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Strengthening Community Resilience against Violence and Extremism

The Roles of Women in South Asia

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Introduction

In recent years, policymakers and practitioners have recognized that "hard" counterterrorism measures alone cannot address terrorism, a threat that is increasingly diffuse and unpredictable. Furthermore, these approaches ineffectively address the enabling environment for violent extremism, such as the conditions, grievances, and ideologies that may contribute to the violent radicalization and mobilization of individuals and groups. As a result, the international community has moved from a reactive to a more proactive and preventive approach that focuses on countering violent extremism (CVE). Unlike traditional counterterrorism measures, which focus largely on law enforcement and military responses, CVE programming spans a broad cross-section of policy domains and has increased the range of actors involved to include those in development, conflict prevention and mitigation, education, culture, and diplomacy. Moreover, unlike traditional security-centric responses, practitioners have fostered a more bottom-up approach with a focus on the communities and actors most directly affected by or engaged with extremist activities.

Consequently, there has been an increase in efforts to explore the roles of women in terrorism and counterterrorism. Civil society organizations that work with women are often an important source of resilience against violence and extremism. Although such civil society organizations may not be working on counterterrorism issues, many of their objectives and achievements, especially in the realms of development, education, civic rights, and political activism, are being threatened by extremists. As a result, efforts to continue fostering progress on these issues, although not labeled as CVE activities, can play an important role in challenging, delegitimizing, and reducing support for extremist groups.

This multidimensional approach to terrorism is reflected in the UN General Assembly's 2006 adoption of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which urges member states to address "conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism" through the promotion of good governance, rule of law, and respect for human rights. Even traditionally security-centric bodies such as the UN Security Council and the more recently established Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) have recognized the importance of human rights

and the role of civil society in countering terrorism.[1] The roles of women in addressing conflict, violence, and extremism have been highlighted in a number of GCTF meetings and workshops,[2] and the European Union has considered women as a target audience and as potential partners in its CVE and deradicalization efforts.[3] Additionally, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has proposed a number of recommendations for states and civil society to adopt in their efforts to address the roles of women in terrorism and violent extremism.[4]

Within the United Nations, the roles of women in peace and conflict resolution have been underscored through a number of tools and mechanisms, most notably through UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on women, peace, and security. This gender dimension has been less visible in counterterrorism discussions to date, and there have been few opportunities for counterterrorism practitioners and policymakers to directly interact with civil society actors who are confronting these issues.[5] Nevertheless, the recent UN Secretary-General's report on women and peace and security provides a specific "call for action" on this front, stating that the Security Council should "include women, peace and security issues in all thematic debates, such as those relating to terrorism, counter-terrorism measures, transnational organized crime and conflict prevention and natural resources."[6] This point was further underscored by Resolution 2122, in which the council expressed its intention to "increase its attention to women, peace and security issues in all relevant thematic areas [including] threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts."[7]

To further explore the gender dimensions of CVE engagement, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) and the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) at the National University of Singapore cohosted the workshop "Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism in South Asia: What Role for Women and Civil Society?" in early fall 2013. The workshop, hosted with generous support from the government of Norway, provided a platform for regional experts and practitioners from a range of professional and national backgrounds to explore the gender dimension of the drivers of violence and extremism in the region and the lessons from experiences in addressing them. The workshop was part of a series undertaken by CGCC and ISAS to explore the roles of experts and practitioners in strengthening regional security cooperation in South Asia. The series complemented training for regional law enforcement officials,

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[1] See UN Security Council, S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001; UN Security Council, S/RES/1624, 14 September 2005; UN Security Council, S/RES/1963, 20 December 2010.

[2] GCTF, "Working Groups," n.d., http://www.thegctf.org/web/guest/working-groups.

[3] See Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC), "EU Workshop on Effective Programming for Countering Violent Extremism: Final Summary Report," n.d., http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news/documents/20121217_eu_cve_workshop_summary_report.pdf.

[4] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, "Women and Terrorist Radicalization: Final Report," February 2013, http://www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true.

[5] See Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Rafia Barakat, and Liat Shetret, "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors," *CGCC Policy Brief*, April 2013, http://www.globalct.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/13Apr11_Women-and-Terrorism-Prevention_Final.pdf.

[6] UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security*, S/2013/525, 4 September 2013, para. 75(e).

[7] UN Security Council, S/RES/2122, 18 October 2013, para. 3. Resolution 2122 also encourages troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the percentage of women military and police deployments in UN peacekeeping operations.

prosecutors, and judges in South Asia organized by CGCC and the UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

Participants in the CGCC-ISAS workshop offered perspectives from the realms of development, education, the rule of law, and conflict resolution and considered the contribution of women's roles in these areas to challenging violent extremist activities and narratives. The discussions addressed the role that women sometimes play in supporting and facilitating radicalization and violence and the programs that have reached out to them. The notable achievements of women and civil society in South Asia were highlighted and offered valuable lessons that may inform responses to violence and extremism in other parts of the world confronting similar challenges. These lessons are particularly relevant as South Asia has seen women occupy the highest political offices, such as the late Pakistani politician Benazir Bhutto; former Indian prime minister Indira Ghandi; the current prime minister and the opposition leader in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, respectively; and former Sri Lankan president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, whose mother, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, was the first elected female prime minister in 1960. The discussions at the workshop were conducted with a view to considering the application of the international framework for countering violent extremism and generated recommendations and insights for how the development of policy and practice might be informed by some of the particular regional challenges in South Asia as well as the opportunities for engagement in their own communities and countries. This policy brief is reflective of the discussions in Singapore, as well as research and discussions conducted by the authors.

Singapore workshop participants, September 2013

Women, Conflict, and Terrorism

The detrimental impact of violence and conflict on development was underscored by the World Bank's *World Development Report 2011* and in the post-2015 development agenda.[8] According to the World Bank report, 1.5 billion people live in conflict-affected areas; it is estimated that, by 2015, more than 50 percent of those in extreme poverty will reside in

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[8] World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2011), http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf; UN High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development," 30 May 2013, http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf.

places affected by conflict and chronic violence.[9] Furthermore, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 noted that women and children account for the "vast majority" of those adversely affected by armed conflict and are increasingly "targeted" by combatants and armed elements.[10] Within this conflict environment, women and girls are predominantly affected by sexual violence.[11] Women also suffer from other forms of violence during armed conflict, including murder, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, and forced sterilization.[12] Yet, women are not only victims of violence and conflict; they also play important roles in international peace and security efforts, including conflict resolution and peace-building. These roles have been underscored by the adoption of Resolution 1325 and subsequent thematic resolutions on women, peace, and security. Nevertheless, the roles of women in relation to terrorism and violent extremism have remained less explored by policymakers and practitioners. This dearth of understanding is particularly notable as the impact of armed conflict on women may be further exacerbated by terrorist and violent extremist groups operating in conflict-affected areas, and vice versa.[13]

A closer understanding of the roles women play in relation to violence and conflict is critical to the development of tailored strategies to strengthen resilience against violence and extremism and support victims and survivors of terrorist attacks. As noted in the Strategy, prolonged and unresolved conflict can be one of the conditions conducive to terrorism. Moreover, grievances regarding weak governance, sociopolitical inequality, a lack of access to justice, or the suppression of human rights can be drivers of political violence and create an enabling environment for extremist and terrorist groups to drum up support and recruits and impose their ideologies. Not only are they often victims of violence and extremism, but women may also be active sympathizers and supporters of terrorist causes and violent extremist ideologies or powerful preventers and agents of change.[14] Studies suggest that women are generally driven by many of the same factors that prompt men to become terrorists.[15] In many instances, however, women may be more vulnerable than men to being coerced into supporting or perpetrating violence through physical and psychological manipulation and intimidation, particularly in societies where they may have little recourse to alternative mechanisms of empowerment or independence.[16]

Women's participation in terrorism and violent extremism may be a deliberate choice shaped by their personal convictions and experiences. Rather than preventing family

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[9] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Ensuring Fragile States Are Not Left Behind," n.d., http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/factsheet%202013%20resource%20flows%20final.pdf.

[10] UN Security Council, S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000.

[11] See UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, *Sexual Violence in Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/67/792-S/2013/149, 14 March 2013.

[12] See UN Department of Public Information, "Women and Armed Conflict," DPI/2035/E, May 2000, http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs5.htm.

[13] UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 17 January 2012 From the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2012/42, 18 January 2012 (*Report of the Assessment Mission on the Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the Sahel Region*).

[14] Kylie Morris and Sasha Joelle Achilli, "How British Women Are Joining the Jihad in Syria," Channel 4, 23 July 2013, http://www.channel4.com/news/syria-rebels-jihad-british-foreign-assad.

[15] For example, see Maj. Marne L. Sutten, "The Rising Importance of Women in Terrorism and the Need to Reform Counterterrorism Strategy," School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, AY 2009, 21 May 2009, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA506225.

[16] Ibid.

members from engaging in violence, they may push children and family members to aspire to martyrdom and support terrorist organizations through such activities as propaganda, recruitment, and fundraising and other forms of support. Like their male counterparts, women can also be drawn to participate in terrorism to avenge a sense of personal or familial dishonor.[17]

Singapore workshop participant, September 2013

Alternatively, women can be powerful preventers and participate in innovative efforts to inform, shape, and implement policies and programs to reduce the appeal of violence and extremism and mitigate the effects of terrorism on communities.[18] In many communities, women are traditionally well placed to shape familial and social norms and to promote increased tolerance and nonviolent political and civic engagement. Groups such as Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) are working closely with mothers and families to empower them as parents and help in identifying early signs of grievances, anger, and behaviors that might lead to radicalization.[19]

Women's voices may be especially compelling when they speak out, either on their own behalf or for family members and friends who are victims or survivors of terrorist attacks[20] or as partners and family members of terrorists and fighters, by dispelling the notion that fighting is "cool" and expressing the hardships such a life can impose on families and communities. In several countries, such as Indonesia, Jordan, Spain, and the United States, survivors and family members of victims have been speaking out to humanize the impact of terrorism on families and communities. Of course, this role is not confined to female family members. There have been also powerful appeals by men affected by terrorism, such as Tahir Wadood Malik in Pakistan or Max Boon in Indonesia.[21]

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[17] Ibid.

[18] See Edit Schlaffer, "Mothers of Extremists: The Unlikely Allies for a New Female Security Paradigm," Huffington Post, 21 May 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/edit-schlaffer/mothers-of-extremists-the_b_3314019.html.

[19] See Women Without Borders, "Underway: Mothers Schools," n.d., http://www.women-without-borders.org/projects/underway/42/.

[20] For example, see Bruce Hoffman and Anna-Britt Kasupski, "The Victims of Terrorism: An Assessment of Their Influence and Growing Role in Policy, Legislation, and the Private Sector," *RAND Occasional Paper*, 2007, p. 36, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2007/RAND_OP180-1.pdf.

[21] Tahir Wadood Malik, "A Terrorist Victim Isn't Always Someone Else," Common Ground News Service, 26 April 2011, http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=29653&lan=en&sp=1.

Violent Extremism in South Asia

South Asia is no stranger to the challenges of terrorism and violent extremism. Four out of seven countries in the region rank within the top 10 in terms of the impact of terrorism; six out of seven countries in the region rank within the top 40. Groups have been perpetrating violence under the banner of a range of ideological, religious, or ethno-nationalist causes, such as the Maoists in Nepal and India, the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Khalistan movement in India, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. Islamist groups in Bangladesh have fostered violence and extremism, and Buddhist extremism in Myanmar has surged, which is affecting the Rohingya Muslim population on the region's borders.[22] Additionally, the region confronts a complex host of developmental challenges, including poverty, inequality, and gender-based violence, and countries lie on a spectrum of political stability ranging from postconflict zones to established democracies. Moreover, the endeavor of state-building continues in the region, with many countries and communities still grappling with the sociopolitical repercussions of colonialism and governments struggling to meet the increasing expectations of their citizens with limited resources. Such grievances and conditions, in combination with the incidence of confrontational and violent politics and proxy wars in many countries, may create an enabling environment for extremist groups.

Despite this difficult environment, the region boasts a vibrant civil society; and women in South Asia have made notable progress in a number of areas, including education, poverty eradication, social and political mobilization, and maternal health, with support from civil society and international donors and organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank.[23] In Bangladesh, for example, infant mortality rates have been more than halved due primarily to adult female schooling and delayed childbearing among women.[24] The growth of the textile industry and introduction of microcredit has expanded economic opportunities for many women in the country.[25] Underscoring the linkages among women, education, and development, research has shown that a mother's education is critical to child survival and that women are more likely than men to invest in family well-being.[26]

Yet, these gains and any further improvement in the lives of women may be at risk due to extremist groups in South Asia. These effects could be seen with attacks on girls'

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[22] Shubhajit Roy, "Delhi Raises 'Resurgence' of Khalistan Movement With West," *Indian Express*, 9 January 2013, http://www.indianexpress.com/news/delhi-raises--resurgence--of-khalistan-movement-with-west/1056945/; Todd Pitman and Grant Peck, "Myanmar Anti-Muslim Violence Fueled by 969 Radical Buddhist Movement," Associated Press, 31 May 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/31/myanmar-anti-muslim-violence-969-movement_n_3366863.html.

[23] See World Bank, "Role of Women: Key to South Asia's Development," n.d., http://go.worldbank.org/6UJ0TH0830.

[24] See World Bank, *To the MDGs and Beyond: Accountability and Institutional Innovation in Bangladesh*, July 2006, pp. 28–33, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1171499457708/chapter3.pdf.

[25] "Bangladesh and Development: The Path Through the Fields," *Economist*, 3 November 2012, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21565617-bangladesh-has-dysfunctional-politics-and-stunted-private-sector-yet-it-has-been-surprisingly.

[26] For example, see UN Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2013; The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World*, 2013, http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2013_EN_complete.pdf; Marc J. Cohen, "Food Security: Vulnerability Despite Abundance," *Coping With Crisis Working Paper Series*, July 2007, http://www.ipinst.org/media/pdf/publications/mgs_fsec.pdf.

education,[27] a problem powerfully highlighted by Malala Yousafzai in her speech at the United Nations calling for universal access to education.[28] Extremists have perpetrated acts of violence and disseminated threats to the personal security of women in an effort to limit their participation in the public sphere.[29] Moreover, there are concerns that religious groups favoring more-rigid cultural and religious practices will roll back gains made by women, especially with regard to health and education.[30]

The Security-Development Challenge

A serious chasm between development and security practitioners remains that inhibits the exchange of knowledge and an integrated approach to the development of policies and programs. This wariness stems largely from political sensitivities regarding the definition of and legal response to terrorism, persistent organizational cultures in which the two remain wary of one another, and limited opportunities to bridge the divide, as well as concerns regarding the safety of personnel identified as counterterrorism practitioners. Many law enforcement and security officials continue to view counterterrorism through the lens of interdiction, with a focus on intelligence, interrogation, and kinetic operations, many of which have constrained the space for civil society and threatened their operations. Anti–money laundering regimes and cumbersome regulations to counter the financing of terrorism have posed an administrative burden on civil society groups, many of which may be small, informal organizations without the technical capacity to meet such legislative demands, and forced them to limit or close operations.[31] In South Asia in particular, the wariness of the practice by colonial powers of applying the label of terrorism to pro-independence actors is reflected in skepticism regarding the application of the term, especially by Western powers, a dynamic underscored by the "global war on terror" terminology. Moreover, there are concerns that association with counterterrorism activities will endanger field staff and operations and relationships with key stakeholders.[32]

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[27] Taha Siddiqui and Declan Walsh, "Siege by Taliban Strains Pakistani Girls' Schools," *New York Times*, 11 July 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/12/world/asia/siege-by-taliban-strains-pakistani-girls-schools.html?pagewanted=1&src=recg.

[28] "The Text of Malala Yousafzai's Speech at the United Nations," A World at School, n.d., https://secure.aworldatschool.org/page/content/the-text-of-malala-yousafzais-speech-at-the-united-nations/.

[29] For example, see Irene Khan, "Lost Rights, Lost Lives," *New York Times*, 14 May 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/15/opinion/global/lost-rights-and-lost-lives-in-bangladesh.html?_r=2&; "Afghanistan: MP Fariba Ahmadi Kakar Abducted in Ghazni," BBC, 13 August 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-23685833.

[30] For example, see Leah Malone, "Rising Religious Fundamentalism, Conservative Thinking Impacting Women: Department of Natural Planning," Minivan News, 7 July 2013, http://minivannews.com/society/rising-religious-fundamentalism-conservative-thinking-impacting-women-department-of-national-planning-60859; "Gender Equal Bangladesh," *Daily Star*, 12 May 2013, http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/gender-equal-bangladesh/.

[31] See Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, "A Decade Lost: Locating Gender in U.S. Counter-Terrorism," 2011, http://chrgj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/locatinggender.pdf; CGCC, "To Protect and Prevent: Outcomes of a Global Dialogue to Counter Terrorist Abuse of the Nonprofit Sector," June 2013, http://www.globalct.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CGCC_Prevent-Protect-Report_pgs.pdf.

[32] Shamim Shahid, "Taliban Terrorists Target Anti-Polio Team, Kill 2," *Pakistan Today*, 7 October 2013, http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/10/07/news/national/taliban-terrorists-target-anti-polio-team-kill-2/.

The division between security and development practitioners poses a challenge for many governments and international organizations, whose practitioners and policymakers are frequently divided on these issues. Bureaucratic silos and lack of a shared understanding of these concepts inhibits opportunities to develop more-integrated and -responsive programming.

Moreover, the divide reflects variances in the prioritization of countering violent extremism by local, regional, and international partners. The considerable development challenges have led to clear policy priorities focusing on development, and grievances about violence are framed more often by experiences of political, communal, or sectarian tensions. Ongoing conflicts such as those between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, in Afghanistan, and within Sri Lanka, for example, have placed a much heavier emphasis on security or insecurity derived from relationships with the state or regional powers than on the actions of terrorist groups. At the same time, violent extremism has exacerbated or compounded these dynamics, and the increase in sectarian and intercommunal violence has been greatly attributed to the ideologies and campaigns of extremist groups.

The complex and diffuse nature of evolving security challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and illicit trafficking means that CVE policies and programming present new opportunities for engagement on such issues. Violent extremism need not be associated only with terrorism but can and has often contributed to drivers of political violence, sectarian tensions, and insecurity and inhibited or constrained development efforts. Although the terms "countering violent extremism" and "terrorism prevention" are often used interchangeably, the former can be more closely associated with efforts to prevent and resolve conflict, mitigate drivers of instability and insecurity, and foster intercommunal dialogue. Given the CVE focus on the prevention of violent extremism, challenging extremist narratives and addressing underlying grievances, there is much scope for overlap with development, education, and human rights programming without any of these necessarily being undertaken for specific CVE objectives.

Women and Perpetrators and Supporters

There is a tendency in policy circles to presume an exclusively preventive role for women with regard to violent extremism. In South Asia, however, as in other regions, women have supported and perpetrated acts of violence and terrorism. In Sri Lanka, the all-female branch of the LTTE, known as the Freedom Birds, was involved in the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The assassination attempt was plotted by a female deputy head, Akhila (aliases Somasekaram Satyadevi, Sakthi, and Akilakka), of the LTTE intelligence wing and executed by a young woman called Dhanu of the Black Tigers, an elite all-female commando unit within the LTTE.[33] The Black Tigers also planned and

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[33] Margaret Gonzalez-Perez, "From Freedom Birds to Water Buffaloes: Women Terrorists in Asia," in *Female Terrorism and Militancy: Agency, Utility, and Organization*, ed. Cindy D. Ness (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp.

carried out assassination plots against a number of public figures from 1991 to 2004.[34] Yet, women were not initially accepted into the LTTE; they had to prove their capabilities by committing ferocious attacks to gain prominence within the organization and achieve similar ranking as their male counterparts.[35]

Even in conservative, religiously inspired groups such as those associated with al-Qaida, women have been gaining increasing attention in most cases as ideologues and supporters rather than as combatants, although that may change. Recognizing these roles and the prospect of recruiting educated and politically engaged young women, al-Qaida has appealed directly to women through online magazines that call on women to support male jihadists and to raise their children to believe in an extremist ideology.[36] More recently, reports alleged that Samantha Lewthwaite, the wife of one of the attackers in the 7 July 2007 London bombings and known as the "White Widow," was been involved in a number of attacks sanctioned by al-Qaida.[37]

The prospect of escaping societal and cultural restrictions, particularly in South Asia, is among the motivators that lead women to join or support terrorist organizations and paramilitary groups. For example, the LTTE promised "radical transformation of women's lives and social attitudes towards women";[38] the Indian Naxalites, owing to their egalitarian ideology, offered a way of escaping caste and gender divisions; and the People's Liberation Army of Nepal was notable for being composed of nearly 30–50 percent women and espousing equal rights for women as one of its goals.[39] Material and financial burdens associated with tradition, such as dowry payments, which were suspended for female members of some terrorist groups, offered powerful incentives for women to

Singapore workshop participants, September 2013

183–200. A Singapore workshop participant noted that titles were given to LTTE members not based on training or qualifications, but as rewards for violent acts and that the higher-profile attacks were rewarded with higher titles. For these reasons, it was argued that using the titles given by the organization—in the case of Akhila, "Lieutenant Colonel"—was a means of legitimizing their actions and risked increasing their appeal to others. Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[34] Gonzalez-Perez, "From Freedom Birds to Water Buffaloes."

[35] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[36] "Al-Shamikha, Al Qaeda Women's Magazine, Launches: Report," Huffington Post, 14 March 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/al-shamikha-al-qaeda-womens-magazine_n_835572.html.

[37] Mike Pflanz, "Target of U.S. Somali Raid Linked to Samantha Lewthwaite," *Telegraph*, 7 October 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/10362364/Target-of-US-Somali-raid-linked-to-Samantha-Lewthwaite.html.

[38] Gonzalez-Perez, " From Freedom Birds to Water Buffaloes."

[39] Dualy Xaykaothao, "Nepal Maoist Leader: Women Driving Movement," NPR, 5 May 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5387419.

join such groups and were powerful disincentives for demobilization and reintegration in some instances.[40] As a workshop participant noted, such groups were not truly egalitarian but rather utilitarian, realizing that the inclusion of women was more of a tactical move than a strategy aimed at truly mainstreaming any kind of equality.

In some cases, militant groups are able to recruit and retain women in their organizations or at least garner support and sympathy because they are embedded within a particular community. For example, the Naxalites are largely concentrated in extremely poor areas and have created a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ) where they provide public services, such as roads, schools, and clinics, to the local population.[41] Women in the CRZ are particularly supportive because these programs ease their social burdens and ensure safety for themselves and their families. For some children in Sri Lanka, the LTTE was so embedded within certain communities that the only exit strategy was suicide.[42] In some instances, women would pressure their children and family members to join or stay in the organization, which may be a result of their commitment to the cause or out of fear of being ostracized by the other supporters in the community.[43] In other instances, a "culture of violence" may be supported, implicitly or explicitly, by a "culture of silence," whereby people and communities not inherently violent may hold very deep convictions that allow violent groups to find inroads and flourish within those societies.[44]

Mitigating Violence and Extremism

The experiences of women in addressing violence in South Asia offer CVE practitioners and policymakers a valuable body of knowledge and expertise in the prevention of conflict and extremism. Numerous programs and projects have been established by a variety of different actors across the development and security spectrum to address the development, economic, and sociopolitical challenges facing the region. Some of these have been developed to address CVE concerns specifically; others are relevant to CVE efforts in that they are focused on mitigating potential drivers of violent extremism, which can include one or more of the following: (1) denial of basic political rights and civil liberties, (2) gross violations of human rights and government repression, (3) widespread corruption and perceived impunity for elites, (4) poorly governed areas, (5) protracted violent conflicts, (6) perceptions of governments as illegitimate, and (7) previous support to violent extremist groups to serve national strategic interests.[45]

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[40] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[41] Gonzalez-Perez, "From Freedom Birds to Water Buffaloes."

[42] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[43] Ibid.

[44] South Asian academic, discussions with authors, Singapore, September 2013.

[45] Guilain Denoeux and Lynn Carter, "Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism," USAID, February 2009, http://transition.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/publications/docs/guide_to_drivers_of_ve.pdf. Although the report acknowledges that poverty may contribute to violent extremism, it notes that this is more likely on a macro than micro level. Most terrorists have not been poor themselves, but the report argues that "national poverty

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Community Engagement

Women's organizations are usually at the forefront of efforts to mitigate conflict and violence and are potentially able to achieve great success owing to their direct engagement with local communities. For example, noting that mothers are often in a unique position to identify early signs of violent behavior and intervene but in many countries do not feel empowered to do so, a number of initiatives focusing on the roles of mothers have been established by SAVE in countries as far apart as India, Ireland, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Yemen. These include Mothers MOVE! (Mothers Opposed to Violent Extremism) and Mothers Schools.[46] Through Mothers Schools, which arose following community consultations in Tajikistan and drew on research and activities across the globe, SAVE encourages family members, especially mothers, to safeguard their families against violent extremism. SAVE provides the training and materials for local partners to run home-based workshops in communities at risk and help mothers through sensitization and skills training for a period of six months.[47] These provide a space for mothers to discuss common issues, particularly regarding radicalization and violent extremism, and offer opportunities for income generation.

Community radio stations also provide a valuable conduit for community engagement. For example, in India, Radio Mewat was created in a socially and educationally underdeveloped community with the aim of providing a platform for marginalized voices in the community and a space where sensitive and community-relevant issues can be discussed.[48] The radio station utilizes all sections of society in developing its content, and three-quarters of its fulltime reporters are from the local community. Not only has the radio station been successful in improving the relationship between the local community and the administration, it was instrumental in reviving lost cultural and oral traditions common to the area.[49] These local initiatives contribute to CVE efforts because they provide positive outlets for people to voice concerns rather than turn to violence and offer a chance for communities to engage with local and provincial governments to address underlying grievances.

Other community engagement programs in South Asia focus on women's empowerment, which is an important aspect of CVE initiatives as it provides traditionally marginalized women with the agency to create positive change within their communities. In Nepal, DidiBahini works at the grassroots level to ensure gender mainstreaming in the development process and enhance women's problem-solving skills, through arbitration and different forms of dispute settlements, for example.[50] Other skills-building or income-generating programs help to empower women by providing them with direct financial assistance, microcredit loans, and vocational skills training. For example, Women for Women

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increases a country's propensity to produce terrorism." It adds that if low-, middle-, and high-income countries are considered together, per capita income does not correlate with terrorism, "but if low-income countries are examined by themselves … increases in per capita income diminish vulnerability to terrorism." Consequently, in the long run, economic development can contribute to reducing the appeal of terrorism.

[46] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013. See Women Without Borders, "Underway," n.d., http://www.women-without-borders.org/projects/underway/.

[47] See Women Without Borders, "Underway: Mothers Schools."

[48] See "Radio Mewat," n.d., http://www.radiomewat.org/.

[49] Ibid.

[50] See DidiBahini, "Women Forums," n.d., http://www.didibahini.org/index2/womenforums.php.

International developed a one-year, needs-specific vocational training program in Afghanistan that included courses in gem-cutting and managing poultry and vegetable greenhouses.[51]

Strategic Communication and Media Campaigns

The vibrant media throughout South Asia offers a number of important channels through which to challenge and counter the messages of extremist groups and reduce their appeal, although these also could be used to incite and support violence. For example, shows offering powerful female role models, such as "Burqa Avenger" in Pakistan, promote the role of education and highlight the negative impact of extremism on national development efforts.[52] "Meena*,"* a nine-year-old South Asian cartoon character, was created by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) to raise awareness about education, health, and gender equality.[53] Other media campaigns that contribute to challenging extremist ideas and groups include call-in radio programs and events with cultural, religious, and local authorities who provide powerful counternarratives to extremist groups. The media can also be used to highlight the devastating impact of terrorism and violent extremism on families, women, and children in the very communities or countries terrorist groups purport to be defending. Other initiatives include training women and youth in rural areas to become community reporters, with the goal of developing their professional skills and empowering them and contributing to more-balanced reporting that shies away from incitement or sensationalization.

In remote areas less accessible for development programs and practitioners, the media could fulfill a number of roles involving education, entertainment, advocacy, and the promotion of cultural identity. In rural Afghanistan, radio programming is one of the most effective ways of reaching isolated populations, and many radio shows feature a range of problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. A popular radio drama, which reaches almost 40 percent of Afghan adults, covers topics such as women's rights, civic education, and conflict mitigation. The show had such a powerful impact that a Taliban leader "released a decree giving widows more rights after an episode of the program was aired," suggesting a causal relationship between the two events.[54]

The professional media community plays a critical role in shaping perceptions through its reporting or programming. Just as it is a valuable tool for countering violent extremism, the media could provide the space for and even promote incitement and inflammatory narratives. This has led to initiatives that work with the media to develop enhanced reporting standards and voluntary codes of conduct. In instances where traditional media may be censored, alternative forms of messaging has flourished. For example, Sri Lanka has

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[51] See Women for Women International, "Working Towards Freedom and Equality for the Women of Afghanistan," n.d., http://www.womenforwomen.org/global-initiatives-helping-women/help-women-afghanistan.php.

[52] See "Burka Avenger," n.d., http://www.burkaavenger.com/.

[53] UNICEF, "Meena Communication Initiative," n.d., http://www.unicef.org/rosa/media_2479.htm.

[54] United States Institute of Peace, "Resolving Conflict One Airwave at a Time," 18 May 2012, http://www.usip.org/publications/resolving-conflict-through-one-airwave-time.

witnessed an increase in the use of social media, text messages, community radio, citizen journalism, and blogs as an alternative to mainstream media.[55]

Rehabilitation and Peace-Building

Supporting rehabilitation and peace-building initiatives are particularly important because women are able to bring a unique perspective to the table and could offer valuable insights on reintegrating male and female fighters into society. Rehabilitation centers in Sri Lanka developed interschool harmony projects to increase cultural learning and critical thinking skills. Art and cultural shows, such as fusion dancing and dramas, were used to highlight the impact of violent extremism on all aspects of society.[56] In reintegrating women fighters, the rehabilitation center tries to reestablish family and cultural connections, as these were cut off during their indoctrination into the LTTE. Other organizations in South Asia focus specifically on including women in peace initiatives and integrating a gender perspective in peace processes. Such organizations include, in Sri Lanka, the Women and Media Collective;[57] the Afghanistan Justice Organization;[58] and in India, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace.[59]

Recommendations

As international actors continue to bridge the divide between development and security, particularly in light of the post-2015 development agenda that formally recognizes that conflict creates significant impediments to development, the creation of tailored and effective CVE programming will need to focus on bringing together practitioners from across the spectrum and on enhancing existing programs and developing new initiatives where necessary. The ideas below, many of which were drawn from the discussions in Singapore, suggest ways in which local, national, regional, and international partners could support governments, civil society, and other stakeholders in empowering and supporting women in their efforts to address violent extremism and develop tailored prevention strategies that address the roles of women as perpetrators.

Increase regional collaboration and consistent platforms for cooperation on CVE issues

To build capacities of civil society organizations to deal with emerging transnational threats, there is a need for an increase in the number and variety of platforms for cooperating and sharing experiences, knowledge, and good practices from different countries and regions. It would be helpful for civil society organizations, particularly those that work primarily with

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[55] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[56] Singapore workshop participant, September 2013.

[57] See Women and Media Collective, http://womenandmedia.org.

[58] See Afghanistan Justice Organization, http://www.afghanjustice.org.

[59] See Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace, http://www.wiscomp.org.

women and focus on development, rule of law, conflict resolution, and peace-building issues, to learn about and from each other's work and develop ideas on how their efforts could play a role in countering violent extremism. In this regard, the creation of an annual conference or yearly publication that gathers and highlights best practices might allow for greater coordination and promotion of CVE efforts with a gender perspective.

Develop CVE training and awareness programs

The CVE concept remains little understood and often misunderstood by many within civil society, due in part to the wariness around hard counterterrorism measures such as the use of intelligence, law enforcement, and defense forces. Nevertheless, raising awareness about countering violent extremism could create support from communities and civil society organizations that have been hesitant to cooperate with counterterrorism bodies in the past. This is particularly important because narrowly conceptualized counterterrorism policies may lead to negative and unintended consequences for women and women's groups. Developing a series of forums through live call-in radio or television programs, for example, could provide awareness around CVE-related issues. These programs could give a voice to the marginalized and provide a platform for them to raise concerns regarding violence and extremism within their homes or communities.

Support and facilitate female education opportunities

Education plays a powerful role in preventing violence and extremism. Governments and donors could ensure a gender dimension in the development of curricula and facilitate opportunities for dialogue and exchanges among women and girls from different countries in the region so that they can share experiences and build relationships. These exchanges could offer young women positive role models and encourage them to become role models for other girls in their communities. Unduly focusing on female education, however, may cause boys' education to suffer and could risk them becoming even more vulnerable to recruitment into violent extremist groups, so it is important to ensure that families and communities are part of the discussions regarding education and countering violent extremism.

Deepen gender perspectives in law enforcement and peace-building efforts and facilitate female practitioner networks

Integrating a gender perspective in law enforcement and peace-building efforts can contribute to the recruitment, training, and retention of female officers and women peacekeepers.[60] This has proven to be important not only from a rights-based perspective but from an operational standpoint, with many practitioners underscoring the positive operational effects of having more women in frontline law enforcement roles.[61] Further efforts should be made to offer gender training to law enforcement officials, including

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[60] For example, see Sahana Dharmapuri, "Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping," *Providing for Peacekeeping*, no. 4 (July 2013).

[61] International Peace Institute, "Panel: Women's Participation in Peacekeeping Improves Operational Effectiveness," 7 October 2013, http://www.ipinst.org/events/panel-discussions/details/488-panel-womens-participation-in-peacekeeping-improves-operational-effectiveness.html.

military, police, and, particularly in the case of South Asia, which hosts the top UN troop-contributing countries, peacekeepers. Additionally, training efforts could be directed at female practitioners following a needs assessment to explore whether particular capacity-development programs may be helpful to them.

The role of women as preventers of violence and extremism could be inhibited if they are not sufficiently educated and trained on CVE issues. Facilitating female practitioner networks would help them to develop the skills necessary to recognize early-warning signs of radicalization and respond effectively to violence and extremism. Connecting civil society organizations that work with women who are involved in preventing conflict and violence, such as women in peace-building or law enforcement, could enhance their capacities and provide a valuable platform for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Additionally, media outlets could foster diversity in the workplace to ensure multiple perspectives are available in the development of content, ensuring that women have opportunities to have their voices heard.

Support initiatives that empower women and develop networks to assist in social, personal, and professional development

Donors and relevant stakeholders could support the many ongoing programs that serve to empower women across South Asia. For example, the Mothers Schools initiative would be a valuable project to replicate in other countries and regions, and the content could be targeted to specific audiences. Other programs include community-based CVE initiatives that work to build linkages and networks among women's groups and female religious leaders. Supporting these and similar initiatives could encourage women to take leadership roles within their communities and enable them to be effective preventers of violence and extremism.

Include families and communities in CVE efforts

Although the role of mothers was highlighted as unique, efforts focusing on mothers risk marginalizing fathers and siblings who can also play a powerful role in radicalizing youth or countering violent extremism. It was therefore suggested that programs be developed to include fathers and community members who are important actors in creating enabling environments for CVE efforts and shaping values and opportunities for youths who may otherwise be vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups.

Conclusion

Violence and extremism pose a significant threat to the hard-won achievements of women in South Asia. These threats could be further exacerbated by a lack of progress in areas such as education, health care, economic well-being, and social and political mobilization, as these conditions are conducive to violent extremism and could create opportunities for extremist

groups to increase recruitment. Efforts to prevent and respond to violent extremism and terrorism must be informed by these dynamics and help to empower youths, families, and communities to strengthen resilience against violence. There is no shortage of women's activism in South Asia, be it in development, conflict mitigation, or peace-building, and these efforts could be further strengthened to challenge violent extremists and their narratives. These efforts may not and should not carry the "CVE" label, but they demonstrate the valuable roles women can play in CVE efforts.

Singapore workshop participants, September 2013

CGCC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute dedicated to strengthening international counterterrorism cooperation. It works to improve counterterrorism cooperation and capacity through collaborative research and policy analysis and by providing practical advice. CGCC is working to improve intergovernmental cooperation at the global, regional, and subregional levels; support community-led efforts to counter violent extremism; ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law; and empower civil society and victims of terrorism to speak out.

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