DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND COUNTER-EXTREMISM:
A GUIDE TO PROGRAMMING

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Counter-Terrorism Hypotheses Phase II

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AQ   Al-Qaeda

CE   Counter-extremism

CSO   Civil society organization

DA   Development assistance

D/G   Democracy and governance

ICU   Islamic Courts Union

IED   Improvised explosive device

IRA   Irish Republican Army

NGO   Non-governmental organization

TSJ   Transnational Salafi Jihadism or transnational Salafi Jihadist

TSJs   Transnational Salafi Jihadists

TSCTP   Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership

USAID   United States Agency for International Development

USG   United States Government

VE   Violent extremism or violent extremist

VEs   Violent extremists

VIE   Violent Islamist extremism or violent Islamist extremist

VIEs   Violent Islamist extremists

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Approach:

Drawing on the February 2009 *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Islamist Extremism*, this new publication on *Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism* discusses the implications for practitioners pursuing development objectives in the context of counter-extremism (CE). Because programming must reflect the distinctive features of the specific environment in which a particular group involved in Violent Extremism (VE) operates, this publication does not create a universal formula for designing and implementing programs that address CE. Instead it recommends a process that considers key questions and areas of inquiry to inform programming choices. The document specifies six steps to follow to identify key drivers and to assess how those drivers interact with each other. It also lays out twelve broad programming principles and a menu of development assistance (DA) interventions to help development practitioners respond to socioeconomic, political, and cultural drivers of violent extremism.

The report is organized into five sections. Part One lays out a six step process to identify key drivers and summarizes socioeconomic, political and cultural drivers of VE. Part Two outlines the twelve core CE programming principles. Parts Three through Five provide a list of illustrative options for addressing socioeconomic drivers, political drivers, and cultural drivers, respectively.

Part One:

Part One identifies the three conditions necessary for effective CE programming: a solid understanding of the factors that generate and sustain VE; identification of the primary challenge being confronted; and determination of the populations, areas and institutions that appear to be particularly vulnerable to VE. In order to meet these conditions, six steps to the programming process are given along with a set of questions designed to lead the practitioner through an analytical process.

- Step One: determine the characteristics of the VE phenomenon in the specific setting being analyzed.
- Step Two: assess whether prevention or mitigation is the main task and whether recruitment, community support, or an enabling environment that permits VE groups to operate are the most pressing concerns.
- Step Three: identify which populations, geographical areas, and/or institutions are particularly vulnerable and why.
- Step Four: ascertain those social processes and group dynamics that are critical to facilitating or undermining recruitment and/or community support.
- Step Five: determine the key political, socioeconomic and cultural drivers at work and assess their salience after reviewing the analysis in Steps One through Four.
- Step Six: prioritize drivers and target locations; determine DA and strategic communications interventions. To help with this step, a Threat Assessment Matrix is given as a template for the practitioner to identify the type of drivers of extremism

The authors identify three different categories of drivers of violent extremism: socioeconomic, political and cultural. The drivers briefly described and separated by category are as follows:

Socioeconomic Drivers:

1. Perceptions of social exclusion and marginality

   This perception may be particularly prevalent among peri-urban/slum youth and in environments where family structures have eroded, normal social controls no longer check behavior, and youth have too much time on their hands. A sense of anomie and isolation may result. VE groups may

exploit this isolation by offering an escape, a sense of purpose and inclusion in a collective movement.

2. Social networks and group dynamics

   Social networks are an important factor in radicalization and recruitment. Individuals may drift into VE groups with friends or as a result of the influence of relatives, neighbors or a charismatic local preacher.

3. Societal discrimination

   Real or perceived discrimination towards an individual or community (or both) in a broad sense can be a driver for VE. In places where Muslims are a small minority, soci-economic and/or political discrimination may be perceived as linked to disrespect for Islam and Muslims, provoking radicalization.

4. Frustrated expectations and relative deprivation

   Relative depravation and frustrated expectations are powerful drivers of VE activity among youth given improvements in education, especially at the secondary and university levels. Youth with greater amounts of education are likely to feel that they deserve better life outcomes than their societies can deliver. They generally cannot obtain the sorts of jobs they feel they deserve; they recognize the nepotism impedes access to jobs. Young males may lack the economic resources to marry and are generally denied a voice in traditional societies.

5. Unmet social and economic needs

   Deprivation of socioeconomic needs—especially when combined with other factors such as widespread corruption and lack of security and justice—may be a factor exploited by VE groups, which may offer wages or services. It is not poverty, however, but the acute form of social exclusion by the government and society that elicits support for VE.

6. Greed or the proliferation of illegal economic activities

   VE organizations' illegal activities offer lucrative economic opportunities for those who seek a ready income. Networks operating VE and illegal economic activities have a mutually beneficial relationship—providing each other with revenue, experience in concealment, and ideology to legitimize illegal behavior. Prisons are a popular venue for VE recruitment.

Political Drivers:

1. Denial of political rights and civil liberties

   The lack of political rights and civil liberties, and closed, unresponsive political systems, can instill a belief that violence is the only means for political change. Civil liberties and political rights also may represent a critical—but not representative—link between economic development and vulnerability to VE.

2. Harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights

   Justice is a critical value in Islam. Cruel, degrading treatment (including torture) to an individual at the hands of the police or security forces can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the brutality, the greater the spur to VE activities and the more support VE may garner from the local communities.

3. Foreign occupation

   Countries subject to foreign military occupation are at risk of insurgency and rights abuses. Support for VE activities may derive from individuals seeking to redeem disgrace to their person and their community.

4. Political and/or military encroachment

    Large-scale political or military intrusion into internal affairs can act as a unifying element, with the community resorting to violence to redeem individual and collective honor. In communities with a historically high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, strong resistance is likely.

5. Endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites

    This driver prompts civic disengagement and political apathy at the least and can foster a profound sense of moral outrage as is the case in Afghanistan. The more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for VE groups to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and to lash out at immoral governing elites.

6. Poorly governed or ungoverned areas

    These areas are isolated, low population density regions that constitute safe havens where VE organizations can establish themselves with little hindrance, and even garner support from communities ignored by the government. It should be understood that VE groups might gravitate toward 'states of limited strength'—as opposed to failed or even failing states—where they can have the infrastructure necessary to develop their network and carry out operations.

7. Local conflicts

    Local conflicts of sufficient scale can create chaos, incapacitate government institutions, and result in a power vacuum to be exploited by VE organizations. VE groups will try to co-opt one side in a conflict and will try to impose their transnational agenda on purely local dynamics. In one recent example, the Afghan Taliban (whose agenda has been local) now call for an Islamic Caliphate.

8. State support

    Host governments and foreign states—or groups/individuals within— have often supported VE movements, only to later lose control over them. Examples include the Egyptian government supporting radical Islamists against the Nasserites and Pakistan governments supporting various Islamist groups against India and Afghanistan.

9. Discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions

    When a regime is entirely discredited, and there is no viable opposition, those who wish to oppose the government and bring about reform will be pushed outside normal political channels and may support VE groups.

10. Intimidation or coercion by VE groups

    Where governments cannot provide security and protection for its citizens, VE groups use intimidation and coercion to force support for their movement.

11. Perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples

    Populations may accept VE propaganda that the global political and economic system discriminates against the Muslim world, which can mesh with personal or communal feelings of discrimination.

Cultural Drivers:

1. Islam under siege

    A strong correlation exists between VE success and the perception the West is attacking Islam and Muslims. Individuals who experience repression and humiliation in their daily life may be more susceptible to highly politicized and emotional images of fellow Muslims suffering in other countries. This overlaps and reinforces political driver number 11.

2. Broader cultural threats

   The population may perceive a broader cultural threat – to traditions, customs, values, and sense of collective/individual honor and dignity.

3. "Proactive" religious agendas

   Groups promoting these agenda will try to impose their version of Islam, jihad, etc. on the local population, weakening traditional and more moderate and tolerant religious structures and practices. This may set the stage for VE.

Part Two:

After diagnosing the different types of drivers of violent extremism, it is crucial to assess responses. Part Two highlights twelve core principles for programming development assistance to counter VE. Designed to prevent potentially misguided decisions, these principles help a practitioner to consider specific activities or types of interventions that one may not have considered initially. The programming principles fall under two categories: extremism risk assessment and strategy development, and program and project design and adaptation.

The first three principles address risk assessment and strategy development when programming to address CE. Rule 1 suggests developing a strategy after an adequate understanding of local conditions and dynamics has been acquired. Rule 2 is to disaggregate the threat and prioritize strategy elements accordingly. Rule 3 requires that one systematically identify and tap into those features of local society that may protect it against VE in developing a strategy.

The remaining rules specifically address program and project design and adaptation. Rule 4 challenges the program designer to think holistically: to design all activities to fit the overarching CE strategy; integrate interventions across sectoral areas; look for complementary and mutually reinforcing impacts; and coordinate among key stakeholders. Rule 5 recommends that assistance be directed to at-risk groups and communities, and calls for prioritizing interventions and maintaining a sense of modesty in projecting likely results. Rule 6 argues that it is best to anchor development program implementation in partnerships.

Rule 7 reminds practitioners to convey respect for indigenous religious and cultural norms and tradition. Rule 8 ensures that development interventions are designed to produce CE benefits or impacts, and that the CE benefits are significant enough to merit the interventions. Rule 9 emphasizes effective communication and requires that a plan be formulated early and as a core element of the CE development strategy. Rule 10 considers the potential unintended consequences of particular interventions before making any final decision about programming. Rule 11 balances the advantages of continuity and consistency against the need for flexibility. Finally, Rule 12 addresses high VE risk environments by challenging the practitioner to consider the trade-offs that may exist between CE objectives and strategy elements and DA approaches. In summary, the rules highlighted are dynamic and should be considered both while a CE strategy is being developed and after tentative decisions have been reached.

Part Three:

Parts Three through Five consist of illustrative DA responses to the different VE drivers. Part Three specifically focuses on socioeconomic drivers and offers different ways to address the five different socioeconomic drivers, placing a particular emphasis on the role of youth. The paper provides six suggestions for how to respond to both social exclusion and marginality and counter the effects of social networks and group dynamics that tempt youth to become involved with VE organizations or activities. To respond to societal discrimination, two main suggestions are given: identifying existing areas of societal discrimination and lessening the likelihood that groups facing discrimination will find solace in VE organizations. Frustrated expectations and deprivation are a common problem particularly among more educated youth. To respond to the vulnerabilities of this societal group there are four suggestions:

developing job readiness training, creating better transitions from school to work, increasing youth employment, and improving opportunities for young entrepreneurs. Unmet social and economic needs can be addressed by traditional development activities aimed at improving social and economic conditions among vulnerable populations; focusing on job creation and improving access to basic services; improving service-delivery and strengthening relevant government institutions; and interrupting the flow of resources to religious organizations that condone, support, or are engaged in VE activities. Finally, to respond to greed or illegal economic activities, criminal justice reform must be made a priority as well as anti money –laundering laws, stronger accounting skills, and improved policing programs that rely heavily on collaboration among the public, private and NGO sectors. In addition the greed of VE groups should be highlighted in awareness campaigns to vulnerable populations.

Part Four:

Responding to eleven different political drivers is the focus of Part Four. The paper offers six suggestions for how to address a situation where political rights and civil liberties are denied to citizens. To respond to harsh government repression and gross violations of human rights, the authors suggest DA interventions that emphasize preventing or curbing gross human rights violations and indiscriminate repression. Although the authors do not offer a means to address foreign occupation, they provide three suggestions when addressing political and/or military encroachment. Five suggestions are given to address endemic corruption and impunity for well-connected elites and three are given to address poorly governed or ungoverned areas. Local conflicts should be addressed only when they heighten the risk of being exploited by transnational VEs or if there is a risk of them becoming a source of VE. The authors provide four suggestions for dealing with local conflicts, beginning with the suggestion to develop the ability to determine the extent to which conflicts pose a significant VE threat. To address state support for extremist groups, discredited governments and missing or co-opted legal oppositions, and intimidation or coercion by VE groups, the authors provide suggestions that involve DA, diplomatic efforts, and security efforts. Finally, although it is difficult to counter the perception that the international system is fundamentally unfair and hostile to Muslim societies and peoples, the following steps can be taken to build trust: support efforts to address large-scale poverty and marginality, support indigenous voices in a counter-narrative, and disseminate information about the accomplishments of Muslim individuals, organizations, and countries on the international stage.

Part Five:

Although cultural drivers are usually viewed as the most difficult to influence through DA, there are some principles that can be used to address them effectively. Maintain a high level of respect for Islam as well as indigenous customs, religious figures and cultural leaders; remember that interventions may be viewed as a form of cultural intrusion; and engage credible indigenous cultural authority figures in development assistant efforts are some suggested ways to address cultural drivers. In addition, maintaining an awareness of the cultural drivers while tackling socioeconomic and political conditions that reinforce VE discourses is also important.

Conclusion:

In summary, this document should be considered a "navigation chart" that draws attention to key questions and areas of inquiry that should inform programming choices; it offers guidance on how to identify the most salient drivers; and it provides illustrative types of interventions to address those drivers. By capturing most of the "dos and don'ts" of CE programming, and by drawing attention to the unique challenges, trade-offs, and dangers associated with programming, this paper contributes to the quality of decision-making in this area and acts as a guide to development practitioners.