

**Emerging and Conflict-Related Issues Division
(ECRI - ESCWA)**

&

Hedayah's ICCT

International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism
Abu Dhabi, U.A.E.

Expert Group Meeting (EGM)

on

**“The State and Future of Preventing Violent Extremism in the Arab Region:
Regional Assessment and Future Prospects”
Abu Dhabi - UAE**

9 and 10 January 2019

Concept Outline

Research on Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) is relatively new. The trajectory that led to its conceptualization started after the September 11 attacks in the United States, as the international community became increasingly aware of the need to combat terrorism. This materialized in 2006 through the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Strategy was based on four pillars: (1) tackling conditions conducive to terrorism; (2) preventing and combating terrorism; (3) building countries' capacity to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and (4) ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism.

Policies to combat terrorism emerged as a reaction to acts of extreme violence, however they were mostly repressive. Conducted in the name of national security, they largely overlooked pillars (1) and (4) of the Strategy. Perhaps best exemplified by the US “war on terror”, this security-based approach has largely failed: the number of deaths from VE and terrorism across the globe rose from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014. This prompted the international community to shift the focus unto preventing terrorism rather than countering it. In 2014, UN Security Council Resolution 2178 advocated countering violent extremism (CVE) as a mean to prevent terrorism.

The importance of PVE emerged shortly afterwards, as the need to complement CVE strategies with preventive measures that addressed its drivers was understood. In 2015, the UN Secretary-General devised a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, aimed at reinvigorating pillar (1) of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Plan, which was largely a reaction to a rising new generation of groups able to spread violent extremist ideologies at an increasingly rapid pace, recognized VE as conducive to terrorism. All over the globe, individuals are exposed to violent material and ideologies in an unprecedented manner. In just three years, the self-labelled Islamic State inspired violent acts across 31 countries.

If each radicalization process is unique, qualitative research suggests that drivers of VE can be categorized into ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors. ‘Push factors’, which refer to the structural conditions that can drive an individual into VE, include: the lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalization in prisons. On the other hand, ‘pull factors’ refer to individual processes like backgrounds and motivations; collective grievances and victimization; distortion and misuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; and leadership and social networks.

Against this background, one can easily see how VE can take root in the Arab region, which displays a 30% youth unemployment rate, protracted conflict, exclusive understanding of ethnic, religious and other forms of identities, non-inclusive governance, poor human rights records, etc. The social fabric of a number of societies and communities are eroding, while millions of uprooted IDPs and refugees are at risk of marginalization in host communities with limited resources. The risk for people to resort to violent means of expression similar to the ones that spread across much of the region in 2011 is looming, which would engulf the region into further conflict and drive it away from achieving the SDGs set by Agenda 2030.

In this context, still prevalent ‘hard’ security-based policies in the region need to effectively make way also for other policies that address the drivers and root causes of VE. These policies have primarily materialized through government-led initiatives aimed at producing discourse counter-narratives. A new wave of such initiatives has emerged in recent years. However, much like their predecessors that saw the light of day in the 2000s, they are likely to prove insufficient, if not counter-productive, for two main reasons.

First, counter-narrative initiatives do not address the ‘push factors’ of VE. By focusing on counter-narratives, discussions in fact drive the attention away from the structural conditions that create the ‘push factors’ of VE. Counter-narratives must be complemented by policies that promote inclusive growth and development, good governance, the rule of law and human rights. Providing counter-narratives on one side while violating human rights on the other will continue to fuel grievances and perpetuate sentiments of victimization. Not addressing ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors simultaneously will fail to produce effective and sustainable PVE strategies.

Second, such initiatives will be seen as illegitimate by individuals who perceive governments and their institutions as the agents responsible for their grievances. Counter-narratives need to be developed through all-of-society approaches that incorporate civil society actors and the local level. Al Azhar University’s online Observatory for Combating Extremism (2015) for instance is training local Imams to rebut extremist religious interpretations in their communities through social media. In Northern Morocco, women-led dialogues are organized at the community level, after research has

shown that mothers are among the most influential forces on an individual's choice to join violent extremist groups.

This EGM will be co-organized with Hedayah Center's ICCT, the UAE-based premier international center and operational platform for expertise and experience to prevent and counter violent extremism by promoting understanding and sharing of good practices to effectively serve as the true global center to prevent and counter violent extremism.

This meeting will explore a number of questions regarding the future of PVE, inter alia, in the Arab region. Even though PVE programmers are still very much in their inception, their future seems uncertain. The lack of empirical evidence on the impact of PVE is notably problematic, as results will take years to effectively materialize. Should the region continue investing in such programmers? How should PVE planning be conducted? Can governments devise national strategies if they actively include all actors of society? How should hate speech be combatted and prevented in social media? Is there a role for the private sector in these efforts? Should civil society actors address 'pull' factors while development actors address 'push' factors?

For additional information or questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Draft Agenda

Day I – 09 January 2019

- 09:30 - 10:00 **Arrival and registration**
- 10:00 - 11:00 **Opening Plenary Session of the EGM**
Opening remarks:
Dr Ali Al-Nuaimi, Chairman of Hedayah Center
Dr Tarik Alami, Director, Emerging and Conflict Related Issues Division (ECRI)
- [Introductory] What are the drivers and constituents (behaviors, etc.) of violent extremism; “push” and “pull” factors?
 - Brief description of how the EGM sessions are divided
- 11:00 - 11:30 **Coffee break**
- 11:30 - 13:30 **Session 1:**
The introductory session of the EGM sets the stage by exposing a stocktaking of PVE efforts (globally and in the region).

This session will last 90 minutes with an added 30 minutes for interactive discussion. It aims to address the following questions:
- UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
 - How should PVE planning be conducted?
 - Can governments devise national strategies if they actively include all actors of society?
 - How to develop inter-governmental PVE/CVE strategies?
 - Should civil society actors address ‘pull’ factors while development actors address ‘push’ factors?
 - Is there a role for the private sector in PVE?
 - How to deal with refugee or inmate radicalization?
- Presentations*
- Mr. Jonas Hult - Security Advisor, City of Malmö / former Senior advisor to UNSMIL
 - Dr. Youness Abouyoub (ECRI)
 - Ms. Jessika Soors, Catholic University of Leuven, Impact Europe
 - Dr Samir Taqui, Director of the Middle East Center for Research and Studies
 - Dr George Wilcoxon (ECRI)

Moderator: Dr Mohamed al-Orabi, Parliamentarian

13:30 - 14:30

Lunch Break

14:30 - 16:30

Session 2:

This session outlines the lessons learned and best practices. It lists the PVE-CVE efforts that have been conducted regionally, as well as which of both preventing or countering/ combating violent extremism has a better impact when it comes to global and regional terrorism.

This session will last 90 minutes with an added 30 minutes for interactive discussion. It aims to address the following questions:

- Which PVE efforts have been conducted in the region/ worldwide and in which context? What were the outcomes of these PVE initiatives?
- How have governments responded to VE? Which policies and initiatives were undertaken?
- How can the international community coordinate better on PVE policies? How can the international peacebuilding community improve the impact of PVE/CVE programs and initiatives?
- Which NGO/Youth and community-based initiatives have been conducted in the region/worldwide, in which context? What is the role of women in CVE/PVE? What have we learned from these initiatives?
- How to deal with the return of foreign fighters?
- Are there “new trends” of violent extremism?
- Case study (MENA - Presentation of the Technical drafted paper by ESCWA)

Presentations

- Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck, Carnegie Middle east.
- Daniel P. Aldrich, Professor and Director of the Security and Resilience Studies Program, Northeastern University
- Dr. Alexandros Lordos.
- Dr Mohamed Al-Haddad, UNESCO Chair professor of comparative religions;
- Ms. Anne Salinas, Director MIA [What is the role of women in CVE/PVE? What have we learned from these initiatives? I have both programmatic experience and research findings to share on these topics, while I have comparatively little experience with the topics covered under Session 4]
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Moderator: Dr. Youness Abouyoub (ESCWA)

Day II – 10 January 2019

09:00 - 11:00

Session 3:

This session focuses on cyberterrorism and how to prevent and counter it.

This session will last 90 minutes with an added 30 minutes for interactive discussion. It aims to address the following questions:

- Which initiatives have been undertaken to prevent cyberterrorism (governmental? Intergovernmental? other?) and how do they operate?
- Based on lessons learned, how to develop cyber-security further?
- What is the role of the private sector?
- Media and social media role in PVE
- Case study (Sweden) – Presentation of the report on Digital Jihad Online

Presentations

- Mr. Adam Hadley
- Mr. J.M. Berger
- Mr. Mohamed Kweiti
- Dr. Adel Abdelsadeq, Al-Ahram Center for Policy and Strategic studies

Moderator: Mr. Jonas Hult - Security Advisor, City of Malmö

11:00 - 11:30

Coffee break

11:30 - 13:30

Session 4:

This session focuses on political violence and the expansion of hate speech and discourse, focusing on extremist and violent ideas and how to address these issues.

This session will last 90 minutes with an added 30 minutes for interactive discussion. It aims to address the following questions

- What are “extremist online communication strategies”?
- What is the role of the media in the diffusion and expansion of hate speech and discourse? Does increased media coverage also increase VE?
- What is the role of social media platforms in this case? What are their policies regarding the issue and how can these platforms improve at managing content?
- How can these media platform help in PVE and in conflict prevention overall?
- Case study Iraq

Presentations

- Mr. Hicham Al-Hachimi, Expert on PVE/CVE, Advisor to the Iraqi Parliament on PVE

- Professor Jeffrey Haynes, London Metropolitan University
- Mr. Mohamed Al-Jassem, European Center for counter-terrorism research

Moderator: TBC (If Samir Taqui is not available, ECRI will moderate)

13:30 - 14:30

Lunch

14:30 - 16:00

Session 4: Continued Discussion

With the aim of preventing and countering further violent extremism, this session will wrap-up the outcomes of the previous discussions, reflect on good practices that can be derived from within and outside the region, and offer suggestions, recommendations and policy options for states to better prevent and counter violent extremism which is present in different forms, such as political violent discourse or cyberterrorism.

Presentations

- Dr Samir Nader, Director of the Levant Center for Strategic studies
- Dr Mohamed al-Haddad
- Monica Duffy Toft, Professor, The Fletcher School (Tufts University)
- Dr Mohamed al-Oraby

Moderator: **Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck (Carnegie Middle East)**

Summary and Closing remarks:

Dr Ali Al Nuaimi

Dr. Tarik Alami