Symposium on Measuring the Effectiveness of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programming

27-28 March 2013
Ottawa, Canada

BACKGROUND NOTE

As the threat from terrorism has changed, so the tools of counterterrorism have continued to evolve. International successes in addressing terrorism through short term law-enforcement measures have yielded a growing recognition that effectiveness in the medium and long term requires a greater focus on preventing radicalization and recruitment, as well as improving the resilience of individuals and communities to the appeal of violent extremism. Violent extremism has the potential to fuel political violence, armed conflict, and terrorism, and sometimes threatens fragile societal relationships. It is therefore essential that efforts to prevent these outcomes include effective programs to prevent and counter violent extremism (CVE). Given the relatively new nature of this programming, learning from past practice will be important to ensuring the effectiveness of future programming. Tools to integrate past evaluations into program design, to develop intervention logic based on a close reading of the context and past experiences, and to monitor and evaluate new programs, are therefore critical.

To explore challenges and practices in evaluating terrorism prevention efforts, an initial “Colloquium on Measuring the Effectiveness in Counterterrorism Programming” was held in Ottawa on 9-10 February 2012. The Colloquium was developed and organized by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) with the support of the governments of Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Participants included counterterrorism and terrorism prevention experts from national governments and international organizations as well as academics and practitioners, and specialists in these and related fields. The outcomes of the Colloquium were published in a CGCC report, From Input to Impact: Evaluating Terrorism Prevention Programs. The report reflects upon the emerging demand for evaluation of CVE measures, noting the significant challenges that practitioners have faced in undertaking evaluation activities and the importance of integrating evaluations into the early stages of program design. From Input to Impact captures current practice by developing a preliminary typology of approaches to evaluation and further offers a set of key principles for consideration in the conduct of evaluations for terrorism prevention efforts. It recommends, among other things, the development of a toolkit to assist counterterrorism policymakers and practitioners in developing evaluations, and a database, or compendium, of existing practices that can serve as a model.

The “Symposium on Measuring the Effectiveness of Countering Violent Extremism Programming” in March 2013 is intended to build on this initial discussion and with a greater focus on efforts to counter violent extremism, or “CVE” programming. The Symposium has three primary objectives:

1. To take stock of experiences and lessons learned to date;
2. To identify good practices and effective programming; and
3. To develop knowledge products for use in evaluating CVE.

In this way, the Symposium aims to delve deeper into lessons learned regarding the design and implementation of “CVE” and CVE-relevant programs (which may not be undertaken specifically under a CVE label but which contribute in part or whole to its strategic objectives), and how they are or can be evaluated. Participants will have the opportunity to meet CVE and government representatives, experts and civil society actors to discuss their approaches to evaluation and how these contribute to the identification and planning of more effective future programs. Furthermore, it is hoped that the lessons and practices raised during the Symposium will inform the development of a compendium of good practices developed by Canada, as a member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Working Group on Countering Violent Extremism. This compendium will be shared with GCTF member states as well as other key stakeholders.

**Evaluating CVE today**

In the past few years, the focus of counterterrorism practitioners has shifted from a focus on response, to prevention. This shift is largely a result of successful efforts to diminish the immediate threat posed by groups like al-Qaeda or its associates. However, the increasing diffusion of potential terrorist actors, their ability to operate in global networks rather than centralized organizations, and the increased use of technology and social media to communicate ideas and planning, has also warranted efforts to strengthen prevention capacities. The themes of the Symposium reflect this evolution and the increasing focus on CVE as a means to diminish the potential threat posed by radicalization and recruitment.

Reflective of these trends, CVE has, in a relatively short period, become an increasingly important instrument in the counterterrorism toolkit. States are more attentive to the development of CVE strategies or for moving beyond policy development and into implementation. As a result, use of evaluations has also increased, providing a broader range of experiences on which to draw. Additionally, multilateral counterterrorism actors, such as the EU and UN, have expanded their interest in CVE and have included evaluation as part of their discussions. In December 2012, the Hedayah Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism was launched in Abu Dhabi, a result of the deliberations of GCTF members. Further still, regional organizations and civil society actors are becoming increasingly engaged in the development and implementation of CVE programming.

The proliferation of CVE programming has raised a number of challenges in the development and evaluation of preventive programming. Developing a CVE intervention requires that a number of questions be addressed. For example, CVE programs generally aim to reduce support for violent extremist groups by non-coercive means. However, at what point is “support” determined; i.e., at what stage of the radicalization process is an intervention warranted? Should CVE programs target those who are sympathetic to the causes espoused by militant groups, or only those who have provided active support? Do programs that address some of the grievances often associated with violent extremism – underdevelopment, inequality, sociopolitical marginalization, for example – merit a “CVE” label? What kind of added value can be provided by “CVE” programs that are not addressed under development, education or conflict mitigation and peacebuilding efforts?

The responses to these questions are important in establishing the scope and parameters of the program, and in contributing to the development of indicators against which success can be measured. Once the intervention has been designed however, there are a number of obstacles to measuring its impact. *From Input to Impact* highlighted a number of challenges associated in the design of evaluations of preventive programs, such as, determining the scope of the evaluation, identifying an evaluator and attributing causality, or “measuring the negative.” To a large extent, the answers to these questions will vary across regions and contexts, and be determined by lessons learned from past practices. Reflecting the prevalence of CVE concerns and programs, there is now a greater acceptance of the need to address such questions and invest in evaluation; it is no longer a question of “whether” but “how.” The Symposium will offer participants an opportunity to share lessons learned in addressing such challenges from a broad range of perspectives.
Conclusion

A sustainable strategy to counter terrorism requires governments to address the challenges of radicalization and recruitment. Consequently, CVE is likely to remain an important part of balanced counterterrorism strategies in the future. However, radicalization is a complex and often unpredictable process that differs for each individual. Moreover, programs and projects need to be tailored to local contexts and cultural dynamics in order to resonate with their target demographic. We can therefore anticipate several challenges in utilizing CVE tools in diverse and complex contexts. At each stage it is essential to determine whether policy interventions are having an impact. Integrating evaluation into the early stages of the discussion and practice surrounding CVE advances this objective.

*From Input to Impact* recommends a database of evaluation practices and indicators for use by CVE practitioners as well as a compendium of good practices and case studies that could provide practitioners with a menu of model options concerning metrics, methodologies and theories of change. This could help shorten learning cycles, eliminate the need to develop new methods each time an evaluation is needed, and contribute to some uniformity across evaluation practices, allowing for some comparative analysis.

The Symposium in March will provide an invaluable foundation for such initiatives and contribute to a knowledge base of evaluations practices and experiences to enhance the effectiveness of future CVE programming.

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