life.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the former detainees who offer themselves as cautionary tales, like Mamat and Abu Harith, want to remain anonymous so that they and their families can lead a normal life and not continue to be identified with a terrorist group.

As Abu Harith makes clear, it is not just attainment of true religious knowledge but also empathy from their jailers and counselors that make them more receptive to ideas that challenge the

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<sup>37</sup> Abu Harith, "Interview with a Former JI Detainee," in *Winning Hearts and Minds, Promoting Harmony*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

JI narratives. And as with other former JI members interviewed by the Counter Narratives Study team in Indonesia, the strongest push often comes from betrayal by the group's leadership. For Abu Harith, that occurred when he saw his erstwhile leader denying his own followers.

A significant turning point in my rehabilitation was the trial of Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia. During the trial, Abu Bakar Bashir's denial of his Singapore JI followers—he had remained silent without the courtesy of looking at them—disappointed me[,] as I know that he was familiar with the JI members.

Abu Bakar Bashir's actions made me recall the Al-Qur'an verses about Judgment Day where a leader would deny his followers when the followers point to him as their leader. Bashir was doing exactly what Allah had said in the Al-Qur'an. From that moment, I knew JI had lied to me and all its members.<sup>39</sup>

## **+The Challenge of Self-Radicalization**

In 2004, as it prepared to release the first group of detainees judged to have been de-radicalized following religious counseling by the RRG clerics, ISD set up a supervision team to monitor their reintegration, initially modeling their efforts after the Singapore prison aftercare program. The following year, ISD stepped up its efforts to “tackle the ideology” of extremism. A Community Involvement unit began giving talks to educators, school managers, and grassroots leaders to create awareness of their role in preventing terrorist propaganda from spreading and taking root. The initial aim was to ensure JI could no longer recruit in Singapore. But the London 7/7/2005 bombings spurred greater counter-radicalization efforts by ISD and RRG and the creation by the government of a nationwide Community Engagement Program to encourage social cohesion and manage diversity.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 125.

That year, new content was added to the counter-narratives being delivered by the RRG clerics. Apart from the usual anti-Western grievances, JI and militant groups were also using the concept of *Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'*—loyalty and disavowal—to demand total disassociation from the non-Muslim world. Coupled with its utopian vision of a perfect society where Muslims live as the Prophet did in seventh-century Mecca, the militant interpretation of *Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'* was a recipe for inciting hatred and violence against non-Muslims.

Challenging this view was clearly necessary. As RRG Secretary Ustaz Dr. Mohamed Ali explains:

The misuse of *Al-Wala' wa al-Bara'* has negative implications on the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims and the image of Islam. It undermines Islam's image as a religion of peace, mercy and harmony. . . . The Qur'an may be seen to contain verses that are seemingly unfavorable to certain groups. However, a proper study of these verses in their proper context will show that they were directed against certain groups that persecuted Muslims in the seventh century. It would be wrong to read such verses literally and apply them out of context.<sup>40</sup>

For those who are self-radicalized, the intertwined questions of how Muslims should relate to non-Muslims and live in a secular society are even more pertinent, officials who have worked with the four such individuals detained in Singapore say.

To those who embrace extremist ideas, the counter-argument Singapore uses is that “Islam is *wasatiyyah*”—Islam is the middle path. In other words, it is a religion of moderation, wherein the middle path is arrived at by consensus of the community. This conceptual approach allows for the practice of Islam to differ among countries. For example, while requiring women to wear the burqa might be considered the norm in Afghanistan, it would be an example of extremism in Singapore. While there continues to be much debate over the concept of what it means to be a moderate

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<sup>40</sup> Ustaz Dr Mohamed bin Ali, “Al-Wala' wa al-Bara': Rebutting Militants' Interpretation,” *Winning Hearts and Minds, Promoting Harmony*, 129.

Muslim, the idea of balance has been gaining traction in the region. Malaysia has been taking the lead in promoting the idea, with Prime Minister Najib Tun Abdul Razak setting up, in 2012, a Wasatiyyah Institute of Malaysia to reject extremism in Islam and to create a Global Movement of Moderates (GMM).<sup>41</sup> First aired by Mr. Najib in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2010, this idea of a GMM was endorsed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which issued a concept paper to rally “the voices of moderation to drown the voices of extremism” that was adopted by the Asia-Europe Summit in Laos in 2012.<sup>42</sup>

“There is an urgent need for moderates to reclaim the center and moral high ground. The voices of moderation should be from all religious beliefs and faiths, committed to working together to combat and hence marginalize extremists,” the ASEAN concept paper exhorted. Among initiatives proposed: to establish an ASEAN online space for voices of moderates, making use of social networks, blogs, and other forms of social media to get feedback and generate mass support. “The use of social media would be able to assist in initiating a global conversation on preventing young people from becoming radicalized and [on] how to de-radicalize others,” the paper added.

An ASEAN official noted privately, however, that work on ideas such as this has not begun, suggesting that moderation remains an elusive idea in concept and in practice.<sup>43</sup>

And while the “Islam is moderation” concept is intellectually defensible, it is challenging to implement, especially when individuals are attracted to narratives of violent extremism for altruistic reasons, such as a strong sense of personal accountability to make the world right. The case of Abdul Basheer in Singapore suggests that the moderation narrative may not be effective in convincing self-radicalized individuals that using violence is wrong. As the Singapore ISD deems a

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<sup>41</sup> Datuk Aziz Jamaludin Mhd Tahir, “Institute Wastiyyah tolak ekstremisme,” April 21, 2012, <http://www.ipislam.edu.my/index.php/artikel/read/1363/Institut-Wasatiyyah-tolak-ekstremisme>

<sup>42</sup> ASEAN’s Concept Paper on Global Movement of Moderates, [http://www.asean.org/archive/documents/20th%20summit/Concept%20Paper%20on%20GMM%20-%20FINAL-1%20April%202012-1740\[2\].pdf](http://www.asean.org/archive/documents/20th%20summit/Concept%20Paper%20on%20GMM%20-%20FINAL-1%20April%202012-1740[2].pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Email communication, July 30, 2013.

total ban on access to the Internet for formers released on parole to be difficult to enforce, it may thus require a very different approach to persuade those who acquired their extremist beliefs from the Internet to continue to stay disengaged upon release.

## **+Measuring Success**

While the Internal Security Act allows the Singapore government to preventatively detain individuals deemed to be a threat to national security for continuous two-year periods, subject to annual reviews by an Advisory Board comprising a high court judge and two laypersons, it can be argued that there is also a political imperative to release detainees early to show that the terrorist rehabilitation program is working. There are, however, some built-in checks and balances. For example, every detainee is assessed by multiple parties, including parties who are not involved in the rehabilitation program, to ensure that a comprehensive and objective determination is arrived at in each case. The reflexive instinct of security officials is also to err on the side of caution; they note, in particular, that they have to expend considerable resources on post-release supervision, possibly more than was spent on rehabilitation. And while more than two-thirds of those detained over the last ten years have been released, there is no push in any quarter to release the few hard-core detainees who remain wedded to the idea of violent jihad to create their vision of an Islamic utopia, and who resist attempts by the RRG clerics to provide religious counseling. These hard-core detainees will not be released unless ISD is satisfied they have modified their mind-sets and given up violence, officials say. They stress that terrorism is a threat to multiracial Singapore—a country, as has been noted, of many religions. Their definition of success is to have no terrorist attacks in Singapore.

While there is as yet no formal evaluation of the program—officials continue to believe that no objective metrics are possible—an effort to benchmark progress in rehabilitation by a detainee has been developed over the last few years, as the number of those eligible for release has gone up.

ISD psychologists have identified “seven stages of positive change that occur in the course of effective rehabilitation.” The stages were laid out in a paper presented at the 2013 Asian Conference of Criminal and Operations Psychology (ACCOP), devoted to the rehabilitation of detainees and those released on supervised Restriction Orders. The stages do not necessarily follow a fixed chronological sequence for all individuals. In addition, not all individuals will go through every stage.

The first stage is reevaluation, when detainees begin to reflect on past actions and their consequences. The second stage is a reevaluation of environment; religious counselors and family members try to debunk these assumptions that led detainees to believe that their actions were

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**The detainees develop confidence not only through the rapport but through the realization that the help and advice rendered are well intentioned and beneficial.**

supported by the community at large. The third stage is formation of therapeutic relationships between the case officers and counselors and the detainees. The detainees develop confidence not only through the rapport but through the realization that the help and advice rendered are well intentioned and beneficial. The fourth stage is to develop a path of awareness of radicalization. The fifth stage is ideological rectification through gaining an understanding of terrorists’ misinterpretations of Islam, developing values of nonviolence and inter-religious tolerance, and identifying pro-social forms of activism.

In all of these stages, there is cognitive restructuring, where the detainees are made to gradually learn from psychologists how to manage emotion and develop the capacity to objectively frame global events. Detainees also learn personal problem-solving skills and to evaluate ideas critically and be more open-minded. Every case is reviewed regularly to determine if the detainees will still pose a security threat. Even after detainees are released on Restriction Orders, rehabilitation efforts continue to ensure that they are well reintegrated into society and remained inoculated against terrorist ideology.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, participation in Singapore's risk reduction program is a lifelong process for anyone who commits to extremist ideas and attempts to go down the path of violence.

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<sup>44</sup> Internal Security Department (Singapore), "The Stages of Change in the Rehabilitation of Terrorist Operatives," presentation to ACCOP 2013, Asian Conference of Criminal and Operations Psychology, Singapore, May 20–23, 2013.

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## NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA, AND THE SAHEL

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This chapter of the Counter-Narratives Study is the result of research and discussion with various program officials, academics, journalists, and authorities involved in combating terrorism in West Africa. Potential and proposed counter-narrative concepts in opposing violent extremism were core to the discussion. There persists a lack of counter-narratives to extremism in large swaths of

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**The absence of alternative narratives creates a massive chasm where violence flows in.**

the region. Combined with a confluence of critical events, this has continued to inflame violence. There are pockets of transitional or unstable governance. The region is awash in the weapons from—and the uncertainty brought on by—rapidly dispensed dictatorial regimes. Human and economic development are chronically neglected. In this environment, groups seek power, wealth, and control through terrorist activities.

The absence of alternative narratives creates a massive chasm where violence flows in. In these vulnerable countries of West African and the Sahel belt, criminals, extremists, and political opportunists seek to fill the empty spaces.

# CONTEXT FOR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## +Nigeria

In the west of Africa, the asymmetrical problem of terrorism continues to hit the northeastern area of Nigeria, with its persistent violence, and in the south the country is similarly affected by several alliances of criminal and terrorist groups in the Niger Delta. The most lethal threat of malevolent actors is Boko Haram. The name means, roughly, “Western education is sinful.” The group’s formal name is Jam’at Ahl al-Sunna lil-Dawa’t wal-Jihad (Community of the Practice [of the Prophet Muhammad] for Proselytizing and Jihad). It was formed in 2002 in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria, by Muhammad Yusuf, with a philosophy and goal of establishing a state governed by Sharia law, first locally and eventually throughout Nigeria.<sup>45</sup> The degree of violence surrounding and carried out by Boko Haram saw an uptick in 2009–10. The group has roots in the Nigerian political system but rejects the authority of the Nigerian state. Apart from Western-style education, Boko Haram rejects secular governance, the authority of the Nigerian state, and any religious interpretations of Islam that run counter to its teaching.

The group’s course of action has taken advantage of what it calls the chronic corruption of the Nigerian government and continual disaccord of Nigeria’s predominantly Christian south and Muslim north. The growing economic disparity between Nigeria’s northern and southern regions due to the geographic location of resources has exacerbated entrenched issues. Not just restricted to Nigeria, the group has established a regional presence. Suspected Boko Haram fighters have been seen in northern Mali since Islamic extremists took control.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> From “Overview of Terrorism in West African Sub-Region,” Presentation by NIA, Abuja, Nigeria, November 2012.

<sup>46</sup> *IRINnews*, “Understanding the Causes of Violent Extremism in West Africa,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, May 10, 2013.

Although it operates independently, Boko Haram has some affiliation with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM. At the height of the jihadist occupation of Mali, some Boko Haram personnel were seen there collaborating with AQIM. Nigerians were involved in the January 2013 attack on British Petroleum's In Amenas facility in Algeria, and there is speculation that they were affiliated with Boko Haram. Despite its participation in events outside Nigeria, Boko Haram is concentrated in the northeastern area of the country. Nigeria's most economically prosperous region is the southern Niger Delta; however, it has been difficult for Sahel terrorist networks to infiltrate this region because of large ethnic differences. The population of the Niger Delta region is predominantly ethnic Ijaw, a group that is 95 percent Christian, making it difficult for Boko Haram and its offshoots (AQIM et al.) to infiltrate. Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, is an Ijaw.

Broad regional unrest has aided the operations of Islamic militants in northern Nigeria. Boko Haram and offshoot elements have been using anti-aircraft artillery and other sophisticated weaponry. In the past, Boko Haram has employed small arms to carry out attacks, but it is believed that these new, more advanced weapons were obtained after the overthrow of northern Africa regimes, including that of Muammar Qadhafi in Libya.<sup>47</sup>

Identifying funding sources for Boko Haram and similar groups is problematic. There is some consensus that outside entities from the Trans-Sahel, which possess greater financial resources, have contributed. The group has repeatedly employed kidnapping for large ransom payments as a way to raise funds.<sup>48</sup> Not only for Boko Haram but for other terror groups in the northeastern Nigeria border areas, recent reporting points toward a "chicken or egg" effect, whereby it remains difficult to tell if those engaged in kidnapping did so in retaliation for official and quasi-official "detaining" of family members of terror suspects or the government employed the tactic to locate subjects in combating terrorism cases. The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (New York,

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<sup>47</sup> John Gambrell, "Nigeria Sees Outside Extremist Help," Associated Press, May 30, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Heather Murdock, "Boko Haram's Funding Remains Elusive," *VOA News Online*, May 22, 2013.

USA) cites a new and marked increase in kidnapping as a terrorist tactic and revenue source, with over twenty Nigerian government officials and civilians as well as seven foreigners kidnapped between February and June 2013.<sup>49</sup> In a broader and more conspiratorial context, some point to outside and transnational terror networks largely conducting the kidnappings as part of their effort to establish sanctuary in the marginally governed expanse that touches northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, while seeking to buy an alliance with Boko Haram.

The Nigerian government also cites Boko Haram's aggressive pursuit of alliances with outside groups, such as the "signing of an MOU [memorandum of understanding]" with AQIM in 2010, which, among other things, specified joint recruitment and training efforts, methods of secure communications, and funding of operational activity.<sup>50</sup>

As an example of the seemingly implacable foes represented, Boko Haram's nominal leader, Abubakar Shekau, released a videotape in July 2013 in which he stated, "We are going to burn down the schools, if they are not Islamic religious schools for Allah."<sup>51</sup> As for his selective religious and political justification, Shekau said his fighters claim not to "touch small children and women," but warned, "Schoolteachers who are teaching Western education" can be targeted for killing. However, it was widely reported that up to thirty children were killed in an attack on a boarding school in Yobe State in early July 2013.<sup>52</sup> The government attributed the attack to Boko Haram. But even within the relatively small area of northeastern Nigeria, chronic conflicts continue among the ethnically based divisions in the towns of Sokoto, Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. Shekau, for instance, has threatened to assassinate the Sultan of Sokono, the preeminent leader of Nigeria's Muslims, because of his condemnation of Boko Haram's violent methods. Moreover, in his recent

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<sup>49</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Evolving Tactics and Alliances in Nigeria," CBT Center at West Point, June 25, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> "Overview of Terrorism in West African Sub-Region," NIA Presentation.

<sup>51</sup> Michelle Faul, "Nigerian Extremist: Burn Schools, Kill Teachers," Associated Press, July 13, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> "EU Condemns 'Horrible Murder' in Nigeria," *Al Jazeera*, July 7, 2013.

video, Shekau reiterated his consistent position of non-negotiation with the officials of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, and staying with the narrative of violence: “We will not enter into any agreement with non-believers or the Nigerian government. The Qur’an teaches that we must shun democracy, we must shun Western educations, we must shun the [Nigerian] constitution.” As part of his framing of the narrative, Shekau also co-opts one of al-Qaeda’s core talking points, that the West is fighting Islam “to tactically make the Qur’an insignificant and unimportant.”<sup>53</sup>

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The seeming religious and moral motivations in seizing the violent narratives are ripe for counter-narratives.

There are opportunities to address and exploit the broad and ever-adjusting messages of terrorist leaders. Take, for instance, Ansaru (its full Arabic-language name is Jama'at al-Ansar al-Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan, The Community of Protectors of Muslims in the Land of Black Africa), often characterized as a spinoff from Boko Haram and at other times termed a rival group. Ansaru’s leadership has criticized Boko Haram’s indiscriminate bombing of Christian churches, something it considers un-Islamic and sinful; at the same time, it has kidnapped and executed foreign hostages. Abu Ussamata al-Ansary, the leader of Ansaru, has been quoted as saying that the Nigerian government was incapable of protecting Muslims against those who attack them and that violence is needed to regain “the lost dignity of Muslims of black Africa.”<sup>54</sup> Further, he said that violence was justified in killing non-Muslims if “in self-defense or if they attack Muslims,” which seems to speak of Ansaru’s justification to attack Nigerian soldiers deployed to Mali, as well as its

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<sup>53</sup> Paul, “Nigerian Extremist: Burn Schools, Kill Teachers.”

<sup>54</sup> Farouk Chothia, “Who Are Nigeria’s Ansaru Islamists?,” BBC Africa, March 11, 2013.

call for the creation of an Islamic caliphate from Niger to Cameroon and northern Nigeria.<sup>55</sup> The seeming religious and moral motivations in seizing the violent narrative are ripe for counter-narratives—through any combination of recognized academics, viable leaders, and legitimate religious scholars—to help the impressionable make better decisions and to drive a wedge between violent groups who are often competing entities.

Boko Haram and Ansaru’s capacity and inclination to act on respective violent narratives are compelling. However, there is a general consensus that they represent neither a threat to Nigeria’s way of life nor a transnational threat outside the Sahel. Nonetheless, it would appear that the narrative of violence and its negative effects in northeastern Nigeria and border areas of the Sahel belt will persist. With the exception of a suicide operation against a newspaper in Abuja in April 2012, Boko Haram’s operational area has been confined to the northeast, and there are no indications of an ability or inclination to move to urban areas such as Lagos and Port Harcourt, where actions would have considerable economic impact.

Adam Nossiter of the *New York Times* tells the story of a militant who attended AQIM training camps, subsequently returning to Nigeria “to wage his form of jihad”:

He attended an Islamic college in northern Nigeria and then traveled to Khartoum, Sudan. It was there that al-Qaeda recruiters invited him into their clique, bringing him to the southern deserts of Algeria and later to Mauritania for a training course organized by AQIM. He trained for six months under Abu Zeid, one of AQIM’s notorious figures. He returned to Nigeria in 2008, and then went underground in Lagos. He claimed that there were thousands similar to him in Nigeria, stating that some work in government, others in business, and even as teachers.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Adam Nossiter, “New Threat in Nigeria as Militants Split Off,” *New York Times*, April 23, 2013.

Some regional watchers see the violent narrative less as a product of religion and faith than as a competition for power and resources. The violence is not carried out by Boko Haram and Ansaru alone; Muslims and Christian ethnic groups become embroiled in local disputes over land and other issues. Talking in the context of the greater Levant and Iraq, Fanar Hadad of the National University of Singapore writes, “It is religion as identity rather than religion as faith that is being mobilized.”<sup>57</sup> A similar case can be made for Nigeria and much of West Africa, where sectarian differences often form along lines of loyalty to local and clan identity.

In response to Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan’s offer of amnesty as an incentive to renounce violence and negotiate differences, Boko Haram’s Shekau responded by saying that *he* would consider amnesty for the Nigerian government. It is but one example of implacably opposed narratives. The current Abuja strategy appears to be to bring the dual tracks of “all-out war” and the declaration of a state of emergency with carrot-and-stick maneuvers and an amnesty program.<sup>58</sup>

Nigeria acknowledges that the causes and motivations of terrorist groups are complex and multifaceted. The Nigerian National Intelligence Agency (NIA) considers “triggers” of terrorism—not only for Nigeria but also for the larger West Africa region—to be political, economic, and social. In a candid assessment of national and regional issues, NIA lists persistent challenges as: deficient political processes and electoral malpractice; chronically disaffected minority groups; trafficking and proliferation of arms; a preponderance of weak and failing states that result in sanctuary for terrorists; widespread conditions of poverty and unemployment, resulting in a breeding ground for terrorists; endemic corruption and weak state institutions; proliferation of smuggling networks and related criminal activity; movement of illegal migrants connected to transnational crimes; and the widening gap between rich and poor. Further, the NIA assessment included as problems needing to be addressed the “ethno-religious intolerance,” lack of cultural diversity, and “social inequality and

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<sup>57</sup> “Political Islam: The Power of Religion,” *The Economist* online, July 13, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21580618-islamists-government-proving-harder-opposition-power-religion>.

<sup>58</sup> Katrin Gänslér, “Boko Haram Still Active in Northern Nigeria,” *Deutsche Welle*, June 21, 2013.

injustice” in many parts of West Africa. As for these social “triggers,” NIA indicated it was difficult to say which one of the causes, or combination of same, feed the other, and their origins remain less significant than what it calls “West African terrorism riding on the platform of religious extremism.”<sup>59</sup>

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The Nigerian government seeks to implement fairly standard responses, such as hardening targets, making critical infrastructure a priority, and following and disrupting terrorist financing.

Well before Mali devolved into chaos, and before the attack at In Amenas, Algeria, occurred in January 2013, the NIA listed as terrorist safe havens (or increasingly vulnerable to becoming safe havens) large swaths of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Togo, Cote d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), and Benin Republic. In another frank admission, NIA listed Nigeria as one of the countries adding to the difficulties by serving as a safe haven.

From a security and tactical perspective, the Nigerian government seeks to implement fairly standard responses, such as hardening targets, making critical infrastructure a priority, and following and disrupting terrorist financing. Complementing military and law enforcement responses are more aspirational approaches, such as leading efforts with regional neighbors in addressing youth unemployment, reducing the level of illiteracy, and “regulating” provocative preaching of both Christian and Muslim religious figures.<sup>60</sup> As a key component in combating regional terrorism,

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<sup>59</sup> “Overview of Terrorism in West African Sub-Region,” NIA Presentation.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Abuja recommends participation in various international and African cooperative alliances and task forces, such as the Intergovernmental Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), the Sahel-Saharan Intelligence Services' Fusion and Liaison Unit, and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative.

## **+Approaches in Counter-Narratives and Potential Solutions**

In Nigeria and West Africa, as in other places where violent extremism exists, law enforcement and military action will continue as part of —and sometimes as the only—security response. But Nigeria has also recently developed and proposed a number of counter-narrative approaches and actions designed to address the most common underlying triggers for young men joining violent networks.

In the Nigerian Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA), the Directorate of Behavioral Analysis (DBA) has devised a three-pronged approach focusing on “De Radicalization,” “Counter-Radicalization,” and “Strategic Communication.” As part of its National Counter Terrorism Strategy, ONSA characterizes the proposed program as “key activities” targeted to counter violent extremism “through a whole of society approach.”<sup>61</sup>

While candidly assessing the situation in northeastern Nigeria, DBA acknowledges challenges in its proposed eighteen-month implementation phase of the overarching Intervention program. For example, with regard to its “whole of society” cooperation and community engagement, DBA speaks of the risk component and security concerns for civilians who work within the program framework. However, the only solution referenced is a protection plan that is under development.

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<sup>61</sup> “Intervention: Program of Directorate of Behavioral Analysis,” Office of the National Security Advisor, Abuja, Nigeria, June 2013.

The DBA describes the planks and goals of its Intervention program: “*DE Radicalization*” focuses first on prison de-radicalization for those convicted of terrorism-related offenses as well as suspects awaiting trial. A regimen of After Care is embedded as part of the de-radicalization process, devised for detainees granted amnesty or released by court order as well as those willing to “come forward in renouncing involvement in terrorist activities.”

*After Care* proposes a steering committee among ONSA and other concerned government offices to work with consultants in further developing the de-radicalization plan. Some of the to-be-determined aspects include needs assessments, training workshops, and capacity building. During the eighteen-month phased approach, consultants and subject matter experts will be selected and Islamic scholars vetted and trained on the program execution and goals. The program cites a need for “cognitive behavioral counseling” specifically directed toward the states experiencing the highest volume and most chronic violence, Kano and Borno. Other After Care program points include peace building and interfaith workshops, a lecture series on “the principles of jihad” (delivered by After Care’s selected scholars), and skills acquisition and training for those in the program. Though they are comprehensive in scope and vision, the DBA has not commented on After Care’s priorities—for example, counseling relative to vocational support.

The DBA’s After Care program speaks to a broader societal context and is, at least in aspiration and theory, an exemplar of comprehensiveness. As part of the DE Radicalization effort, the DBA proposes categorization of terrorist suspects, acknowledging the myriad individual motivations and disparate groups involved in criminal and terrorist activities. (Details of criteria for categorization and behavioral indicators were not available as of the date of this report.) It proposes the training of “50 Islamic scholars” for the program for direct discussion of religious matters where they are determined to be a primary motivator of violent behavior. It is in this program point that the DBA gets to the core of countering the narrative: The proposal speaks of the critical need to counter extremists’ “use of religious justifications” to foment violent and criminal acts. In addressing

the behavioral component, and as a measure of the DBA's aggressive approach, the training of "20 psychologists, counselors, and social workers" is proposed.

Moreover, in another example of level of detail, the DBA noted that "select prison" staff are also part of Intervention's holistic approach to countering the narratives.

In speaking to a major conclusion of the Counter-Narratives Study—the immediate need for further study of metrics of effectiveness—the DBA stated that goals and objectives of After Care and the Intervention program overall must be constantly catalogued and calibrated for efficacy. It lists as one of its more idealistic, if not lofty, goals for the program "better respect for human rights and rule of law." And, not ignoring the practical law enforcement and security agency mission roles, the DBA addresses the need to consider both human rights and intelligence collection in order to disrupt terrorist plotting in Nigeria's prisons.

*Rehabilitation* is another facet of DE Radicalization, with a proposed skill acquisition platform. In speaking to the deeper societal and integration aspect, the program calls for development of an "art and sports" component.

Among those entities suggested as partners in the DE Radicalization program plank are Nigeria's prison service, the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and affiliates, the Psychological Society of Nigeria, and local and international non-governmental organizations with "experience in the field of inmate support."

The "*Counter Radicalization*" component of the Intervention program seeks to "engage communities, carry out research, build data banks, develop feedback centered on [support to] community resiliency, and collect economic data" that would be used to tackle "root causes" of extremism, with poverty listed as one of the incubators of violence.

The Counter Radicalization program plank lists specific objectives as creating awareness of the threat of terrorism “at the grassroots level” and identifying credible voices within communities to help understand the threat. In the finer points of the program, the DBA indicates that demographic data will assist in assessing and targeting of religious figures, sects, where places of worship are concentrated, and the content of religious instruction and sermons that may foster narratives of violence. Moreover, the proposal calls for creating and organizing distribution channels for dissemination of counter-narrative messages. Some of the grassroots facets would include youth mentoring programs, training workshops for “peace initiatives,” support for evolving small business enterprises, and law enforcement community policing/community engagement work. Further, the military and security services would be included in the Counter Radicalization program with a “civil-military relations platform.”

Areas of concentration for Counter Radicalization would be, at least initially, Borno, Yobe, Kano, Kogi, Plateau, and Kaduna states. Proposed activities in those areas, which are quite aggressive in reach, would be prioritized as follows: mapping of religious centers, scholars, and faith-based educational facilities; a survey of economic activities among “18 local governments”; establishment of counter-narrative distribution channels; economic engagement schemes; and technical support from the national level to local governments.

The DBA proposal has as its core theme, particularly for the Counter Radicalization program, encouraging and enabling the voices of counter-narratives to violence, community engagement, and building of trust among all stakeholders (that is, between the government and citizens of the greater northeastern Nigeria). Of particular note, the DBA submits that the Counter Radicalization program should be implemented by *partner non-governmental organizations*, as opposed to the central government. Two reasons are given: It will enable “pioneer work” by NGOs, which have the capacity to act; and the NGOs’ counter-narratives will serve as a conduit for the government’s programs, thereby creating “civic population” ownership of the program. This is a singular

proposal. Although the DBA attributes the idea of a more hidden government hand to “the paucity of NGOs” in the troubled areas, it also appears to acknowledge an obvious challenge in Nigeria—and in many other locations: Questions of credibility and resonance arise when a government fingerprint is seen among chronically oppositionist populations.

As the overall objective of the “*Strategic Communications*” plank of the Intervention program, the DBA lists countering extremist ideology and the misconceptions of “*jihad, takfirism, constitutional democracy, and Western education,*” as espoused, specifically, by Boko Haram.

Detailed program objectives for Strategic Communication include responses coordinated between government officials and the media to “promptly address” extremist messages, and leveraging various media to foster public awareness of violent groups’ “false messages” and calls to violence. In another example of a comprehensive and thoughtful approach, the DBA cites the need to give victims of terrorist violence a platform to tell their stories. Moreover, addressing early

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Addressing early education in countering narratives is proposed, including programs to develop children’s ‘critical thinking skills’

education in countering narratives is proposed, including programs to develop children’s “critical thinking skills” so that they can question for themselves the narratives of violence, through tangible activities such as “cartoons, games, books and poetry” via a partnership with the Ministry of Education.

It also addresses the often sensitive topic within diverse and democratic nations of “working with media” to develop a “voluntary code of conduct” in reporting issues of national security, particularly how terrorism is characterized in “free press coverage.”

More micro-level aspects of Strategic Communication include a “Positive Voices Campaign” through media channels; development of a website and use of social media to address and “feed” counter-narrative forums; creation of documentaries and “radio jingles” related to terrorism and counter-violence; production and distribution of audio compact discs narrated by “learned religious scholars”; development of a radio program specifically to hear from victims of violence; establishment of two radio stations in Borno and Kano states; development of platforms to disseminate sections from the Qur’an and hadith that are “against violence;” training for relevant government agencies; and sponsorship of student religious organizations in speaking against violent extremism.

Nigeria’s DBA, like similar agencies in many of the other countries in the CN Study, holds that precision in use of words and terms best informs the discussion. It makes a distinction, for example, between de-radicalization—a term it associates with those who have already taken constructive steps in violence—and counter-radicalization—centering on disrupting steps toward violence.

In a common theme, funding and political support—as well as will—is a concern spoken of in the DBA proposal. It remains to be seen when or if Abuja will approve, fund, and implement the proposal.

## +West Africa and the Sahel

More recently, the upper Niger River Basin of Mali has experienced an assortment of extremist and fleeting alliances. Various groups have first seized and then been pushed back from large parts of the country. The conflict pits local and outside terrorist and criminal elements against French forces that last saw action in Mali in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In that era, the French battled indigenous peoples whose rallying call against colonialism was carried out under the banner of Islam.

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**The Sahel has long suffered from a fatal confluence: extreme poverty coupled with weak governance.**

The Sahel has long suffered from a fatal confluence: extreme poverty coupled with weak governance. Insecurity in the region has made it a hospitable environment for extremist violence. The Sahel belt possesses a large supply of valuable natural resources yet remains one of the world's most impoverished regions. The trend of young populations and high levels of unemployment found in many African nations also afflicts the region, where the large number of unemployed youth are vulnerable to recruitment by militant groups.

West Africa's geography is also considered to be a contributing factor. It is a vast area, with large swaths of desert enclosed by porous borders that make it difficult to track or prevent the movement of people and goods. Residents of these areas often have a greater loyalty to their ethnic

tribes and clans than to the modern state, making it chronically challenging for the central government to overcome extremist narratives spread by regional groups.<sup>62</sup>

The Sahel's problems are largely ethnically driven and a product of the continuing North versus South conflict, with various demands made by many actors. Much of the region continues to harbor a complex set of violent groups, offshoots from these groups, and an array of extremist causes. Boko Haram, for example, is made up of at least three different groups of various tribal and ethnic affiliations whose familial and clan ties straddle the borders of Nigeria's northeast. The incubating factors are part of the north-south divide and a chronic atmosphere feeding into the violent narrative. This includes the sense by those in the North that they are being left out of current and future stakes in general welfare and benefits from Nigeria's rich natural resources. In Mali, the government's failure to consistently invest and maintain a strong state presence in the north created an environment conducive to the expansion of Islamic militancy and escalation of violence.<sup>63</sup>

For Mali's Tuareg rebels, the Qaeda name does not denote a single, unified organization carrying out operations in Africa; rather, it is perceived correctly as a name that is recognized worldwide and which gives small rebel groups legitimacy (even though many have little in common with central al-Qaeda).<sup>64</sup> The indigenous Tuareg people have been at odds with the country's central government in a struggle against marginalization that has endured for generations. The Tuaregs have long demanded an autonomous homeland in the north and have had some success, following the March 2012 coup, and after seizing towns in the north from the government's troops. They were soon overpowered by extremist Islamic groups that had fought alongside them in their struggle against Mali's government forces.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *IRINnews*, "Understanding the Causes of Violent Extremism."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Chan, "Al-Qaeda in Africa: After Algeria and Mali, the Die Is Cast for New Struggle as Terror Spreads like a Virus," *The Telegraph*, January 19, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> *IRINnews*, "Understanding the Causes of Violent Extremism."

To tap into the Tuareg rebellion in Mali, AQIM members have married into the Tuareg clan. This enables foreign sojourners to blend into the local populations and hide their movements. They also can manipulate indigenous rebels to do their bidding. By gaining Tuareg rebels as

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Despite their ideological differences, the rebel groups will fight together with al-Qaeda-aligned groups if it will further their goal of autonomous rule.

spokesmen and soldiers, AQIM has been able, to an extent, to blend in and achieve military objectives. They no longer seem like a foreign entity and are now legitimized in parts of the region due to ties to West Africa.

French military forces that came to Mali's aid after the coup have been fighting against a variety of extremist groups. Some of these groups are against al-Qaeda, three are affiliated with al-Qaeda, one is homegrown, and two others are believed to want to rule regionally. Despite their ideological differences, the rebel groups will fight together with al-Qaeda-aligned groups if it will further their goal of autonomous rule. Professor Stephen Chan, an international relations specialist at the University of London, suggested that the French should “strike a deal with the Tuareg fighters who will resist al-Qaeda. You cannot defeat all four groups in the endless deserts of Mali.”<sup>66</sup>

Among the varied but earnestly deadly Salafi-Takfiri groups in Mali are Ansar al-Dine, the Movement for Monotheism and Jihad in West Africa, and derivatives of AQIM. But it is not only the religiously extreme fringe in play in Mali, as politically implacable and protectionist secular groups have joined in the violence. These include: the National Movement for the Liberation of

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<sup>66</sup> Chan, “Al-Qaeda in Africa.”

Azawad (MNLA), a Tuareg rebel group; the National Front for the Liberation of Azawad, an Arab group sometimes affiliated with MNLA; and Ganda Koy, an ethnic Songhai militia—all part of a boiling cauldron of violence in significant areas of North and West Africa and the Sahel.<sup>67</sup> According to journalist and author Nick Turse, “The security situation in Africa suggests that it is in the process of becoming Ground Zero for a veritable terror diaspora set in motion in the wake of 9/11 that has only accelerated” in recent years.<sup>68</sup>

Both Ansar al-Dine and the Movement for Jihad and Unity in West Africa existed prior to AQIM’s arrival, but they have been greatly strengthened due to their new affiliation. However, once al-Qaeda had gained power, they pushed aside the native rebel groups. For example, in Mali, after the north was overtaken, AQIM revealed its presence to the outside world and abandoned Tuareg objectives.

After Ansar al-Dine forces helped the Tuareg wrest control of their area from the Malian government, they seized power and ruled for ten months, implementing Sharia governance. The Tuareg population was shocked by the new practices that were being forced upon them. Women were compelled to completely cover up, music and cigarettes were banned, and thieves were punished by having their hands chopped off. When the French forces liberated Timbuktu, it was seen as a welcome reprieve from harsh Sharia law.

After the situation in Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, and Niger all intensified their own efforts to block violent extremists and criminal networks from expanding operations into other parts of the region.

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<sup>67</sup> May Ying Welsh, “Making Sense of Mali’s Armed Groups,” *Al Jazeera.com*, January 17, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/01/20131139522812326.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Nick Turse, “The Terror Diaspora: The U.S. Military and the Unraveling of Africa,” *TomDispatch.com*, June 18, 2013, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175714/>.

The roots of the violence are as vast as the area in question. In the northern hinterlands of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Niger, and Chad, the influence is primarily felt in the presence of violent groups organized around the Salafi-Takfiri philosophy, propagated in its loudest form by Usama bin Laden's original mid-1990s al-Qaeda network and now still by remnant al-Qaeda and associates. Though it is not within the purview of this report to speak to the continuing debate over what the term means today, *al-Qaeda* for our frame of reference represents the philosophy of religiously and politically motivated, and largely indiscriminate, violence against any entity it deems to be in opposition to itself. It is the narrative of the Qaeda philosophy, more than any central organizational control once established by UBL and his *shura* council, that is most inspirational and motivating for those who use violence as the only tactic to bring about change. For example, though AQIM of Algeria took the Qaeda brand as part of its name, the same young men—or now, their younger brothers—and their causes were known as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the 1980s and 1990s, and then the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) from the 1990s to the mid-2000s. Similar incubators and conditions (namely, political power, control, treasure, and ineffective counter-narrative) that existed over the last generation still persist and likely will for the longer term.

The former GSPC, now doing business as AQIM, has profited tremendously from new routes in the worldwide narcotics trade. A consequence of its geographic location and poor government, the Sahel region has become a critical transit point of drugs traveling from Latin America to be sold on the European market. The facilitation of the illegal narcotics trade has helped AQIM finance its operations. The former head of U.S. Africa Command, General Carter Ham, has expressed concern over AQIM's role in narcotic smuggling operations and noted its bankrolling of said operations, describing AQIM as the wealthiest al-Qaeda affiliate.<sup>69</sup>

AQIM was originally one of al-Qaeda's weaker wings, especially compared to Qaeda operations in the Middle East and Asia. In recent years, however, AQIM has dramatically increased

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Masters, "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)," Council on Foreign Relations, January 24, 2013.

its operations, in large measure through funding generated by kidnapping tourists and foreign aid workers and holding them for ransom for a total amount estimated at \$88 million.<sup>70</sup> According to documents found in his Abbottabad, Pakistan, home, Usama bin Laden personally endorsed AQIM's business model.

The extremist Salafi-Takfiri dogma and its philosophical cousin Wahhabism started to take root and affect local discourse after African students who had attended Islamic universities in the Middle East began to return to their home countries. Mali, Niger, and Senegal have a complicated dual school system. These countries have formal state schooling recognized by the government as well as a private system. The private system is typically Arabic-language Islamic schools that are not recognized by the state. Moreover, the government does not interfere with the curriculum or the financing of private schools. It is speculated that Saudi entities are financing these schools, facilitating extreme forms of Wahhabi and Salafi thinking and thus giving rise to an increase in radicalism brought about by conflicts between, first, the indigenous, traditional Sufi sect of Islam and, second, religious philosophy that is entirely outside that tradition and hence profoundly unfamiliar. The young radicalized Africans who are members of al-Qaeda or affiliates are products of the Salafi ideology based on the uncompromising and extraordinarily rigid tenets of Takfir.<sup>71</sup>

In Algeria, AQIM does not have to shield its involvement in struggles, since it can plausibly present itself as a homegrown organization. AQIM leaders and the group's predecessors have over twenty years' experience fighting against the Algerian government. They have grown accustomed to the region and have developed various tactics, including impersonating Algerian security officials. They are particularly attracted to southern Algeria due to the abundance of foreigners who are operating economically significant facilities that are difficult to defend. The porous borders that were seen as attractive have also enabled militants to move from Algeria to nearby countries.

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<sup>70</sup> Rukmini Callimachi, "AP Exclusive: Rise of Al-Qaida Saharan Terrorist," *Salon*, May 28, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Jemal Oumar, "North Africa: West Africa, Maghreb Face Same Extremist Threat," *All Africa*, May 27, 2013.

The situation in the Sahel is grim, and it is believed that AQIM will continue to thrive within the chaos. Donald Yamamoto, the acting U.S. State Department Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, offered an assessment of the situation: “The collapse of Libyan security institutions caught the Sahel at an especially vulnerable time. Terrorists enjoyed greater freedom of movement and, temporarily, access to a larger pool of potential recruits and training opportunities. At the same time, transnational criminal networks used well established smuggling routes to increase their trafficking in weapons, drugs and people.”<sup>72</sup>

A coordinated effort is gravely needed; as the terrorists are pushed out of Mali, for instance, they will show up in other ungoverned places. Similarly, the continued instability in Libya and lack of government control over its southern territory continues to be a regional threat.<sup>73</sup>

In its own version of community engagement and countering the narrative, Senegal and Mauritania launched an initiative in early 2013 that promoted local awareness of the encroachment, into countless neighborhoods, of a terrorist sentiment that is geared toward sanctuary and recruitment of vulnerable youth.<sup>74</sup>

## **+Perspective and the Road Ahead**

Japan recently announced that it would provide the Sahel with \$14 billion in aid over five years. Japan’s energy and infrastructure firms are heavily committed to the region. Mindful of the ten Japanese citizens who were killed in the terrorist raid on the Algerian BP facility, the country recognizes the need to support social programs and development so local government might tackle unemployment and poverty, which are believed to contribute to the growth of extremism. The aid is geared toward support for the training of 2,000 people in counterterrorism and security

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<sup>72</sup> Donald Y. Yamamoto, “The Growing Crisis in Africa’s Sahel Region,” *ReliefWeb*, May 21, 2013, <http://reliefweb.int/report/mali/growing-crisis-africas-sahel-region>.

<sup>73</sup> Yamamoto, “The Growing Crisis.”

<sup>74</sup> Bakari Gueye, “Mauritania, Senegal Partner Against Terrorism,” *Magharebia*, January 3, 2013.

maintenance activities, but it will also go toward health and education services for the local population, in particular the youth. The Japanese are operating under the idea that a more hospitable environment will attract economic development, which will further contribute to stability.<sup>75</sup>

Strategic communications directly engaging and involving the community could potentially act as a counter-balance to small groups' hijacking the narrative. Countering violent extremism must “work as a system,” according to Peter Knoope, the Director of the International Centre for

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The United Nations Population Division projects that the population of Nigeria will reach one billion by the start of the twenty-second century.

Counterterrorism. “It should be society-centric and not individually driven.” Moreover, Ambassador Knoope noted that, while research and empiricism show that words are important, it is policy change that addresses the underlying grievances. With respect to those who seek to seize the narrative with violence, he advises that the “social, socializing and ‘re-socializing’ part is critical.”<sup>76</sup>

In the context of profound issues for the future, the United Nations Population Division projects that the population of Nigeria—which is the size of the U.S. state of Texas—will reach one billion by the start of the twenty-second century.<sup>77</sup> This dramatic demographic assessment speaks to the urgent need to address alternatives to violence through creating a culture of liberal democracy

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<sup>75</sup> “Japan to Give \$1 Billion for Sahel Security, Stabilization,” *MSN News*, June 2, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> ICCT-QIASS Conference, The Hague, Netherlands, February 7, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Max Fisher, “The Amazing, Surprising, Africa-Driven Demographic Future of the Earth, in 9 Charts,” *Washington Post*, July 16, 2013.

and emphasizing education, jobs, opportunities, and economic growth. Though it seems like the distant future, events move exponentially, and the region may see an inexorable crisis exacerbated by violence as the only narrative in the absence of solid governance, coalitions of mutual concern and support, and alternatives to terrorism. The UN's assessment characterizes West Africa, generally, as "already troubled by corruption, poverty, and religious conflict" and barely able to serve the needs of respective populations now. And within the statistics and trends is an immediate reality that needs to be addressed: The "dependency ratio" in Africa is relatively high. That is, one in five adults is of working age, and, thus, the other four are more highly dependent on government and the rest of society. (North America's is roughly half of the African dependency ratio.) However, Nigeria, in particular, is blessed with vast natural resources and under-leveraged, high-potential human capital. Actions by leaders to foster cultural and political change, create opportunities, and work collaboratively to counter violent narratives are keys to stability, growth, and prosperity. Or, as the UN report points out, with positive government response toward meeting the needs of such exponential growth, the potential is there to create a "miracle [of economic development] akin to China's."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

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# CONCLUSION

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With this study we have sought to provide governments and other stakeholders with important lessons and strategies for countering the narratives of violence and extremism. Central to this—as seen from the takeaway “Findings”—is developing the right medium, message, and messenger.

As we go to press in September 2013, governments in the West have been caught off guard by the apparent resurgence of al-Qaeda. In August the United States announced the temporary closure of nineteen embassies and consulates across the world, as did some other countries, in response to intelligence indicating that al-Qaeda was planning attacks on these and other targets.

A question rightly asked was: Why, more than a decade after the horrifying attacks of September 11, 2001, and the trillions of dollars spent on counterterrorism operations and wars across the world against al-Qaeda, was the terrorist group still able to scare the United States and other countries into closing their embassies? Such a reaction was at odds with the repeated declarations from leaders that al-Qaeda had been nearly destroyed.

Part of the answer is that those leading the war against al-Qaeda have failed to understand how the group has adapted over the past decade. Since September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda’s leadership has given greater power and autonomy to semi-independent affiliates like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other loosely connected groups, including Boko Haram in Nigeria. Many in the international security establishment, however, dismissed such affiliates as local problems and did not

consider them part of the global war against al-Qaeda. But while these groups do initially focus on local fights, they eventually and inevitably turn to the global war.

The second part of the answer to why al-Qaeda was again deemed a major threat in 2013 is our failure to effectively counter the narratives that they and other terrorist and extremist groups use to recruit new members.

This is where our study comes in. Our central message of choosing the right medium, message, and messenger calls for a global strategy. Such a strategy must include providing vulnerable communities with the proper tools and support to effectively withstand the narratives of violence. A counter-narrative program involves not only military and intelligence aid but also targeted educational tools. Furthermore, we will need to provide political and economic support that is tailored to counter the power vacuums that terrorists and extremists exploit.

Once Countering Violent Extremism is included alongside military, intelligence, and law enforcement operations and other counterterrorism programs, then, and only then, will terrorists and extremists be put firmly on the back foot. This study offers the way forward.

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# ANNEX ONE

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## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### +Tier 1

**1. What is the nature of the threat currently facing your country?**

A. Are these new threats? Or extensions of older, existing problems?

**2. What initiatives or programs exist in your country to counter violent extremism?**

A. Do any of these initiatives focus on countering the narrative that leads individuals into violent extremism?

B. Are these components part of a broader strategy?

C. How long has this strategy been in existence?

D. Would it be possible for us to see the documentation on this strategy?

**3. How and where were these designed and developed?**

A. Who initiated them?

B. What was the critical decision factor associated with undertaking the initiatives?

C. Who actually conducts them? Government-sponsored vs. NGO?

D. What is the relationship between official agencies and NGO bodies engaged in CVE work?

**4. What is the underlying strategy of the initiative?**

A. For example, prevention? Disruption? Undermining the attractiveness of the narrative? “Inoculating” those vulnerable to its message? Exposing contradictions or hypocrisies in the narrative? Promoting alternatives?

B. Or some combination of all of these?

**5. At whom are these initiatives directed?**

A. Those at risk of becoming involved? those already involved? those seeking a way out of involvement? the parents, friends, families of those at risk of involvement?

Communities “represented” by extremists?

**6. What if any lessons exist from international experiences of doing this kind of work?**

A. Have you studied the programs in place within other countries? Have other countries sought to learn from your efforts? If so, which countries and when?

B. Are there any current “best practices” that your country has identified?

C. Is there engagement with Interpol on these issues?

**7. How successful are the tactics used for the program believed to be?**

A. Do you measure effectiveness? If so, how is that measured?

B. Are your metrics developed “in-house,” or were they adapted from other programs?

C. How long have you been collecting data for the purpose of measuring effectiveness?

D. Is there any oversight?

E. To whom does the program report? Audit by some govt. agency?

F. Are there any behavioral indicators of success?

+ For example, increased tips to police, emergence of representatives from the community; speaking about grievances openly in appropriate forum etc.

## +Tier 2

### 1. What exactly does the counter-narrative component look like?

A. For example, does it use a moral vs. political vs. religious narrative? Can any parallels be drawn between the moral, political, or religious narratives?

B. Is there a formal program? If so,

+ How is it structured? Staffing, resources, activities?

+ Where is the program housed?

+ Is this component measured for effectiveness also? If so, how, etc.?

+ How are participants screened? Social, psychological, legal?

+ What are inclusive and exclusive criteria for participation?

+ Recidivism rates

### 2. Is there a role for former extremists in these initiatives?

A. If so, what is the basis of that arrangement, how are people selected, etc.?

B. Where are former extremists used?—for example, in prison, in schools, media, etc.?

C. If former extremists have been employed within your program, how would you characterize their effectiveness?

### 3. What role is there for government to develop or employ counter-narratives?

A. Impossible, unwise? What does govt. do?—select and facilitate partnerships, support dialogue, stimulate communities, address grievances, etc.?

**4. What kinds of narratives are used by the violent extremists in your country?**

A. Is there a primary one? moral vs. political vs. religious vs. social, heroic, glamour, adventure, etc.

B. Have the extremists in your country been successful in their use of these narratives? How? Which narratives have they used most?

**+Tier 3**

**1. What research gaps are there in formulating an effective CVE strategy?**

A. What steps are being taken to address these gaps?

B. What, if any, are the obstacles you face in sponsoring/managing/conducting research in this area (for example, funding, priorities, expertise, etc.)?

**2. What if any role is played by diaspora communities in countering violent extremism?**

A. If such engagement doesn't exist, why not? (fears, concerns?)

B. What is the general response of the leadership of these communities to government programs (for example, support, suspicion, not seen as needed, etc.)?

**3. What is the relationship between online and offline initiatives?**

A. Is there any online presence of CVE initiatives? Public or private?

B. Can any parallels be drawn between the online vs. offline initiatives?

**4. What are the different target levels for CVE efforts (for example, adults vs. children, local vs. diaspora communities)?**

A. What are the specific needs of each of those target communities? What tools and capacities do they need to uncover and root out radicalization and extremism within their communities?

B. How are the efforts that are conducted on various levels coordinated? how does

conflict get resolved? Are there strategic plans for dealing with individuals who transition from one target set to another (for example, an at-risk teenager becomes an adult)?

**5. How is what is learned in the CVE program used operationally to support counterterrorism activities by the government?**

Interrogation, source validation and management, vetting, debriefing?

**6. Business Operations**

A. Is there a budget for CVE initiatives?

B. Staffing allotments?

C. Competencies and skill sets of the staff?

D. Organizational structure of programs: Does a strategic plan exist?

E. Performance measures, outcome measures?

F. Oversight: audit?





The Qatar International Academy for Security Studies (QIASS) presents this latest report, “Countering Violent Extremism: The Counter-Narrative Study” to add to its continued efforts in examining strategic approaches to counterterrorism across multiple cultural and political contexts. This study is the result of a year-long research project conducted by our team of former top law enforcement, intelligence, and counterterrorism officials. Our QIASS team traveled around to a dozen countries studying extremist and terrorist groups and interviewing their members, as well as those in government and other important stakeholders responsible for tackling the problem. While governments across the world have had many notable successes against extremist and terrorist groups, there is a growing realization at the highest levels that in one key area they have fallen short: in countering the narratives that inspire individuals to join such groups in the first place. This is costly. For as long as extremist narratives continue to inspire new recruits to join movements, the battle will continue for generations to come. This is why the strategic tool known as “countering violent extremism,” or CVE, is so important. It is critical that governments utilize it alongside special operations and other important tactical weapons.