Strengthening Multilateral Policies and Practices to Counter Violent Extremism

The Role of the Security Council

August 2014

The terrorism threat today has become far more difficult to track and combat, with diverse, dispersed, and fluid networks comprised of loosely organized groups as well as independently motivated individuals, or "lone wolves." This change has prompted greater focus on preventive counterterrorism efforts aimed at diminishing the potential for terrorist cells to drum up support and followers. The particular vulnerabilities facing youth, the sharp increase in foreign terrorist

Ambassador Gary Quinlan, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations (June 2014)

fighters, and the threat to communities posed by incitement and recruitment on the Internet has further emphasized the need to counter violent extremism by investing in positive counternarratives; promoting alternative, nonviolent avenues to address grievances; and strengthening resilience to radicalization. These dynamics were reflected in the UN General Assembly's recent review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[1]

Terrorism and violent extremism threaten not only member states but also UN personnel, missions, and objectives. Attacks on UN offices and staff in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Somalia have highlighted the threat posed to the United Nations in mission and nonmission settings.[2] Given the strategic imperative to enhance efforts to counter violent extremism for many UN member states as well as the United Nations itself, the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations in partnership with the Global Center on Cooperative Security undertook a project to examine the role of the UN Security Council in countering violent extremism. In January 2014, the Australian

Mission and the Global Center co-organized a roundtable for council members on the council's role in supporting national, regional, and multilateral efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. A second roundtable was held in June 2014 with council experts and a broader range of stakeholders from missions and UN entities. The purpose of the roundtables was to identify how the Security Council should leverage CVE initiatives to help address the contemporary nature of terrorism and to help prevent or stabilize situations of conflict.

Participants at both roundtables broadly agreed that the United Nations has a number of comparative advantages as an actor on CVE issues. These include the legitimacy derived from its universal membership and the values in the UN Charter that lend themselves to the development of collective norms and the ability to strategically communicate those norms, as well as the United Nations' convening capacity and the facilitation of capacity-building assistance.[3]

Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director, CTED
(January 2014)

The Security Council, in view of its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security, plays three key roles in supporting UN entities and member states' CVE efforts. The first is a normative role, through which the council can contribute to shaping international obligations and norms. Second, the council plays a mandating role in shaping peacekeeping and political missions to address threats to international peace and security. Third, the council plays what might be called an advisory role, enhancing coordination and capacity within the UN Secretariat to meet emerging threats, for example, through consultations with special representatives, discussions on conflict prevention and early warning, and guidance of the work of the council's subsidiary organs, such as the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its Executive Directorate (CTED). These roles indicate the range of practical avenues available to council members to further integrate CVE considerations into their responses to terrorism and conflicts that are influenced by terrorism and violent extremism.

The section below draws on insights from the roundtables and additional research and highlights some of the key challenges and opportunities in further integrating CVE practice into the work of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council.

CHALLENGES

Definition and Ownership

Considering the emergent nature of this field of policy and practice, a number of questions have been raised about the definition of violent extremism and the development of a better understanding of the programs that may be considered related to CVE issues and, consequently, which UN entities should take ownership of such

programs. Although there has been no formally agreed definition, international practitioners have broadly understood violent extremism to signify the use of, explicit support for, or incitement to violence based on ideological beliefs to achieve rapid sociopolitical change outside of accepted social and political processes.[4] The term covers acts of terrorism and radical propaganda and incitement that can lead to terrorism.

Fatima Akilu, Director in the Office of the National Security Advisor, Nigeria (June 2014)

The lack of an agreed definition of what constitutes countering violent extremism can be challenging if each member state interprets its scope differently or if the definition is so broad that it loses any real meaning. In its 2013 renewal of CTED's mandate, the Security Council recognized the importance of preventing the spread of violent extremism and the need to work with a range of stakeholders in this endeavor;[5] but other constituent entities of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), including the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre; UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and the UN Alliance of Civilizations, are also increasing their CVE efforts.

Translating Norms Into Policy Guidance and Substantive Programming

In his April 2014 report on implementation of the Strategy, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that "[t]errorism is increasingly a factor in areas of conflict, and awareness of the Strategy and an understanding of terrorism are especially important for peacekeeping, special political and other United Nations support missions in conflict and post-conflict environments where terrorism and terrorist tactics remain evident."[6]

Despite the consensus around preventing terrorism and countering violent extremism and although a number of political and peacekeeping missions are operating in areas in which violent extremism and terrorism are among the drivers of conflict and insecurity, the term "countering violent extremism" has not been explicitly indicated in any Security Council mandates. To date, mission staff have not received any guidance or training in incorporating CVE-related activities into their operations or programming. As one UN official related, based on experiences in Afghanistan, violent extremism was intuitively recognized by staff who sought to address these drivers or grievances as part of their work in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. These activities were individual initiatives, however, taken without guidance, information, or resources from headquarters. Whether and when council-mandated missions undertake CVE initiatives will depend on the unique circumstances of the conflict and deliberation among council members about intentions and methods of operationalization.

Expertise and Capacity

CVE expertise at UN headquarters and in missions remains limited, constraining capacity to identify violent extremism and to undertake programming specifically linked to CVE themes, including by coordinating with entities mandated to undertake this work, such as CTED and other CTITF entities.[7] In some cases where UN missions are engaged in activities, such as promoting dialogue and understanding, social inclusion, and youth engagement, directly intended to address the conditions conducive to terrorism, the United Nations "lacks dedicated CVE expertise," which means these activities are not being leveraged to deliver outcomes that directly counter violent extremism. Staff usually manage these projects based on experiences in such related fields as development, human rights, or communications. This is unsurprising, given the relatively new nature of CVE policy and practice; but it is broadly reflective of a gap in counterterrorism expertise in field missions and in many parts of UN headquarters, where a deeper knowledge of these issues could help inform conflict analyses and develop more holistic responses.

Much of the Security Council's CVE-related efforts have focused on implementation of Resolution 1624, guided by the CTC and CTED, which covers one of many aspects related to violent extremism. Within CTED, there has been limited focus on CVE issues despite the emphasis in Resolutions 1963 and 2129 on preventive and comprehensive strategies and engagement with multiple stakeholders. Participants at the roundtables agreed that the council should engage more on CVE themes and in locations where violent extremism is influencing conflict, including by drawing on the activities of member states, regional partners, and nongovernmental organizations to understand evolving trends.

Strategic Communication

Over the past decade, member states and the UN Secretariat have invested significantly in the elaboration of norms, strategies, and initiatives to support implementation of the Security Council's counterterrorism mandates and the Strategy. Nevertheless, many member state representatives and practitioners acknowledge that the United Nations could communicate its counterterrorism efforts more

Representatives from the CTITF and CTED (June 2014)

effectively, internally as well as externally. The council is identified in public frequently as the voice of the United Nations on international peace and security matters, and its actions communicate the world body's priorities and resourcefulness. A lack of communication on CVE issues therefore can be interpreted as an unwillingness or inability on the part of the United Nations to adapt to the contemporary nature of terrorism.

Developing Integrated Approaches

Although member states and UN officials have underscored the need for more integrated and multidimensional approaches, some roundtable participants noted that bureaucratic silos, limitations in expertise and information, and political sensitivities constrain the development of truly integrated approaches at the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of projects or missions. As one former field officer stated, "All dimensions of what was broadly defined as 'use of violence' and 'terrorism' were believed to be the domain of security and law enforcement agencies," meaning that there was no attempt to understand and address the drivers of violence. Meanwhile, initiatives to promote social inclusion and youth engagement were not integrated into law enforcement approaches. In other cases, it was noted that "the understanding of security within [mission] offices was limited to protecting staff and UN property from attacks, rather than incorporating prevention and CVE into substantive programming."

The Secretary-General's aim to mainstream counterterrorism efforts into UN work, particularly in the context of his priorities—conflict prevention, the post-2015 development agenda, and human rights—provides an opportunity to address these challenges. The UN integrated strategy for the Sahel, which incorporates activities to prevent terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalization under its security pillar, provides an example of how this could work.[8] In addition, roundtable participants welcomed the recognition by many development agencies, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP), of the CVE-related relevance of their work.[9] Yet, this trend toward better integration of counterterrorism, security, and development efforts has not been reflected in council mandates, for example, in relation to conflicts in Mali, Somalia, and Iraq, where violent extremism is a key challenge.

GOING FORWARD

The challenges confronting the United Nations, especially the Security Council, in addressing the issue of countering violent extremism point to a number of opportunities. For instance, Security Council Resolutions 1963 and 2129 underscore the importance of preventive counterterrorism measures through comprehensive strategies and partnerships with civil society, experts, women, and the private sector. In addition, emerging issues such as the threats posed by foreign fighters, online radicalization, and the reintegration of terrorist offenders all require CVE subjects to be part of the responses, therefore bringing CVE concepts into the core of the council's counterterrorism work.

Moreover, the council's role in shaping UN responses to international security threats gives it an important role in contributing to UN strategic communication on CVE topics, including through presidential and press statements and ensuring key audiences hear these statements. Promoting CVE efforts in this way could play an important role

in reinforcing the "one UN" agenda of effective counterterrorism responses that uphold human rights and the rule of law and are responsive to conditions conducive to terrorism. The following options would enhance CVE engagement by the UN system and the Security Council in particular.

Security Council and other UN member state representatives (June 2014)

Improving Information and Expertise Flows at UN Headquarters

Coordination among counterterrorism entities has undoubtedly improved in the last two years. Opportunities still exist, however, to enhance information flows among CTED, the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), UN Department of Safety and Security, and other CTITF entities so that new mission mandates, mandate renewals, and operating guidelines can provide important entry points for addressing violent extremism where it is influencing a conflict. Security Council Resolution 2129 encouraging CTED to strengthen its information sharing with the DPA and DPKO toward this end is welcomed, but mission planning requires more work. The council could encourage better planning in mandates and in its regular consultations on special political missions and peacekeeping operations.

Roundtable participants suggested that CVE concepts could be considered in relevant areas of UN policy planning, for example, in the reviews on peacekeeping and on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. In addition, "horizon scanning" sessions could not only alert Security Council members to potential challenges where violent extremism and terrorism can fuel or exacerbate conflict, but also foster coordinated analysis and responses by the UN Secretariat. One modest way to achieve this may be through regular, informal expert roundtables hosted by CTED as part of the effort to develop analytical products that can identify capacity gaps and needs and facilitate the necessary technical assistance.

Improving Information and Expertise Flows to the Field

The Security Council could encourage enhanced information flows to and from the field to enable violent extremism to be better understood and CVE efforts to be integrated into responses to complex security challenges, for example, in its consultations with special political missions and special representatives. This enhanced information flow can contribute to strengthening the role of the UN in addressing these challenges in the field, and where appropriate, integrate violent extremism into the analysis and initiatives on conflict prevention and early warning. In practical terms, CTED implementation assessments, global surveys, analyses of trends, and guidelines need to reach field offices and missions, and these offices should be able to call on CTED and

the CTITF for information and to mobilize technical assistance where needed. The appointment of a counterterrorism focal point in relevant missions can also facilitate the flow of communications between UN headquarters and the field and provide the mission with a clearly designated source of information and support on counterterrorism and CVE issues. Additionally, CTED and the CTITF could develop a series of web-based training materials on UN counterterrorism obligations, norms, and resources for field staff that could be complemented by the delivery of training for UN personnel and direct counterparts in the field on CVE topics.[10]

Guidelines for Implementation of Resolution 1624

The Security Council could support CTED in the development of guidelines for use by member states and key stakeholders on the implementation of Resolution 1624 as part of efforts to enhance awareness of and compliance with the resolution. This guidance could draw on existing materials by international and regional organizations and include illustrative case studies of initiatives undertaken by member states and a section on lessons learned and recommendations. The CTC could hold additional open briefings on CVE initiatives and practices, building on the success of the presentation by former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair on education and countering violent extremism in 2013.[11]

Integrating CVE Efforts Into CTED Country Visits and Assessments

The CTC and CTED should consider giving greater emphasis to CVE efforts in country visits and assessments by broadening the range of stakeholders it engages during visits beyond government officials, with the government's consent. This could include consultations with civil society and experts, the private sector, and other key stakeholders, with a view to identifying means by which the United Nations can support member state implementation of Resolution 1624 and enhance their prevention efforts. This would also be one way for the CTC to adapt to the threats posed by foreign fighters and online radicalization.

Support for the Development of National and Regional CVE Strategies

With support from the CTC, CTED could work with the CTITF to support member states in the development of national and regional CVE strategies or in the incorporation of CVE aspects into their counterterrorism strategies. Consistent with current practice, CTED could connect states with regional organizations and international think tanks to undertake this work. These CVE strategies could also be developed for host countries or regions where there is a Security Council–mandated peacekeeping or special political mission.

Endnotes

[1] The review reaffirmed "the commitment of Member States to take measures aimed at addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including but not limited to prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, lack of the rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socioeconomic marginalization and lack of good governance, while recognizing that none of these conditions can excuse or justify acts of terrorism." UN General Assembly, *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review*, A/RES/68/276, 24 June 2014, p. 3.

[2] See for example Mohammed Ibrahim and Nicholas Kulish, "Militants Attack UN Compound in Somalia's Capital," *New York Times*, 19 June 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/20/world/africa/un-compound-in-somalia-is-attacked.html?_r=0; Salman Masood, "Suicide Bomber in Paramilitary Uniform Kills 5 at UN Food Office in Pakistan," *New York Times*, 5 October 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/world/asia/06pstan.html; "Abuja Attack: Car Bomb Hits Nigeria UN Building," BBC, 26 August 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14677957.

[3] Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Jack Barclay, "Mastering the Narrative: Counterterrorism Strategic Communication and the United Nations," Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, 2013, http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Feb2013_CT_StratComm.pdf.

[4] Studies on the drivers of violent extremism have identified "push factors" (structural conditions, as identified in Pillar 1 of the Strategy) and "pull factors" that increase the appeal of extremism and terrorism and may include ideology and narratives, charismatic recruiters, and social and material benefits associated with participation in these groups. Activities that seek to address many of these conditions through development, human rights, and other fields may yield CVE-related benefits even though these may be secondary to the broader aims. Yet, where specific pull factors and vulnerabilities to extremism and terrorism have been identified, explicit CVE programs may be developed to address the identified threat.

[5] UN Security Council, S/RES/2129, 17 December 2013.

[6] UN General Assembly, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/68/841, 14 April 2014, para. 21.

[7] The Secretary-General's report on UN activities in implementing the Strategy noted there has been little counterterrorism expertise available to peacekeeping operations and special political missions that operate in areas where terrorism is often a core challenge, such as in the Sahel. Ibid., para. 116.

[8] UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Sahel Region*, S/2013/354, 14 June 2013.

[9] UNDP's Rule of Law program incorporates CVE-related considerations into its community policing capacity building where relevant.

[10] The development of such materials received widespread support in discussions with UN staff supporting or engaged with field missions and offices. See Fink and Barclay, "Mastering the Narrative"; Fink et al., "Blue Sky II: Progress and Opportunities in Implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," Global Center on Cooperative Security, April 2014, http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Blue-Sky-II-Low-Res.pdf.

[11] UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, "'Education Is a Security Issue,' Tony Blair Tells Counter-Terrorism Committee," 22 November 2013, http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/news/2013-11-22_Tony_Blair_event.html.

Authors

This brief was developed by a team led by Claire Elias at the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations and Naureen Chowdhury Fink at the Global Center on Cooperative Security. They are grateful to Rafia Barakat Bhulai and Ben Sugg at the Global Center for their support for this brief.

Acknowledgments

The Global Center is grateful to the government of Australia for its generous support of this project.

Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

About the Global Center

The Global Center on Cooperative Security works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development. In cooperation with a global network of expert practitioners and partner organizations, the Global Center fosters stronger multilateral partnerships and convenes key stakeholders to support integrated and inclusive security policies across national, regional, and global levels.