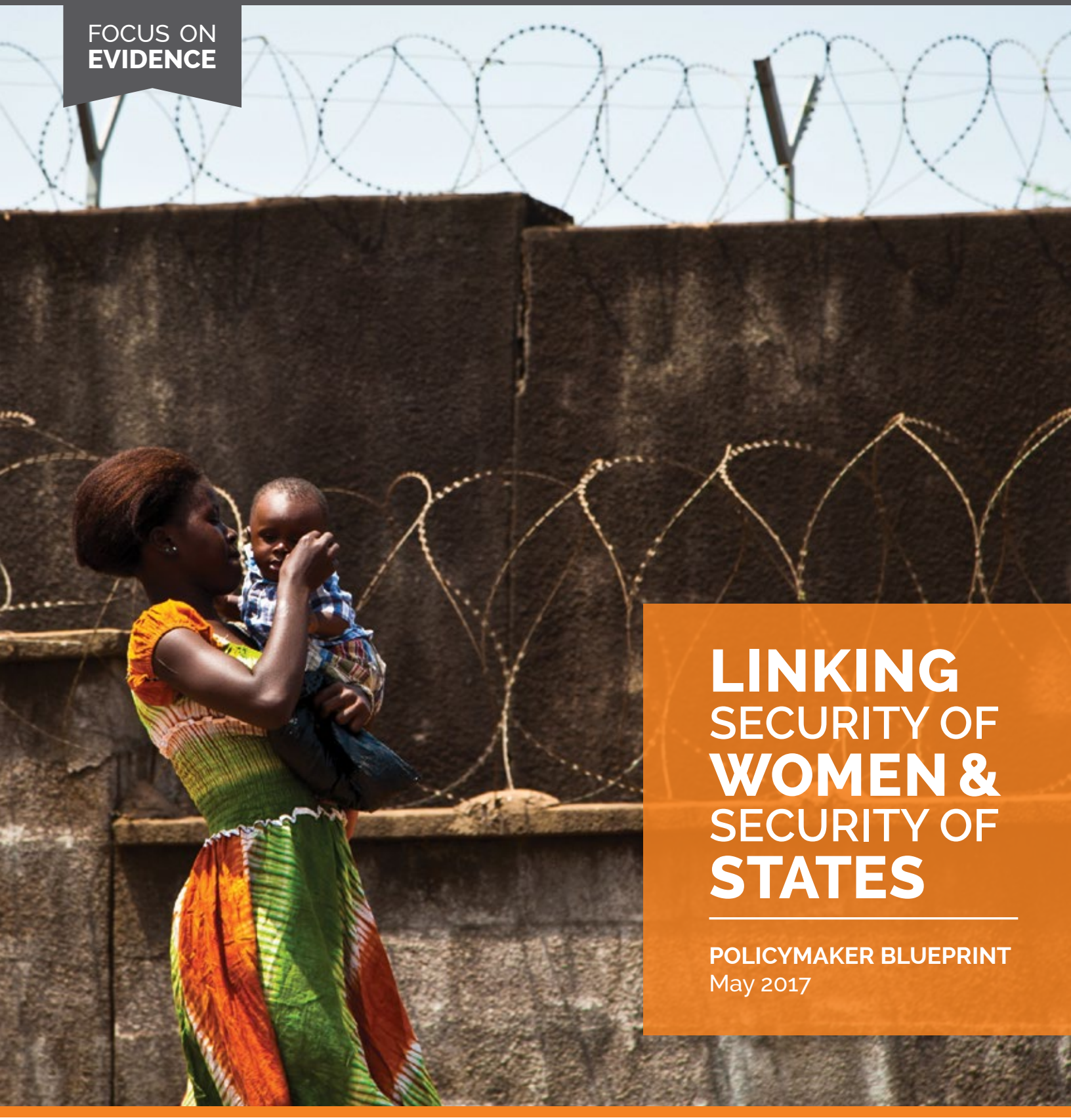
FOCUS ON
EVIDENCE



LINKING SECURITY OF WOMEN & SECURITY OF STATES

POLICYMAKER BLUEPRINT
May 2017

FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE®

OPEN SQUARE
all sides being equal™

It's a long road. We have to stay on it. We don't have to accept such violence as a part of life. I am convinced now more than ever in the capacity of human beings to change. This violence does not have to be part of the human condition.

—Esta Soler | Founder & President, Futures Without Violence

Violence against women and extremism are frightening and heart wrenching and hate filled. They aren't issues that many people like to hear about or discuss. We are committed to discussing these issues. To talk openly about what is working and about what's not.

—Wynnette LaBrosse | Founder & President, Open Square

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COVER PHOTO | Eduardo Arraes, Behind the colorful mother is the United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone where war criminals are held and judged.

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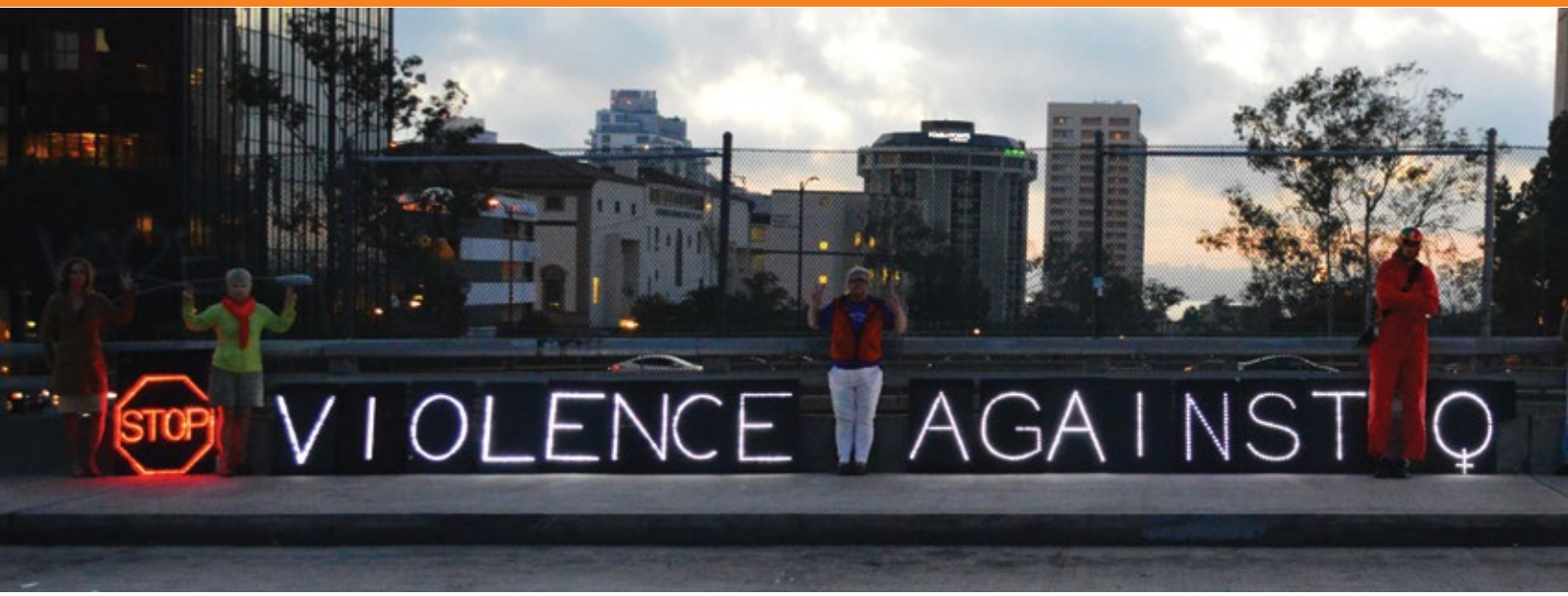

Photo by Chris West
During 16 Days of Activism
against Gender Violence

The overall level of violence against women is a better predictor of state peacefulness and relations with neighboring countries than indicators measuring the level of democracy, level of wealth, and civilizational identity of the state.

—Dr. Valerie M. Hudson
Professor & George H.W. Bush Chair, The Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University speaking in 2016

PREFACE

This report offers critical recommendations for policymakers and summarizes innovative research and influential studies that help us understand the relationship between violent extremism, gender-based violence, and trauma. Specifically, it explores the following:

- **How extremists use gender-based violence and gender dynamics in their strategy and tactics**
- **How science-based understandings of the impact of trauma can improve interventions to counter violent extremism and enhance recovery and reintegration**
- **How gender factors in recruitment to violent extremism**
- **How youth are targeted and what conditions increase susceptibility to recruitment**
- **What entices a person to engage or refrain from participating in violent extremist acts**
- **What interventions can make a difference**
- **A case study of Boko Haram, showing how these concepts come in play**

Political leaders have traditionally separated discussions of national security and violent extremism from those of gender-based violence and women's empowerment. We believe this must change. We also believe that the advocacy community, academic institutions, and scientific and medical institutes can and should combine their expertise and findings to create more robust and effective solutions to the interconnected problems of violent extremism and gender-based violence.

Dollars spent on prevention are more cost-effective than dollars spent on response. Yet funding for prevention is frequently scarce or altogether lacking. Investments must focus on evidence-based prevention that examines and improves social norms and that enables communities to build resilience, children and youth to experience healthy development, women to live free from violence and discrimination, and survivors to recover and reintegrate fully. Our national security strategy must give greater weight to prevention and to better understanding the critical relevance of paying attention to how women are treated in countries around the world.

This report builds on robust discussion, bold thinking, and tested knowledge offered by world-renown experts at a gathering organized by Futures Without Violence and Open Square in 2016. The event encouraged cross-pollination of thought leaders from different fields with the aim of identifying effective approaches and solutions for preventing violent extremism and focusing on the relevant impact of gender-based violence and adverse trauma.

We would like to recognize the many exceptionally talented and dedicated experts who participated in this endeavor and thank the contributing authors to this report. We are especially grateful to Alexandra Arriaga for her commitment, knowledge, and strategic thinking to guide this effort and craft this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Even after I escaped from them and live far away from my village, I am still afraid. I think of death many times. My father tries. He encourages me to forget everything, but it is not easy for me. I have terrible dreams at night.[1]

—A 15 year-old Nigerian girl who escaped Boko Haram
Statement to Human Rights Watch

New political leadership has promised to combat the rise of terror groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Levant (ISIS), one of many violent extremist groups that use gender-based violence intentionally to achieve their aims. The rape of women and girls, the kidnapping and selling of women and girls as enslaved brides, and the abduction of girls and boys for brutal yet distinct roles such as child soldiers are some of the deliberate and impactful strategies of these groups, and not merely the byproducts of war. These abusive acts not only are gross, systematic human rights violations that constitute war crimes, they also are exceptionally manipulative acts of power used to spread terror, expand territory, and control the victims.

Violent extremist organizations not only are committing widespread abuses against women and girls, they also are tapping the strategic and tactical potential of female extremists. Women have long been participants in terrorist activities, and this continues to be the case. Women are engaged with violent extremism as recruiters, fundraisers, combatants, and wives or mothers to the next generation of extremists. Women are also critical agents opposing and preventing violence.

Women's empowerment is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic investment in our collective security. In short, when women do better, countries do better. Women's security is a matter of international security. Without it, we all lose.

—Thomas A. Shannon, Jr.
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, speaking on March 29, 2017

The treatment of women by violent extremist groups underscores the urgency for gender-informed strategies to counter violent extremism. Assessment, analysis, and development of national security strategies must include data on how women are treated in countries of concern.

A growing body of evidence shows not only that violence against women is a critical indicator of instability, but also that it is a key determinant for whether a society will be mired in poverty, impunity, and insecurity.

Within unstable or warring nations, violence against women escalates and levels of stress and trauma increase in households and communities. The causal arrow also points in the opposite direction: Violence against women and the status of gender relations have a causal effect on state stability.[2] This is the case because what is lived and learned at home—especially when it is pervasive—spills over into the community and forms the social norm that will be felt nationally. In essence, a society "normalizes" violence, oppression, and discrimination between men and women.

At its core, this association holds because violence against women and national stability both are manifestations of how individuals and societies cope with differences. Valerie Hudson writes that the first difference encountered in life is experienced and learned through the interactions between men and women within the context of family and the home—in terms of power and control, personal value and respect, and expectations for equality and healthy interactions.

What is learned at home is carried into society. If a society's prevalent norms are that male interests trump female interests, conflict is resolved through violence, and violence is met with impunity, then these norms become the template for dealing with ethnic, religious, cultural, racial, and ideological differences in society as a whole. When these dynamics predominate, discrimination, intolerance of differences, and a propensity toward violence will create a climate of insecurity ripe for instability.

New research makes plain that individuals and societies that reject equality between men and women demonstrate significantly more hostile attitudes toward minorities in their own countries and toward other nations, and these attitudes in turn help form foreign and security policy stances. Conversely, the lived experience of gender equality prepares individuals and a society to live in harmony with others. In a very real way, it is impossible to build peace in the international system unless peace can be practiced between men and women within a society.

Violence against women needs to be acknowledged and understood as a barometer for societal health and stability: Its presence predicts and drives further injustice, impunity, and insecurity, and the absence of such violence creates greater opportunity, stability, and even democracy.

Public discourse has centered on the threat of "radical Islam" as a reference to violent extremism, which essentially paints the vast majority of Muslims and most Muslim countries with the same brush and excludes a broad swath of extremist groups past and present. In fact, security forces, militants, and extremist groups of diverse ideologies over centuries have used violence against women as a tool of terror.

Women's Leadership Forum hosted by Special Operations Command Africa, Chad
Photo by USAFRICOM (March 2017)

Ensuring women's rights benefits not only individuals and their families, it also strengthens democracy, bolsters prosperity, enhances stability, and encourages tolerance. It thereby helps every society realize its full potential, which is an overarching goal of our own national security strategy. And women's rights are at the core of building a civil, law-abiding society: a prerequisite for true democracies.

—Dr. Paula J. Dobriansky
Former Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs under President George W. Bush, speaking at The Heritage Foundation in 2003

There's this idea somehow that the West has figured out that Jihadism is a terrible thing and now has to convince Muslims to join in opposing the phenomenon. In fact for decades, lonely intellectuals and women's human rights defenders—Egyptian, Afghan, Iranian, Algerian, and more—have been saying 'Hey, this is very dangerous, please be very careful about supporting these regimes. Please be very careful about who you're partnering with and which Mujahadeen group you're supporting. The ideology is going to come back and get us all.'

—Karima Bennoune United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, speaking in 2016

In the United States, "homegrown" violent extremists—including Americans who are anti-government, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, or jihadists—are a major concern. From September 11, 2001, through 2015, the number of victims killed in the United States by far-right and far-left violent extremists groups exceeded the number killed by jihadists. In 2016, the number of victims killed by jihadist attacks in the United States rose to exceed those by other violent extremist groups.[3][4] Mass killings in the United States should propel better understanding of the underlying factors that induce a person to commit them.

What makes extremist groups that espouse a perversion of Islam especially dangerous is the cloak of legality and legitimacy they place on practices that are severely abusive, repressive, and discriminatory.

In fact, many Muslims have been at the vanguard of opposition to such repressive ideology, risking their lives to support human rights and fight against extremism. Often from within their home countries, Muslims have urged external forces to tread carefully and desist from dealing with leaders, movements, and highly repressive regimes that espouse extreme ideology.

To meet current security threats and improve efforts to counter violent extremism, it is critical to understand the context in which extremists are operating, including how they are imposing gender-specific violations as normative acts. More specifically, the treatment of women is a critical indicator of how violent extremist groups are inflicting gender-based violence to recruit followers, advance ideological objectives, expand networks, and perpetuate terror.

It is impossible to fully isolate any one country from a global threat or to prevent all recruitment by radical ideological groups. In fact, recruitment within the United States has persuasively targeted a variety of people through very personal approaches, often focused on using social media to build a relationship and trust.

Violent extremist groups know the psychology of their potential recruits. The sophisticated, multidimensional social media campaigns of these groups reinforce their central message.

Many targets for recruitment are youth, who are susceptible not because of their ideology or religion but because the recruiter appeals to deep-seated desires for appreciation and a chance to contribute significantly to a cause of ostensible importance.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified factors that increase the risk of joining and engaging in organized violence. Among the critical factors is having experienced or witnessed violence—most likely at home—as a child.

If one examines the profiles of attackers who recently have committed acts of violent extremism and espoused radical ideology—such as Khalid Masood (London), Mohamed Lahouajej Bouhlel (Nice), Dylann Roof (Charlston), Omar Mateen (Orlando), Tamerlin Tsarnaev (Boston), Robert Lewis Dear (Colorado Springs)—there is a common thread. These criminals have a record of inflicting domestic violence, or as children had been exposed to domestic violence, or often both.[5] [6]

Exposure to violence can have long-term health consequences. Particularly when experienced in early childhood, it can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.[7] Children and youth who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk and greater susceptibility to detrimental mental health development, depression, and deficiencies in empathy.[8] These impairments increase their vulnerability for recruitment into groups that engage in organized violence and violent extremism and for themselves perpetrating violence.

The good news is that these outcomes can be interrupted. Efforts to end violence against children are more likely to succeed where there are strategies to end violence against women and vice versa: Efforts to prevent and reduce violence against women over the long term requires attention to childhood exposure to violence.

Without addressing the underlying discrimination against women, gender inequality, and impunity for violence against women, the risk of organized violence will remain exceptionally high and fuel state and regional insecurity.

In their quest to prevent and defeat violent extremism, governments focus urgently on military operations, intelligence gathering, and cyber security. To curtail recruitment and growth of violent extremism

Foremost among mankind's inhumanity to mankind is treatment of women. . . . We know that mass rape and abuse of women destroy societies. But how can the perpetrators live with themselves? Can they really push out of their consciences the thought of their own mothers and sisters? Can they separate themselves from the horror they inflict?

—Jim Moran
Former Congressman (D-Virginia), speaking in 2016

A 'raiding mentality' the idea that we'll get a fast, cheap, and efficient victory if we can only identify the crucial nodes and take them out . . . That's a fundamentally unrealistic conception. Targeting does not equal strategy. At its worst, a raiding approach is a militarized version of George Costanza in Seinfeld, 'leave on an up note'—just go in, do a lot of damage, and leave.

—Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster
National Security Advisor to President Trump, as cited in Breaking Defense, 2013

Students from an all-girls Catholic school in Manila, Philippines, march in June 2014 wearing masks that depict the schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria and join the global call for the schoolgirls' release.
(Photo by Erik De Castro, Reuters)

over the long run, it is critical to look at the motivations that drive a person to engage and participate in extremist violence and to dig deeper to determine a person's prior exposure to violence—especially violence against women.

A comprehensive approach is needed that ensures policy and programming incorporate what research shows: Violent extremists use differentiated tactics to enlist women and men, they leverage and inflict gender-based violence for strategic purposes, and adverse trauma has real physiological and health consequences that impair regional stability and security.

Prevention efforts must examine the gender dynamics in the community and help youth, families, and leaders build greater gender equality and opportunities for youth empowerment. Response must focus on recovery initiatives for all who were subjected to horrifying treatment or forced to commit unspeakable acts, whether they are women, girls, boys, or men. Reintegration efforts must enable victims to return to a community that is prepared to receive them, offer psychosocial and healthy support systems, and assist them to reengage productively in society. Underlying every initiative must be a gender analysis that facilitates women's participation as equal partners, diminishes discrimination and violence, mitigates harmful consequences, and builds local resilience.

Political leaders have treated national security and violent extremism as issues separate from gender-based violence and women's empowerment. They are not separate. The advocacy community, academic institutions, and scientific and medical institutes all have roles to play in addressing these intertwined dimensions.

Let's bring the full scope of evidence-based analysis to bear on new approaches and decision making. Let's rely on all available sources and our combined expertise to end to gender-based violence, thereby reducing the spread of violent extremism and strengthening the prospects for peace and greater security at home and globally.

Compare those societies that respect women and those that don't. If you think about societies that empower women and protect women in vulnerable situations, those societies are far less likely to be trafficking in people or drugs or weapons, they don't tend to send off huge amounts of refugees across borders or oceans, they don't transmit pandemic diseases, they don't harbor terrorists or pirates, and frankly they don't require American troops on the ground. And therefore it's in our national interest—not only from a rights standpoint and an economic standpoint but from a national security standpoint. There's a one-to-one correspondence. Don't tell me there's no relationship between national security and the empowerment of women.

—Ambassador Don Steinberg

President & CEO, World Learning; Former Deputy Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development, speaking in 2016

ENDNOTES

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A strategy for curbing and ending violent extremism requires a comprehensive approach that integrates many sectors. A military response to violent extremism is not enough. Lasting success requires addressing underlying factors that fuel the growth of terrorist groups. Recommendations in this paper focus on the following areas:

1. **Research & Data**
   What do we know and need to know? Where are the gaps?
2. **Prevention**
   What can be done to disrupt the conditions that enable gender-based violence and to build resiliency within high-target populations?
3. **Recovery & Reintegration**
   Which interventions and services are critical after violence occurs? Which initiatives assist recovery, reintegration, and ability to reengage productively?
4. **Accountability & Good Governance**
   What is needed to end impunity, strengthen legal and judicial systems, and influence social norms to reject violence?
5. **Governmental Role & Partnerships**
   How can governments improve their impact, maximize investments, and leverage public-private partnerships?

International Women's Day 2017 (Photo by Joe Piette)

There is no single approach to eliminating the threat of violent extremism. But dollars spent on prevention go much further than dollars spent on response. Investments in prevention examine social norms that enable women to live free from violence and discrimination, support healthy development of children and youth, build resilience in communities, assist survivors to recover and reintegrate fully, and promote rule of law, accountability, and good governance.

For nations to realize peace, security, and development, they must enable all people to achieve their full potential and live free from violence. The treatment of women is critical in assessing the risk of state insecurity and the rise of violent extremism. National security strategies must pay attention to how women are treated and give greater weight to prevention.

If we can succeed in advancing opportunities for women, reducing the risk of violence, and ensuring their full inclusion and decision-making in the political and economic reconstruction of their countries, there will be a much better chance that those nations will be free and democratic, prosper, and be peaceful and stable allies.

—Charlotte Ponticelli
Former Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State under President George W. Bush

1. RESEARCH & DATA

State stability is integrally tied to the situation and status of women in society. Gender relations underpin all macro-level phenomenon within society.[1]

HOW VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CREATES SOCIETAL INSTABILITY & HOW IMPROVING SECURITY OF WOMEN IMPROVES SECURITY OF STATES

It is vital to fund research to further explore how the security of women and the security of the nation-state are integrally linked and how violence against women causes state instability. Discriminatory practices that deepen subordination in essence normalize the ill treatment of women, affecting societal norms and increasing state fragility. Where violence against women and insecurity are prevalent, conditions are ripe for violent extremism to spread. To better assess and predict where there is potential for instability and violent extremism, it is essential to track, as a key indicator, whether gender relations are progressing or regressing.

Prioritize the systematic collection and application of data on conditions for women, gender relations, exposures to gender-based violence, and adverse trauma as central factors for assessing stability and developing diplomatic and security goals. Integrate gender analysis systematically into the design, decision making, and implementation of all initiatives. Consider the impact on women and men and any actions to mitigate concerning gender-related outcomes.

Support the collection of sex disaggregated data on key indicators of gender based violence and societal factors that indicate insecurity or unrest. For example, collect information on women's mobility, brideprice and trends in dowry, and access to basic food resources. Improve measures for evaluating gains in resilience, capacity building, social cohesion, and other factors that improve prevention.

Create synergies between the academic community and governmental and intergovernmental organizations charged with collecting data and encourage exchanges about what data would be important to collect and what glaring data gaps exist. Governmental and intergovernmental organizations may have the resources to create and house datasets devoted to capturing the situation of women worldwide because funding for these are scarce.

IMPACT OF LOCAL NORMS & COMMUNITY-BASED EFFORTS

Local norms can help counter or escalate the rise of insecurity or violent extremism. Examine the prevailing norms and measure the progressive impact of community-based interventions designed to prevent recruitment to violent extremism and facilitate recovery and reintegration of survivors and former extremists. Areas where more research is needed:

Within the local community, how is violence against women and girls (and boys) perceived, condoned, or taught? Which cultural norms taught to children solidify over time?

How do communities view other cultures?

What is the role of faith leaders on interventions and narratives? Do they support returning survivors and former combatants? Can they do more to inspire opportunities for local empowerment and engagement in the community that can dissuade engagement in violent extremism?

MOTIVES TO DESIST FROM VIOLENCE & DISENGAGE FROM EXTREMISM

Emerging research is shaping interventions to thwart initial interest in radicalized groups, causes or ideologies, and help disengage individuals from violent extremism.

Identify how gender-based violence can help predict and serve as early warning signs for rising radicalization. What protective resources have the greatest potential for addressing multiple risk factors? What drivers/factors lead women and men to join violent extremist organizations?

Identify psychological components for recruitment, resilience, recovery, and reintegration. What are the varied push and pull factors?

Invest in more research to determine why people desist or disengage from extremist violence; how gender beliefs and identity contribute to interest in extremist ideologies and even cause some persons to become more willing to commit acts of violent extremism; and how programs tackle gender-related issues and related drivers of violent extremism.

IMPACT OF TRAUMA & YOUTH SUSCEPTIBILITY TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Children and youth who have been exposed to violence and adverse trauma are at higher risk for harmful health outcomes and feelings of extreme isolation, depression, and deficiencies in empathy. These impairments increase vulnerability for recruitment into organized violence and violent extremism.

Step up research on the impact of violence and adverse trauma on brain function and health for all ages but especially for children, youth, and adolescents. Examine the extent to which exposure to trauma impacts a person's capacity to form healthy attachments and also how it becomes a contributing factor or increases a person's susceptibility to participating in violent extremism. Use these data to craft more effective prevention programs. Investigate the impact of interventions designed to support the mental health of victims of trauma.

Design methods to measure and evaluate the effect of programs on resilience (especially for youth) and determine what works best with whom, under what circumstances, and why.

HARMONIZE PROCESSES FOR DATA COLLECTION

Disparate definitions and methodologies impede collaboration across national agencies and international entities.

Share guidelines and core indicators to improve data accuracy, consistency, coordination, comparability, and capacity to be disaggregated.

Ensure surveys integrate metrics that focus on at-risk populations, including ethnic and religious minorities and persons with disabilities.

Facilitate capacity-building and training programs for planning and implementing data collection systems and surveys among a variety of sectors, including justice, health, education, security, labor/workforce, and law enforcement.

Encourage use of common definitions and clarify research terms to facilitate application of data and research from a variety of sources.

2. PREVENTION

The recommendations below have the capacity to maximize the impact of prevention initiatives by building resiliency, reducing discrimination and violence, and instilling women's confidence in their capacity to access opportunities.

WOMEN'S AGENCY

Women as Partners

Female viewpoints and skills, like those of their male counterparts, must be integrated into the push against violent extremism. It is important to recognize women's agency in joining and participating in violent extremist groups. Interventions that integrate women fully will be more effective in countering the rising power of women in violent extremism than those that do not.

Empower women as equal participants and decision makers in program design and implementation.

Shared Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence & Violent Extremism

Early research on recruitment and growth of violent extremist groups and well-developed research on gender-based violence show important similarities and points of intersection. Underlying both are experiences of deep-seated inequality, severe adversity, or perceived injustice. These experiences may transform into a desire for domination and control to diminish the relative power or standing of a victim and to enhance a sense of identity and power. In both phenomena, gains can be made by ending impunity for violence, empowering women and girls, and engaging men and boys to change social norms.

Gender Beliefs as Motivation

Gender-based beliefs, identity, and norms can play a role in making individuals more or less willing to commit extremist violence. For some women, extremist causes represent opportunities to develop a sense of sisterhood to challenge or seek freedom from gendered norms otherwise unavailable to them. Similarly, involvement may allow some men to fulfill a desired masculine self-image, resolve gender identity confusion or conflict, and reinforce masculine beliefs and related needs.

Understand the role gender identity plays in recruitment, growth, and perpetuation of terror and control in developing policies on countering violent extremism.

Invest in addressing the root causes of gender-based violence:

Diminish barriers and discrimination in economic, political, and civic arenas.

Implement initiatives that protect human rights and raise societies' values.

Provide inclusive education, economic empowerment. and political participation.

COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

Community Support for Persons at Risk

Community-based interventions raise awareness, build resilience, and engage families and local leaders, law enforcement, social workers, health professionals, educators, grassroots activists, and others who can potentially catch warning signs. Most of these interventions are very cost-effective. Not all community-based interventions should be enlisted as programs to counter violent extremism, especially when such a label can place local players at risk.

Invest in community-based interventions that can be adjusted to diverse circumstances and that provide opportunities for everyone to develop a positive, healthy identity; build resilience; cultivate a sense of value and belonging within society; and pursue political goals and objectives through legitimate and legal means.

Resisting Recruitment & Desisting from Violent Extremism

Interventions that leverage psychological and social circumstances can help prevent individuals from engaging with extremist groups, from being willing to commit violence, and from actually committing acts of terrorism. They also can help survivors and former combatants recover and fully disengage from extremist causes and groups.

Invest in evidence-based interventions that help individuals discredit ideologies prior to growing involved in violent extremism; strengthen their pro-social identity prior to any exposure to extremist causes; fortify personal resilience against the appeal of extremist groups; and build resistance to supporting, facilitating, or committing violence.

Mobilize community support before and after someone attempts to leave by providing avenues for individuals to become self-invested locally and offering ways to be better integrated in the community, engage in peer-to-peer interactions, and access support and activities.

Discussion on protection issues in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo broadcast on a twice-weekly show on the United Nation's Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement "DDRRR" radio station.
(Photo by Caroline Gluck/Oxfam)

Faith Leaders Summit, meeting prior to the G-20. (Photo by Bread for the World)

WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH

Many parts of society have a valuable role to play in prevention and disruption of violent extremism, such as women's organizations, the media, the criminal justice sector, educators, religious leaders, health providers, and the security sector. Support for capacity building, outreach, and coordination is helpful. Lasting success requires sustained investments to examine and improve behaviors and attitudes concerning violence, gender-based violence, and human rights. A whole-of-society approach integrates activities of many community sectors.

Women Leaders

Facilitate women's participation as empowered actors and decision makers, including in political processes, peacebuilding, relief, and reconstruction efforts. Actively include women in programs to build entrepreneurship skills and assist their access to jobs in influential sectors of the economic and society. Support the work of women-led organizations working on myriad issues that enhance capacity, education, safety, and leadership.

Civil Society Organizations

Support the active role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in prevention, recovery, and reintegration efforts. Regimes often use violent extremism as an excuse to shut down CSOs and moderate dissenting voices. CSOs play a key role in convening community members, facilitating discourse, and delivering programs and services.

Youth

Identify victims of childhood adverse trauma and provide supports to facilitate healthy development and prevent harmful legacies of trauma. Promote youth engagement in positive interests and activities and integrate curricula for healthy interactions between girls and boys based on respect and equal partnership. Provide life skills for adolescents and pre-adolescents.

Religious Leaders

Religion is a powerful influence. Encourage faith leaders to teach about respect, the harms of violence, and the principle of the Golden Rule (a tenet of many faiths). Develop programming that engages religious leaders on gender equality. When religious figures espouse and operationalize respect for women, the lived experience of the population will begin to shift at the household and community level.

Men

Engage men as potential allies, facilitators, and activists in achieving greater gender equality and eliminating violence against women and girls. For lasting impact, invest in evidence-based programs to engage men and boys.[2]

Parents & Teachers

Involve parent/teacher councils to improve collaboration across settings, enhance positive parenting and teacher role models, advise on signs of behavior changes in youth and about available support resources, and teach about internet safety and encryption. Support explicit curriculum for school-based interventions that teach healthy relationships, respect, and better understanding about gender equality. Also include this curriculum in programs for youth designed around interest areas such as sports, arts, and other interest areas.

Survivors

Survivors have important perspectives and a powerful role in prevention efforts. Their knowledge is critical to include in consultations and the design of approaches. Recovery and reintegration of survivors is essential for lasting security. Mental health and social services should be survivor-centered and uphold personal dignity. There are many nuanced methods to deliver psychosocial support through general education and skills training that strengthen a sense of purpose, belonging, confidence, and hope.

Marginalized Populations

Include multiple voices of communities in consultations, program design, decision making, and implementation of initiatives. Consider how violence may especially affect populations that frequently are marginalized, such as indigenous people, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ, and religious and ethnic minorities.

MESSAGE & INTERNET

Social media and online tools are powerful avenues of recruitment, especially of youth. Counter-narratives can take many forms.

Because storytelling is a vital component of prevention and the most credible voice is the voice of someone who has been there, champion voices of survivors and defectors, allowing them to share what life is really like within ISIS and other violent extremist groups. Bring their stories to media outlets to counter extremist narratives.

Frame positive messages that speak to persons seeking to fill a void, find purpose, and engage with a group rather than provocative messages that attempts only to discredit an ideal.

Engage the support of religious leaders and offer faith-based counter-narratives.

Elevate voices of trusted peers and local authorities who can spur questioning about the merits of radical causes and introduce perspectives at variance with black-and-white extremist ideology.

Consider messages that go beyond women's rights as human rights and instead educate about ways in which violence against women contributes to broader societal insecurity.

Photo by frankieleon

Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, Iraqi Yazidi activists and survivors of ISIS, receive the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2016.
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3. RECOVERY & REINTEGRATION

The recommendations below are essential to set a course for greater security over the long-term. Attention centers on how to enable positive reintegration, facilitate engagement in legitimate economic and political processes, and diminish the recurrence of violence and the pull toward radical ideology.

RETURNING HOME: SURVIVORS & EXTREMISTS

Whether they were captured or coerced and whether they were supporters or survivors of an extremist group's goals, it is important to help those who were formerly engaged with extremist groups to become positively engaged members of society.

Assist survivors and returning extremists who may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and require psychological resources in order to overcome their trauma and successfully transition into daily life. Help them access psychological and health resources, facilitated support groups, job training, community activities, and productive work.

Provide psychosocial and health services, social support systems, and related activities to women confronted by stigma associated with rape, child and forced marriage, and forced or coerced participation in terrorist activity. Assist them in reengaging with their communities in a healthy manner and enable recovery and healing from the violence they may have experienced.

Intervene to support women who are victims of domestic violence and the children who are witnesses. Support initiatives to address and alter the behaviors of perpetrators, including criminal accountability. Provide local leaders training to recognize and respond to cases of domestic violence.

Support families through training, financial assistance, and other interventions to reduce misdirected stigma assigned to victims and diminish any perceived dependency on terrorist networks.

Develop tailored interventions that differentiate between categories of violent extremists (leaders, mid-level, followers) and adapt psychological interventions to different types, recognizing that no single program will work for every offender or in every region.

TRANSITION & POLITICAL VOICE

A recurring theme among survivors of violence and also former combatants is a deep desire to regain purpose, have their voice heard, and participate in a meaningful way in political processes. Having the capacity to participate in legitimate political discourse and decision-making is important for recovery and reintegration.

Ensure women are fully empowered as equal participants, decision makers, leaders, and implementers in peace negotiations, postconflict transitions, and political processes.

Recognize that reintegration and legitimate political participation by extremists or combatant groups need to be accompanied by accountability. In Algeria, ex-combatants were reintegrated without accountability and were essentially rewarded. Include survivor groups in political negotiations and decisions about combatant reintegration.

Ensure peace agreements and related accountability or transitional justice mechanisms address the crimes of gender-based violence, reduce impunity, and support non-discrimination against women and other frequently marginalized populations.

Emphasize initiatives in the transition from relief to development that build resilient communities, integrate women as equal partners, and clearly oppose violence or discrimination against women and survivors.

REFUGEES & INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

The high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally pose a great challenge. These vulnerable populations require assistance to build resiliency and engage in meaningful activities.

Build the groundwork for reintegration and recovery by protecting the rights of refugees and IDPs, most of whom are women and children. Include women in the design, oversight and decision making in refugee and IDP camps. Provide alternative reporting mechanisms for human rights violations by humanitarian workers, members of the military, and members of civilian task forces. Couple such mechanisms with swift and public discipline of offenders to ensure women's safety within camps.

Give special attention to structural issues in active and postconflict settings in order to provide protection—especially to women and girls—from physical harm. Safely deliver the psychosocial and health support that is critical for recovery and reintegration, and create conditions that minimize risk from harm, exploitation, and abuse in humanitarian relief settings.

Include women fully in resettlement and redevelopment programming. Design humanitarian assistance and redevelopment programs around women and prioritize gender equality while scaling up donor assistance.

Integrate as part of any technical and financial assistance consultations with women (and their organizations, where they exist) to identify what support and initiatives women prioritize. Enable them to have influence on the postconflict agenda.

Recognize the trauma caused by widespread violence and terror tactics, and provide health services and interventions to facilitate recovery and improve reintegration for all members of the community.

Chadian women speaking at the first Women's Leadership Forum hosted by Special Operations Command Africa and facilitated by the U.S. Embassy in Chad and Spirit of America.
(Photo by USAFRICOM, March 2017)

4. ACCOUNTABILITY & GOOD GOVERNANCE

There will continue to be a space ripe for radical ideology and competing allegiance, without addressing impunity, systemic abuse, and structural discrimination. The recommendations below focus on inclusion of women as equal participants in government processes and decision-making, and on accountability, which is a critical component in the rule of law.

JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Many models exist for upholding justice and human rights—from local courts to international criminal tribunals to national commissions on truth and reconciliation. Accountability is critically important for recovery and reconstruction to take hold. Without accountability and access to justice, a climate of impunity will perpetuate violence.

Include women as empowered partners in design, decision-making, and implementation of justice reforms to strengthen an independent judicial process; foster nondiscriminatory laws; and train judges and law enforcement in their consideration of men and women, treatment of gender-based violence, and support for survivors. Collaborate with civil society organizations to provide public education about rights, build confidence about equal access to justice, and create a climate that opposes violence and impunity.

Bring the architects and leaders of mass abuses to justice. Insist on trials for high-level officials responsible for abuses and not settle for low-level prosecutions.

Link anti-corruption work with efforts at countering violent extremism—and integrate women into consultations and initiatives—as a means to hold officials accountable and support good governance.

Strictly enforce regulations prohibiting sexual misconduct by governmental personnel, contractors and subcontractors, writing into contracts stiff penalties for misconduct.

Create staff positions that allow for unannounced monitoring of ground-level behavior. Develop real-time, crowd-sourced mechanisms for reporting sexual misconduct by those implementing programming.

SECURITY SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Security forces frequently are the first to meet survivors, and their interactions can either facilitate recovery and access to resources or cause further harm.

Implement gender-sensitive security sector reform. Military-to-military training exercises are prime opportunities to help mainstream gender into security-sector reform initiatives. Critical security partners should collaborate to prioritize gender analysis in training and equipping missions. Programs should also improve structural gender equality and increase the number of women within security forces.

Design training programs for militaries that emphasize best practices of interacting with women and civilians generally. In particular, train on how to interact with the (often female) family members and associates of suspected insurgents without violating human rights and on best practices for counterinsurgency. Desist from criminalizing returning victims of violence.

Promote the professionalization of security forces for top military leaders and local security officers. Widespread training could help local forces do a better job of protection and directing survivors to resources for recovery.

Increase the number of women at all levels in peacekeeping, security forces, and civilian military and policing operations.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT

Diplomatic and technical assistance programs should enable inclusion and full participation of women and protect against discrimination and violence.

Strengthen participation of women in all political mechanisms, including peace negotiations and constitutional reform. Start with hard targets for women's inclusion by insisting that women be in key governance and decision-making positions such as delegates, lead negotiators, mediators, and chiefs of missions. Insist that contractors and subcontractors also meet hard targets for women's inclusion.

Provide technical assistance to government institutions to develop legislation and standardize laws that are nondiscriminatory and that prevent and respond to violence against women and children.

Work with civil society, including women's organizations, to develop education and implementation plans about rights, laws, and policies.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and Secretary of Defense James Mattis
(Photo by U.S. Department of Defense, Army Sgt. Amber I. Smith, March 2017)

5. GOVERNMENTAL ROLE & PARTNERSHIPS

The recommendations below recognize resource limitations. This section offers approaches that can improve efficiency and effectiveness in government processes and help leverage additional investments and partnerships strategically.

WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Better coordination, intentional strategies, and multi-sectoral models will increase the impact of resource investments. In designing and determining government approaches:

Examine recent multisectoral and interagency models that link gender-based violence and security (e.g., atrocity prevention, ending child marriage, child protection) in order to establish a whole-of-government approach to countering violent extremism.

Commit strong funding and do not neglect postwar investments that promote recovery, reintegration, and safety, including investments to end gender-based violence and promote greater equality.

Use successful frameworks for a whole-of-government approach that offer a menu of policy and program options, such as the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Appoint senior-level officials to elevate and integrate gender issues and gender-based violence issues, such as the U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, who coordinates and spurs actions across government agencies.

Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Chairman Emeritus of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, engages with participants in the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program. Photo by House Foreign Affairs Committee 2011

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

There now are more sources for private funding that can complement government investments and much more known about how to structure such partnerships and investments. Drawing on successful models:

Create mechanisms to coordinate public and private funding to maximize investments and better meet the needs of local communities. For example, private-sector funds could match government assistance programs and initiatives. A rapid response fund could provide emergency cash assistance to survivors so that they can reach safety and access care. An innovation fund could support locally inspired initiatives that have the capacity to meet a local need effectively and efficiently and the potential of application elsewhere.

Conduct gender analysis in the design and implementation of investments and programs across sectors—whether economic development, road construction, political participation, judicial reform, security training, media development, or education programs. Consult closely with women and local leaders to determine the following:

- potential impact on women and girls, men and boys
- impact on safety and exposure to violence
- actions that may be necessary to reduce the risk of harm and violence
- how to enhance the equal status of women and girls with men and boys

Encourage specific sectors that have not traditionally been associated with discussion about gender-based violence to elevate and strengthen their roles:

- labor and trade associations initiatives that improve accountability and reduce discrimination or gender-based abuses in the workplace
- infrastructure programs that encourage design to minimize the vulnerability of the project's beneficiaries to gender-based violence
- health services that integrate screening of and response to gender-based violence and deliver safety and psychosocial services

It is one of these cases where, having invested an enormous amount of money [on war], we are now arguing about a tiny amount of money in terms of bringing this to successful conclusion. It reminds me of the last scene in *Charlie Wilson's War*, where, having forced the Soviets out of Afghanistan and having spent billions to do it, Charlie Wilson can't get a million dollars for schools.

—Robert Gates
Former Secretary of Defense under Presidents George W. Bush and Barak Obama, speaking in 2010

ENDNOTES

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EVIDENCE: SECURITY OF WOMEN & SECURITY OF STATES

A woman and her child wait to enter a free medical clinic that is held twice weekly with up to 400-500 people on an average day. (Photo by AU/UN Abdi Dakan)

The overall level of violence against women is a better predictor of state peacefulness, compliance with international treaty obligations, and relations with neighboring countries than indicators measuring the level of democracy, level of wealth, and civilizational identity of the state.[1]

The situation of women is a key marker of whether a society is descending into chaos, morphing into a breeding ground for extremist organizations.[2]

It seems obvious that an unstable, warring nation will stress and traumatize households. But the causal arrow also points the other way. When a society normalizes violence and oppression between men and women—the two halves of humanity whether in households or communities—adverse effects will be felt nationally. An abundance of data and research show that the security of women and the security of the nation-state are integrally linked. Consider, for example, that democracies with higher levels of violence against women are as insecure and unstable as nondemocracies.[3]

That this association is so robust evinces something important: The treatment of women in a society is a barometer of the degree to which a society is capable of peace. How the two different but interdependent halves of humanity live together in a society mirrors how that society copes with difference and conflicts arising from that difference. In terms of power and control, personal value and respect, and expectations for equality and healthy interactions, the dynamics in a relationship between males and females is usually the first experience of difference in life because it is within the family and at home.

What is learned at home is carried into society. If a society's prevalent norm is that male interests trump female interests, that conflict is resolved through violence, and that such violence frequently is met with impunity, then these norms become the template for dealing with other differences—ethnic, religious, cultural, racial, and ideological. When these dynamics predominate, prejudicial discrimination, intolerance, and a propensity toward violence create a climate of insecurity ripe for instability.

According to researchers Erin Bjarnegard and Erik Melander, individuals and societies that reject norms of gender equality also demonstrate significantly more hostile attitudes toward minorities in their own country and toward other nations.[4] The ability—or inability—to live with the "first other" in equality and peace also frames prevailing attitudes toward foreign and security policy. Conversely, the lived experience of gender equality prepares individuals and society to live in harmony with others. In a very real way, it is impossible to build peace in the international system unless peace can be practiced between men and women within a society.

A constellation of discriminatory practices deepens the subordination of women while heightening societal instability. For example, nations with discriminatory family laws have higher levels of violence against women, and the practice of having more than one wife—polygyny—is a risk factor for state instability. There is also a relationship between marriage customs, systems of political governance, and indicators of state instability. For example, where a brideprice is required for marriage, terrorist groups have a much easier time recruiting young men when brideprices rise.[5]

Two decades of intensive research show that the old metaphor of the canary in the coalmine—where we assume women are the canary and state insecurity is the coalmine—is upside down. Instead, the character of male-female relations is the coalmine, and the canary that keels over in response to coalmine dysfunction is manifest in a wide variety of security issues, whether that be food insecurity, demographic imbalance, or explosive national instability.

Men and women alike have to be in this struggle together. We cannot safeguard our country just with one wing.

—Tawakkul Karman
Nobel Peace Laureate (2011)

The first political order is the sexual political order, set by male-female dynamics. The character of that first order molds the society, its governance, and its behavior, creating the conditions for state fragility and insecurity or for state security. Societies that reject impunity for violence against women and that champion equal voice and representation for women in decision-making councils—from the home to the state—can diminish and reject broader societal subordination and violence.

What affects women affects men simultaneously, and the character of male-female relations affects humanity as a whole. Therefore, the treatment of women is not a small, soft, or dismissible issue but rather is central to national and international security.

World leaders have yet to fathom and fully consider how the treatment of women influences state security. For example, foreign policy analysis of whether China can "rise peacefully" typically has not taken into account its treatment of gender nor the impact of China eliminating almost 15 percent of its daughters from the birth population through government-mandated abortions and sterilizations.

Five nations had abnormal sex ratios in their birth rates in 1990, but in 2016 there were 19: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Fiji, Georgia, India, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Montenegro, Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Taiwan, Macedonia, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.

Sex ratio alterations have real security implications. In some regions, they distort the marriage market, creating surging prices for brides in local communities. This imbalance fuels recruitment to insurgent and violent extremist groups; escalates crimes against women, including trafficking and forced prostitution; restricts women's mobility; and increases the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. Sex ratio may even alter the calculus of violence deterrence, as it affects perceptions about the cost of attrition warfare based on a population consisting of significantly more young men than young women.

The first years of the 21st century have seen a resurgent patrilineality as a means of providing group security, especially evident in post–Arab uprising nations and in Central Asia and the Caucuses. Patrilineality refers to societies where the underlying structure is the extended male kinship group and where women are strictly subordinated. The foundations of patrilineality are a devaluation of female life, highly inequitable family and personal status law favoring males, and conditions that enable gender-based violence. Where patrilineality is present, there is relegalization of practices such as polygyny and a resurgence of religious sanction of crimes including rape or child marriage. High levels of violence against women worldwide in times of war and of peace buoy the tide of patrilineality, as do laws favoring males in areas such as property rights, rights in marriage, and the treatment of women as minors.

Thus it appears that trends toward gender equality are easily reversible, and when a reverse happens, it comes swiftly. Yet significant progress for women in a society usually takes 10 or more years. This timetable has important ramifications for nations seeking peace and a stable international system. To the degree that states in which women are insecure dominate the international system or its regional subsystems, these systems themselves become insecure and unstable. Diplomats and soldiers that overlook or downplay this linkage are ignoring a central means for predicting and promoting security around the world.

Efforts to increase female education, economic participation, and involvement in government and security forces are important but only go so far in stabilizing at-risk states. Without dismantling the foundations of dysfunctional, inequitable relations between women and men, the destiny of the international system is in a persistent state of fragility, instability, and insecurity. This is the new Realpolitik. The linkages are not new. What is new is that researchers, policymakers, and advocates now have the evidence to see them.

U.S. Army officer for Provincial Reconstruction Team at a key leader engagement meeting, part of a gender strategy working group meeting with the Director of Women's Affairs in Afghanistan.
(Photo by HMC Josh Ives, U.S. Navy 2013)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledge the links between improving overall security of women and state security.

Fund research to supplement the growing body of evidence showing how the security of women and the security of the nation-state are integrally linked and how violence against women causes state instability. Discriminatory practices that deepen subordination in essence normalize violations, oppression, and discrimination of women. This norm affects societal norms and increases state fragility. Where violence against women and insecurity are prevalent, conditions are ripe for violent extremism. When countries in which women are insecure dominate international or regionally focused organizations, issues relating to insecurity, instability, and terrorism also dominate the agenda.

Ensure data collection provides sex-disaggregated information on a wide variety of societal conditions that can be indicators of insecurity and unrest, including women's mobility, trends in bride price and dowries, and access to food and basic resources. Create synergies between the academic community and governmental and intergovernmental organizations charged with collecting data, and encourage exchanges about what data would be important to collect and what glaring data gaps exist. Governmental and intergovernmental organizations may be best positioned to fund the creation of datasets on the situation of women worldwide.

Understand how gender equality can reverse adverse state conditions.

Promote initiatives that cultivate gender equality, even in a context where attitudes and norms have not progressed. Start with areas around which a global consensus is building, such as the need for the elimination of child marriage.

Strengthen participation of women in all political mechanisms, including peace negotiations and constitutional reform. Start with hard targets for women's inclusion by insisting that women be in key governance and decision-making positions—as delegates, lead negotiators, mediators, and chiefs of missions. Insist that contractors and subcontractors also meet hard targets for women's inclusion. Hold contractors and subcontractors accountable to reach similar targets for women's inclusion and provide them with training to model and improve equality and peace in societies in the field.

Strictly enforce regulations prohibiting sexual misconduct by governmental personnel and contractors by writing stiff penalties for misconduct into contracts. Create staff positions that allow for unannounced monitoring of ground-level behavior. Develop real-time, crowd-sourced mechanisms for reporting sexual misconduct by those implementing programming.

Invest in a variety of objectives that can advance the rights and empowerment of women so that the treatment of women becomes an integral component of a holistic gender approach. In the design and implementation of investments and programs across sectors—whether economic development, road construction, political participation, judicial reform, security training, media development, or education programs—conduct gender analysis and consult closely with women and local leaders to determine:

- potential impact on women and girls, men and boys
- impact on safety and exposure to violence
- actions that may be necessary to reduce the risk of harm and violence
- how to enhance the equal status of women and girls with men and boys

Encourage faith leaders to teach respect, the harms of violence, and the principle of the Golden Rule (a tenet of many faiths). Develop programming that engages religious leaders on gender equality. When "respect for women" is operationalized by religious figures, the lived experience of the population will begin to shift at the household and then societal level.

Apply gender analysis to data collection and security analysis.

Prioritize the systematic collection and application of data measuring conditions for women and gender relations within a country as a central factor for assessing stability and developing diplomatic and security goals. Integrate gender analysis systematically into the design, decision making, and implementation of all initiatives. Consider the impact on women and men and actions to mitigate adverse outcomes.

Enlist experts to create an index that will allow tracking of whether gender relations are progressing or regressing within a society. Sub-indices can be tied directly to violent extremism. For example, tracking whether brideprices are rising, stable, or falling can forecast a rise in extremism. A subindex on changes in formal law as well as de facto law can help predict the security horizon for a nation-state. For example, the relegalization of polygyny and new required dress codes for women in Central Asia could signal that these societies are becoming less stable over time. Another subindex on birth sex ratios could be an important sign of rising insecurity.

Address shared root causes of gender-based violence and violent extremism.

Research the similarities and points of intersections between the recruitment and growth of violent extremist groups and gender-based violence. Underlying both are experiences of deep-seated inequality, severe adversity, or perceived injustice. These experiences may translate into a desire for domination and control to diminish the relative power or standing of a victim and to enhance the perpetrator's sense of identity and power. In both phenomena, gains can be made by ending impunity for violence, empowering women and girls, and engaging men and boys to change social norms.

Invest in addressing the root causes of gender-based violence:

- Diminish barriers and discrimination between women and men and girls and boys in economic, political, and civic arenas.
- Implement initiatives that protect human rights and raise societies' respect for all women and girls.
- Provide inclusive education, economic empowerment, and political participation.
- Insist on women's participation as equal partners in program design, decisions, and implementation.
- Examine family law and support reform efforts (where needed) and effective implementation.

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This article is adapted from the following sources, which detail this research: Valerie M. Hudson, "Secure Women, Secure States," Building Peace website (March 2014), http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2014/03/secure-women-secure-states/; Valerie Hudson, "Of Canaries and Coal Mines," 50.50 Inclusive Democracy website (December 10, 2014), https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/valerie-hudson/of-canaries-and-coal-mines; Valerie M. Hudson, presentation to Futures Without Violence and Open Square, April 27, 2016.

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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Ten year-old Ruth B. is an orphan from Adamawa state, Nigeria. Her father died prior to Boko Haram's invasion of her town. She and her mother escaped, but her mother was later killed by members of Boko Haram for refusing to follow the sect. (Photo by Immanuel Afolabi)

The soldiers [told me], 'We don't kill the women and the girls.' They said they would only rape us. As if rape were different than death.

—Mary, South Sudan
Interviewed by Journalist Aryn Baker, Africa Correspondent for *Time*

Gender-based violence devastates not only affected individuals but also the communities and nations where it is widespread. Violence against women and girls is an especially pervasive form of gender-based violence that persists in all countries, reaching epidemic proportions in some. An estimated one in three women will experience violence in her lifetime, including rape, sexual assault, and killing. In some places, the estimated rates are much higher.[1]

Violence against women includes acts committed by intimate and family partners (domestic violence), acts committed by an attacker outside the family, sexual harassment in the workplace or in a public space, trafficking in women, and violence in conflict situations.[2] Sexual violence is especially damaging and primarily affects women and girls. In recent years, widespread gender-based violence and

sexual violence—including brutal rape and mutilation—have been hallmarks of many security forces, militants, and violent extremists.

Women and girls may also endure multiple forms of violence due to multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion. For example, women who are more marginalized and more vulnerable to violence include women who are living with disabilities; recognized as indigenous; identified as LGBTQ; managing HIV and AIDS; displaced, migrant, or undocumented; forced to live deprived of their rights; and living in the midst of armed conflicts or in emergency situations.[3]

The risk and incidence of gender-based violence can be extremely high in conflict-affected and fragile states: domestic violence tends to rise, as do sexual assaults outside the home.[4] In times of armed conflict, gender-based violence has included brutal and pervasive rape and sexual violence primarily against women and girls, kidnapping of boys as child soldiers, and mass killing of civilian men. Such abhorrent acts are inflicted to intentionally cause severe physical and psychological harm to the victim and to devastate the family and society. The international community recognizes that widespread, systematic rape and other acts of sexual violence constitute war crimes.[5] The moral magnitude, human toll, impact on society, and consequences for security must not be underestimated.

For societies and governments, the economic and social costs of violence against women and girls are massive. The costs include not only loss of human life but also "lost workdays, reduced civic participation, and costs to the justice and health sectors arising from injuries, health problems, mental health services, and more."[6]

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation, but it is fundamentally a vicious display of power, domination, and control. Deep-seated discrimination intent on diminishing the victim's relative standing in society underpins it. Where gender-based violence persists, the prospects for development, economic progress, health, and state stability are at risk.

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life.

Gender-based violence can include female infanticide; child sexual abuse; sex trafficking and forced labor; sexual coercion and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; elder abuse; and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, "honor" killings, and female genital mutilation/cutting.

Women and girls are the most at risk and most affected by gender-based violence. Consequently, the terms "violence against women" and "gender-based violence" are often used interchangeably. However, boys and men can also experience gender-based violence, as can sexual and gender minorities. Regardless of the target, gender-based violence is rooted in structural inequalities between men and women and is characterized by the use and abuse of physical, emotional, or financial power and control.[7]

Photo by UN Women/Pairach Homtong

COSTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The cost of gender-based violence can be measured in the price of acute health consequences, economic impact, and increased security risks. Far-reaching physiological consequences include trauma, physical injuries, and health problems. But the psychological and emotional harms are frequently at least as deep and long lasting.[8]

Women who have experienced violence inflicted by an intimate partner are more likely to suffer depression, give birth to low birth-weight babies, or contract HIV.[9] About two-thirds of the victims of intimate partner or family-related homicides are women, in contrast to all cases of homicide, of which 20 percent of the victims are women.[10] Unlike other categories of homicides, which have declined over time, homicide rates for females as a result of intimate partner or family-related violence have remained relatively stable.

The economic impact of violence against women encompasses costs for law enforcement, housing, health care, and other social and psychological services, as well as the diminished returns as a result of reduced employment and productivity, impaired engagement and participation in society, and lower life expectancy.

The cost of lost productivity due to domestic violence is conservatively estimated at between one and two percent of gross domestic product.[11] Widespread violence also spurs migration and displacement, which frequently put women and children at greater risk, contribute to increased national instability, and result in expensive security-related measures.

Men who as children were victims or witnesses of child abuse or violence against their mothers by a male partner run a greater risk of committing violence against their female partner as adults.[12] As Gary Barker, Executive Director of Promundo (an organization devoted to engaging men and boys in preventing gender violence), explains,

> We have seen in household research in sixteen countries—including post conflict or conflict affected countries—that men who witness violence growing up, either by their father or another man against their mother, are consistently two and half times more likely to use it against their female partner later on. If we layer on violence that they experienced in school or the community—where they are the victim of fights or violence in the home or in the community—the rates go up to four times, compared to men who did not experience one of those two things. In our prevention work, whether in post conflict or otherwise, we need to understand just how much trauma plus the social norms behind this play into the perpetuation and escalation of violence.[13]

All children and youth who experience or witness violence—not just male children—are more susceptible to engaging in violence in adulthood. Children who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk for emotional and behavioral problems.[14] They also are more likely to experience feelings of extreme isolation, depression, and deficiencies in empathy. Exposure to violence in early childhood can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.[15] The prevalence of violence against children increases the urgency for research on effective interventions. Dr. James A. Mercy, director of the Division of Violence Prevention in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Injury Center, put it this way:

> **Imagine you woke up one morning and newspaper headlines said that scientists had discovered a new disease. The scientists reported that up to 1 billion children worldwide were exposed to this disease every year. And that over the course of their lifetimes children exposed to this disease were at greater risk for mental illnesses like depression and anxiety disorders; at greater risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer; at greater risk of infectious diseases like HIV; and, if that wasn't enough, at greater risk for involvement in social problems like crime (including more violence) and drug abuse. If we had such a disease, what do you think we'd do? The truth is we do have such a "disease;" it's violence against children.[16]**

In 2013, the CDC extended technical assistance to eight countries to measure the magnitude and nature of sexual, physical, and emotional violence against children.[17] The results showed that violence against children is common, and in five countries

- **26 to 38 percent** of girls and 9 to 21 percent of boys experienced sexual violence;
- **61 to 74 percent** of girls and 57 to 76 percent of boys experienced physical violence;
- **24 to 35 percent** of girls and 27 to 39 percent of boys experienced emotional violence.[18]

Key factors increase the risk of exposure to gender-based violence. Girls are more likely than boys to experience sexual violence while travelling to and from school, highlighting the need for measures to enable girls to attend school safely. Indigenous girls and women "face a higher prevalence of violence, harmful practices, and labor exploitation and harassment than other women and girls."[19] Women identified as LGBTQ are at high risk of abuse. Also, girls and women with disabilities and those living in institutions experience a higher prevalence of violence than those living with foster families.[20] Most sexual violence takes place in the home.

Child marriage, a form of gender-based violence, exposes children to a lifetime of violence. According to UNICEF, more than 700 million women alive today were married before the age of 18, and more than one in three of these women were 15 years old or younger when they were married or entered into union. UNICEF also reports that boys are married as children, but "girls are disproportionately affected and are often married to men significantly older than themselves."[21]

Violence begets more violence, especially when the consequences are left untreated. These impairments increase vulnerability for perpetuating violence against women and girls and for recruitment into groups that engage in organized violence and violent extremism.[22]

Researchers confront methodological and ethical challenges in collecting accurate data on violence against children and in protecting children from recurring victimization.[23] Despite the enormity of the problem and the dreadful impact of childhood exposure to violence, there are no international standards for data collection. Meanwhile, cases of violence against children are generally underreported and are frequently undocumented.[24]

After their capture, [Yazidi women and girls] were shipped on a fleet of buses to a set of holding pens in the city of Mosul and other areas within Iraq. It was there where many of them heard the word 'sabaya' for the first time. They all describe this really chilling and horrifying moment when they realize what it means—it means slave.

—Rukmini Callimachi
Foreign Correspondent for *The New York Times*, who conducted interviews with 21 women and girls who escaped ISIS.

"I kept telling him it hurts—please stop," said the girl, whose body is so small an adult could circle her waist with two hands. "He told me that according to Islam he is allowed to rape an unbeliever. He said that by raping me, he is drawing closer to God."

—Interview reported by Rukmini Callimachi
Foreign Correspondent for *The New York Times*, article on August 13, 2015

CONNECTION TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Gender-based violence plays an important role in violent extremism. The brutal forms of gender-based violence are an extreme demonstration of control that is used to govern, hold territory, and destroy enemies. Violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Levant (ISIS) and Boko Haram commit gross and systematic gender-based violence as part of their strategy for expansion and control. Both groups use sexual violence and enslave women and girls to advance their ideology and reward combatants, while they destroy families and destabilize communities. The impact of these forms of violence persists across generations.[25]

The systematic rape and enslavement of women and girls has become deeply enmeshed in the radical theology of violent extremist groups. In internal policy that establishes guidelines for slavery, ISIS leadership put forward a narrow, selective reading of the Quran and other religious rulings "not only to justify violence, but also to elevate and celebrate each sexual assault as spiritually beneficial, even virtuous."[26] By arguing that such crimes are justified in law and religious doctrine, extremist groups are enabling violence as a normative condition.[27]

Trafficking women and girls, and then auctioning and selling them, also serves as a source of revenue for the groups. The promise to recruits and new combatants that they will be "given" wives is a further economic incentive in regions where men customarily pay a "brideprice" in order to marry and yet often lack the resources to do so. The removal of this obstacle, combined with the chance to contribute to an ideological cause, is a powerful inducement.[28]

The United Nations officially declared that ISIS's attacks against the Yazidi minority in Syria and Iraq constitute genocide and other war crimes. The UN Human Rights Council report, *They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes against the Yazidis*, is one of a dozen UN documents detailing the brutal atrocities and severity of the crimes.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has inflicted brutal gender-based violence. The majority of the kidnapped Chibok girls remain unaccounted for.

> Thirty women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch were subjected to a variety of abuses, including physical and psychological suffering during and after their abduction, sometimes for refusing to convert to Islam; forced labor, including forced participation in military operations; forced marriage to their captors; and sexual abuse including rape. . . . Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the men and boys are often given the option of joining the group or being killed.[29]

Boys also are exposed to horrifying, gender-specific abuses. They are abducted as soldiers and forced to commit barbarous acts aimed

at permanently severing ties to their families, communities, and the past in general. The gender-based violence inflicted on these boys increases their susceptibility to perpetrating more violence and atrocities in the future. Mausi Segun, senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, described a chilling account of the barbarous violence forced upon boys:

> Boko Haram ensures boys can never return to their community. I spoke to a seven-year-old in Kano whose mother was already dead. Boko Haram forced this young boy to watch them kill his father and then to carry his father's severed head on his shoulder for hours. This boy was rescued out of Boko Haram. For months everyone thought he was deaf and dumb because he would not speak a word. When he eventually spoke, the horrifying abuse and severity of trauma that he and other children were subjected to became clear.

The prolonged conflict and assault by violent extremist forces, the constant threat of attack, and the severity of the abuses have had a deep impact not only on victims but also on those who witness the assaults and those who are forced to participate.

> ISIS permanently sought to erase the Yazidis through killing, sexual slavery, enslavement, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and forcible transfer, causing serious bodily and mental harm.
>
> **—Paulo Sergio Pinheiro**
> Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations

ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: APPROACH & RECOMMENDATIONS

For people to achieve their full potential, their lives must be free from violence. For nations to achieve peace, security, and development, they must intentionally create policies and programs that prevent and respond to gender-based violence and support women to become equal, empowered partners.

Research provides a glimmer of hope. Despite the severity and pervasiveness of gender-based violence, it is possible to disrupt and prevent long-term harm, and there are evidence-based interventions to enable better outcomes. Such interventions can facilitate transition and transformation in affected regions, lay the groundwork for a more stable future, and enable individuals to reenter society, desist from violence, and understand they have prospects for a path forward.

Many parts of society have a valuable role to play: governments, international organizations (multilateral and bilateral), the private sector, and civil society organizations (including representatives of marginalized groups), foundations, local grassroots organizations, and community-based, faith-based, and regional organizations.

A comprehensive approach to end gender-based violence will involve multiple sectors in three primary areas:

Prevention: disrupting the conditions that enable gender-based violence and building resilience in high-target regions

Recovery: providing interventions and services to survivors of violence and supporting their recovery, reintegration, and ability to reengage productively

Accountability: ensuring perpetrators are prosecuted, strengthening legal and judicial systems, and influencing social norms to support punishment for such acts and to end impunity

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD TAKE SEVERAL ACTIONS

Address the underlying context and causes for gender-based violence.

Invest in reducing the causes (including root causes) of gender-based violence, especially violence against women and girls. This includes reducing discrimination and barriers between women and men and girls and boys in economic, political, and civic arenas. It also involves implementing initiatives that protect human rights and raise societies' respect and value for all women and girls, including inclusive education and economic empowerment opportunities. Review family law and support reforms (where needed) and effective application of laws.

Integrate women as equal partners who are fully empowered jn the design, decision-making, and implementation of every initiative. Also paramount is care for children and youth to prevent their experiencing or witnessing violence, to support full recovery for those harmed, and to put in place programs that support youth empowerment and teach healthy relationships based on respect, equal value, and greater equality.

Conduct gender analysis.

Apply gender analysis systematically during the design and implementation of an initiative, determine the potential impact on women and girls, men and boys, including how an initiative may affect their safety and exposure to violence and what actions may be necessary to reduce the possibility of or mitigate violence. In every project—whether it involves economic development, road construction, political participation, or education programs—it is critical to consult closely with women and local leaders, understand the local context, and design an approach that achieves the policy goals, enhances the equality status of women and girls with men and boys, and seeks to reduce the risk of harm and violence.

Institutionalize and integrate a whole-of-government approach.

Establish a whole-of-government approach to improve collaboration and integration of priorities across sectors. To increase understanding, improve effectiveness, and reduce harmful practices, governments must invest not only in global health, human rights, democracy, governance, and education initiatives, where gender issues have traditionally been part of the discourse, but also in initiatives for economic growth, business development, labor, agriculture, infrastructure, technological sciences, justice, law enforcement, and security.

Strengthen governance institutions, which are key to developing appropriate legislation, standardizing laws, developing action plans, and implementing plans effectively and collaboratively with civil society. Advocate for laws and policies to monitor, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence and to eliminate discrimination.

Utilize and leverage existing policy and program frameworks that are based on proven approaches and provide a menu of evidence-based interventions from which governments can choose. For example, the United States should continue to implement and strengthen the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. In addition, governments should appoint senior-level officials to elevate and integrate gender considerations and gender-based violence issues. For example, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues has worked effectively with the White House and other agencies to address violence against women and girls in U.S. foreign policy.

Reach beyond predictable allies to specific sectors not traditionally associated with addressing gender-based violence and strengthen the role they play. For example:

Encourage labor and trade associations to improve accountability and reduce discrimination and gender-based abuse in the workplace.

Design infrastructure programs to minimize the risk of gender-based violence.[30]

Ensure health services integrate screening of and response to gender-based violence and deliver relevant safety and psychosocial services.

Invest in community-based initiatives and collaborate closely with civil society.

Build on existing investment platforms to scale up community-based programs that are evidence-based are found to be effective.

Prioritize violence prevention initiatives.

Support the needs of survivors for full recovery and reintegration, including research-based psychosocial programs. These investments will enable greater stability to develop within the community and society.

Build capacity of civil society, including women's organizations, the media, criminal justice sector, health providers, educators, religious leaders, and organizations relating to the security sector.

Support civil society and community-level approaches to change behaviors and attitudes concerning violence and to facilitate discussion among families, community organizations, and religious, traditional, and other community leaders around human rights and gender-based violence. In particular, engage and involve female leaders and women's groups; youth; men and boys; and religious, faith-based, and community leaders in these activities.

Include and empower women in programs designed to build entrepreneurship skills and provide access to jobs in influential sectors. Conduct local gender analysis and take steps to mitigate any potential backlash or violence.

Facilitate women's participation as empowered actors and decision makers in peacebuilding, relief, and reconstruction.

Provide beneficial life skills for adolescent and preadolescent girls and boys, promote youth engagement in positive activities, and promote curricula for healthy, respectful interactions between girls and boys.

Engage men in programs to achieve gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls. As potential allies, facilitators, and activists, men are indispensable for lasting change.[31]

Enlist influential community-based leaders and organizations:

- religious leaders to teach about respect, the harms of violence, and the tenets of the Golden Rule (a doctrine of most faiths)
- educators to train teachers on gender-based violence and to help end sexual coercion and abuse
- parent/teacher councils to improve understanding and collaboration. Positive parenting diminishes children's susceptibility to committing violence and can help persuade combatants to desist from further violence

Include marginalized communities—such as indigenous people, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ, and religious and national minorities—as equal and empowered partners in consultations, initiative design, and decisions.

Ambassador Samantha Power, Former U.S. Representative to the United Nations, meeting with the council of Ministers in Juba, South Sudan, on issues of justice, accountability and an end to violence. "For as long as armed actors, rape, loot and kill with impunity, for as long as they are not held accountable, it will be very hard for the cause of peace to take hold here," Ambassador Power told the council of Ministers in Juba. (Photo by UNMISS, 2016)

Governments have a critical role in addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations.

Design humanitarian relieve initiatives with the specific intention of minimizing the risk of further violence, abuse, and repeat traumatization. Create and foster conditions that minimize risks of abuse in humanitarian relief settings. In active conflicts and in postconflict environments, give special attention to the structural needs for protecting women, girls, men, and boys from physical harm and provide the psychosocial support critical for recovery, reintegration, and healthy reengagement with society.

Insist that peace agreements and related accountability or transitional justice mechanisms strongly address crimes of gender-based violence and reduce impunity.[32]

Ensure that during the transition from relief to development, emphasis is on initiatives to build resilient communities that do not passively or actively condone gender-based violence or discriminate against survivors.

Prioritize improvements to data collection systems and surveys. Conduct routine, systematic collection of data on key indicators of gender-based violence over time.

Implement population-based surveys on related risk factors, exposures, and health and social outcomes that related` to gender-based violence.

Facilitate capacity-building and training programs for planning and implementing data collection systems and surveys.

Collect information from a variety of sectors: justice, health, education, security, labor workforce, and law enforcement.

Ensure surveys integrate metrics related to vulnerable and at-risk populations.

Improve the harmonization of research and data collection methods as a way to improve accuracy, consistency, coordination, and the capacity to compare data.

Support use of common guidelines, share core indicators, and ensure data can be disaggregated for various analyses.

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WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

Photo by UNHCR

Violent extremism undermines our collective efforts towards maintaining peace and security, fostering sustainable development, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and taking humanitarian action. Violent extremist groups are contributing significantly to the cycle of insecurity and armed conflict affecting many regions of the world.[1]

No country or region is immune from its impact.[2]

Before examining the ways in which government institutions and civil society organizations can work collectively to counter violent extremism, it is crucial to clarify what "violent extremism" means and identify ways in which actors use or threaten violence to advance extremist agendas. As with the term terrorism, there is no universally accepted definition of violent extremism, even among institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO. Violent extremism is generally considered to be a broader term than terrorism, but the two are sometimes used interchangeably.[3]

"Extremism" is context dependent and thus subject to interpretation. In recent years, terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Levant, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, and al Qaeda have formed the global understanding of what constitutes violent extremism, and these understandings have influenced domestic and international responses and prevention efforts. In the minds of many, the term conjures images of extremely radical ideology, unhinged violence, and exceptionally repressive societies. Yet even with the recent uptick in jihadist-inspired activity and the proliferation of efforts to mitigate violent extremism perpetrated by jihadists, the term violent extremism is not synonymous with one ideology, religion, or political goal.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, violent extremist threats "come from a range of groups and individuals, including domestic terrorists and homegrown violent extremists in the United States, as well as international terrorist groups."[4] Unlike like the term terrorism, which is defined in U.S. law, the U.S. government does not have one agreed-upon definition for violent extremism, just as other governments and international organizations do not. However, individual government agencies have offered their own definitions:

- The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation defines violent extremism as "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals."[5]
- The U.S. Agency for International Development defines violent extremism as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic, or political objectives."
- Public Safety Canada defines violent extremism as "the process of taking radical views and putting them into violent action.... [When persons] promote or engage in violence as a means of furthering their radical political, ideological, or religious views."[6]

Although these various definitions share similarities, the lack of a common definition can make it difficult for governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions to collaborate on unified initiatives to counter violent extremism. In addition, the varied contexts and characteristics of extremism make them subject to interpretation.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS ACROSS REGIONS

Among a variety of countries, there is evidence of common drivers to radicalization and violent extremism: lack of socioeconomic opportunities, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violations of human rights and the rule of law, prolonged and unresolved conflicts, and radicalization in prisons.[7] One critical recurring factor that is often overlooked is the poor treatment of women.

> The situation of women is a key marker of whether a society is descending into chaos, morphing into a breeding ground for extremist organizations.[8]

VIOLENT & NONVIOLENT EXTREMISM

When analyzing violent extremism, it is important to understand the differences and potential relationship between violent and nonviolent extremism.

> "Militant groups are usually the offshoot of [nonviolent] movements, and the difference … lies not in their ideology and objective [but rather] in what they regard to be the appropriate strategy" to achieve their aims.[9]

In this respect, the fundamental difference between violent and nonviolent extremism rests in the actor's use of violence to advance an agenda. But this distinction fails to capture the fluidity that frequently exists between the two.[10] Although nonviolent extremists do not engage in violence, they may sympathize with the violent extremists' ultimate goals and may assist in achieving them. Actors in a transitional or intermediary space—such as individuals who materially support kinetic activities without engaging in violence—further complicate the distinction between violent and nonviolent extremists.

Women are increasingly assuming roles in nonviolent and violent extremist groups. Today's violent extremist groups are actively recruiting women for many roles critical to their growth and ideological goals.

By recognizing the various stages of extremist involvement, it is possible to understand the triggers that can shift an individual from being a nonviolent sympathizer, to a supporter through tangential activities, to an active participant in violent extremism. Understanding the spectrum of extremist support and the relationship between the varied forms will enhance efforts to counter violent extremism.

Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program produces empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study; develops pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public; and brings together experts from various continents and a range of disciplines, including government officials, scholars, former extremists, counter-extremism practitioners, and professionals providing firsthand assistance to families grappling with radicalization.

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CYBER CHARM: LURING WOMEN TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Photo by Milena Mihaylova

In Washington State, a young Sunday school teacher living in a rural area was searching on the Internet to learn about the execution of James Foley, unable to fathom how anyone could use religion to justify such cruelty. She started engaging in an online conversation, posting questions and exchanging comments. In fact, a recruiter was slowly befriending her and grooming her for ISIS and was maintaining contact with her much more than anyone else in her life. She made plans to travel, but her family learned about her actions and intervened. She later recognized that the recruiter manipulated her loneliness and sense of conviction.

Women are critical targets for recruitment by violent extremist groups, such as the Islamic State. In the United States, women accounted for 10 out of 71 arrests relating to the Islamic State from March 2014 to March 2016. In contrast, there were 6 arrests of women out of 114 related to terrorism from 2008 to 2013.

No single factor leads to women's radicalization. Instead, there is a complex interplay of factors that may include personal factors such as bullying or a feeling of deep isolation, collective factors such as group pressure, group factors such as real or perceived discrimination, ideological factors that constitute a person's moral compass, and sociopolitical factors such as foreign policy. The reasons for joining are individual, making it imperative to develop a variety of prevention and intervention approaches

In the United States, radicalization and recruitment to violent extremist groups increasingly involve social media and other forms of technology, and recruiters use differentiated approaches to appeal to men and women. Social media amplifies the recruitment process and has become an important portal to reach a broad pool of potential recruits.

The Islamic State has the largest online effort of any terrorist group and has been highly adept at leveraging both traditional and social media, adapting culturally relevant marketing techniques, and creating sophisticated messaging for their target audiences. Social media permits real-time access to the conflict; instantaneous and broad dissemination of messages and information; and easy communication through open or encrypted messages to one another, openly or anonymously.

> In Mississippi, a 19-year-old female who was an honor student, cheerleader, and a member of her homecoming court was attending college when she joined ISIS. She and her fiancé made arrangements to travel to Syria but were stopped before boarding the international flight. She is the daughter of a school administrator and a police officer. She pled guilty and is now incarcerated.

The recruitment clips use compelling themes and tend to use an "us" versus "them" and a "good" versus "evil" narrative. For example, videos may focus on Syrians and feature doctors assisting children, or highlight incidents of discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia—showcasing political rhetoric and news stories, or they may portray the Khilafah (Caliphate) as state building to create a transnational utopia that realizes an inspired ideal, while also conveying that followers find a more meaningful self-identity and become an empowered part of something bigger than themselves.

> Three girls from Colorado aged 15 and 16 years attempted to travel to Syria and were apprehended in Germany. Because they were minors, Colorado's attorney general opted not to prosecute them and instead worked with local grassroots and civil society networks to support their rehabilitation.

The Islamic State has created very specific marketing techniques for young women that portray opportunities for empowerment, sisterhood, and marriage within a community that is committed to a greater cause. The messages of the Islamic State are designed to resonate especially with teenagers and young people in their early twenties who are searching to define themselves, develop a meaningful sense of identity, and contribute to an important cause. Women recruits do not fit one "type."

> Typically, people who are attracted to a topic—whether it is political, religious, or ideological—begin to engage in cocooning behavior. This is when information online becomes increasingly tailored to the person's search history and produces narrower and self-reinforcing results. The person may not even realize this is happening. One way to counter this effect is to bolster external interventions in local communities by working with clergy, women, coaches, and teachers who connect with young people.
>
> **—Sean Aday**
> Director, Institute for Public Diplomacy & Global Communications, George Washington University

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the breadth of the recruitment efforts and the variety of young women who are recruited, initiatives to disrupt recruitment and radicalization need to take a variety of forms.

Enable community-based interventions to raise awareness, conduct resilience exercises, and provide briefings with families and local leaders, law enforcement, social workers, health professionals, educators, grassroots activists, and others who spend time with youth and can potentially catch warning signs. One good example is the *WORDE/BRAVE* program in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Promote internet safety and teach parents about new tools and encryption. Coach parents on watching for relevant behavior changes and available support resources. The website *netsmartz* has valuable information on internet safety.

Mobilize community support to women before or after they attempt to leave. Provide opportunities to feel integral and engaged in local society and promote alternatives to leaving, including peer-to-peer activities, services to protect them from harm, and options for engagement and support.

Enhance initiatives to involve women in countering violent extremism, integrating and amplifying their participation and leadership.

Elevate defector stories, championing those voices and bringing them to media outlets. *Use Your Brain* is an organization started by a woman to highlight defector stories. These are powerful messages about what life is really like within ISIS and other violent extremist groups. The most credible voice is the voice of someone who has actually been there.

Ensure the CVE matrix and evaluations are gender sensitive and can be disaggregated by gender to provide greater clarity on CVE activities and their impact. Improve measures for evaluating gains in areas like resilience, capacity building, social cohesion, and other factors that improve prevention but are hard to quantify.

Leverage youth voices and engage millennials. For example, *Peer to Peer Challenging Extremism* is an interagency, public-private partnership working with university students in the United States and around the world. The program started with 23 schools in 2015 and more than doubled in 2016. Students receive course credit for one semester and a small budget to come up with an online digital and social media campaign at their universities. Because students create the works, these campaigns are more effective in reaching and moving young generations in authentic and consequential ways.

A woman who escaped Islamic State militants and arrived at a refugee camp in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. (Photo by Mauricio Lima for *The New York Times*)

The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) serves as the primary organization in the U.S. government for integrating and analyzing all intelligence pertaining to terrorism possessed or acquired by the U.S. government (except purely domestic terrorism). The NCTC serves as the central and shared knowledge bank on terrorism information; provides all-source intelligence support to government-wide counterterrorism activities; and establishes the information technology systems and architectures within the NCTC and between the NCTC and other agencies that enable access to, as well as integration, dissemination, and use of, terrorism information. NCTC serves as the principal advisor to the Director of National Inteligence (DNI) on intelligence operations and analysis relating to counterterrorism. Operating under the policy direction of the President of the United States and the National Security Council, NCTC provides a full-time interagency forum and process to plan, integrate, assign lead operational roles and responsibilities, and measure the effectiveness of strategic operational counterterrorism activities of the U.S. government, applying all instruments of national power to the counterterrorism mission.

WOMEN & VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Photo by Tambriell Caudill

Women are active agents deterring or engaging in violent extremist movements. Several contemporary violent organizations—the Islamic State, Boko Haram, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—capitalize on women's efforts and demonstrate keen awareness of the strategic and tactical potential of female extremists.

While some women serve as supportive wives and mothers to the next generation of extremists, others act as propagandists, fundraisers, and suicide bombers. The apparent proliferation of female actors in extremist groups, often underestimated, calls for strategies that effectively counter their participation in violent extremism.

The field of countering violent extremism (CVE) encompasses a broad spectrum of efforts to mitigate the radicalization and recruitment of extremists. The increasing prevalence of women as active, valuable participants in extremist organizations is spurring greater interest among government leaders and researchers in examining women's roles in CVE. This interest is welcome, as reliable information on the use and intersection of gender in CVE is just emerging and still deficient. Understanding the roles women play in supporting violent extremism will critically inform efforts to create spaces where women can and should participate in countering it.

HOW DEEPLY HAVE WOMEN BEEN INVOLVED?

Women are not the most common perpetrators of violence, but women are an integral part of many extremist movements. Data on terrorist groups, for example, suggests that women account for approximately 20 to 30 percent of membership.[1]

Women's engagement in violent extremism manifests itself in myriad roles, and these contributions tend to ebb and flow over time and vary between movements. Ultimately, the lines of logic defining women's roles within extremist groups tend to derive from context-specific ideological, religious, logistical, social, and personal considerations.[2]

> Women were participants in terrorist activities long before it became popular to pay attention to them.[3]

Women's supporting roles in terrorist organizations are often ignored due to the overemphasis on combatants within prevalent literature. In examining overarching trends regarding women in violent extremist movements, it is important to draw from and focus on information and literature regarding women in insurgencies, rebel groups, and terrorist organizations. Women's involvement in violent extremism is not unique to the 21st century; women have historically participated in many insurgent and resistance movements, acting on behalf of a variety of causes worldwide.[4]

Despite the long-standing involvement of women in violent political organizations, documentation of their efforts tends to be inconsistent and somewhat unreliable. The historical distortion of women in conflict is relevant, as it should inform the conduct of present-day analysis and research.

ROLES OF WOMEN IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM

> Women play different roles when it comes to violent extremism: they can be enablers and actors, or they can play a key role in countering fundamentalism and extremism.[5]

Women's roles in violent extremist groups fall into three categories: enforcers and informants, leaders and recruiters, and influencers in their communities and families. These categories of engagement mirror those in competing strategies to advance and counter violent extremism.

Women can be powerful agents of change and can play a crucial role in detecting early signs of radicalization, intervening before individuals become violent, and delegitimizing violent extremist narratives.

—Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger & Rafia Bhulai
A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism

I engaged a foreign fighter on Twitter. He never revealed any regrets—until I raised his family, particularly his mother. On Easter I said 'I know you're not a passionate Christian any more, but you may want to reach out to your mother and just let her know you are okay.' In the two months I talked to him, he never showed introspection until that moment. There is a very powerful role for mothers and fathers to reach the people that are drawn to such ideology.

—Seamus Hughes
Deputy Director, Program on Extremism at George Washington University

WOMEN AS ENFORCERS & INFORMANTS

Organizations often use women to build social cohesion, enforce organizational practices, and monitor those who violate standards imposed by violent extremists. While some groups such as FARC and the PKK regularly integrate women as combatants, intelligence gatherers, and informants, others avoid doing so. In some cases, women work as enforcers and informants alongside men; in others, women work in gender-specific units.

Organizations that adhere to ultraconservative practices, including religious fundamentalism, often designate specific branches and tasks for female members. This is the case, for example, in the sisterhood wing of the Ku Klux Klan.

Within territory held by the Islamic State, a reportedly all-female policing unit called al-Khanssaa Brigade enforces socio-religious practices such as dress codes among women under their self-proclaimed jurisdiction.[6] This cohort, reportedly active in both Iraq and Syria, recruits members and creates propaganda targeted toward female sympathizers.[7] Women in al-Khanssaa Brigade serve as just one example of how women advance the agendas of extremist movements.

Women's roles as enforcers and informants position them to become a valuable, more integral part of law enforcement efforts to reduce violent extremism as well. This growing area of investigation has identified ways that women are engaging in critical areas of CVE and has underscored the importance of gender dynamics within CVE strategy.

Women are uniquely skilled in building trust with local communities and networks, leading to a more collaborative environment between locals and officials. Formed in the early 2000s, the U.S. Female Engagement Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan serve as a useful example of how female-centric strategies might be designed.[8]

> Female law enforcement officers are often better at building trust with the community and community-oriented policing, which are crucial elements of CVE strategies.[9]

In some cases, women are believed to be more efficient because they are perceived as more approachable than their male counterparts, especially in dealing with grievances such as domestic abuse and sexual violence. Lastly, in some conservative communities, female security officers may have better access to the population, especially in instances where men are unable to inspect women due to gender-based social practices. Women also are highly valuable in the design of CVE interventions.

WOMEN AS LEADERS & RECRUITERS

In some organizations, women act as leaders and recruiters, advancing extremist agendas by organizing, inciting, and directing both violent and nonviolent activity. Karla Cunningham expands on the nature of women's efforts, noting that women across a range of extremist organizations "have been leaders in organization, recruitment, and fundraising."[10]

> Even though the nature of 'leadership' varies, one study suggests that women assumed leadership roles in over one-quarter of rebel movements between 1990 and 2008.[11]

Organizational management occurs on many levels, whether it is top-down or grassroots initiatives. Over time, globalization and the rise of the internet have made it easier and more feasible for women to take on organizing, recruiting, and fundraising roles.

Wherever women advance extremist agendas, women must serve as partners in the effort to formulate and effective response. In this manner, women can become integral stakeholders within the field of countering violent extremism.

It is critical that women be fully integrated and empowered in government efforts to shape international, national, and local CVE strategies. Once women are included in the development of CVE programming, they can incorporate gendered perspectives into government agendas for CVE and promote programs specifically geared toward women's roles in CVE.[12]

Gender blindness misinforms policy-making and planning.[13] It tends to ignore rather than recognize distinctly gendered factors. Women have become significant leaders in model community-centric CVE organizations. For example, Soad Begdouri Elkhammal created the Moroccan Association of Victims of Terrorism (AMVT), an organization that travels to regional schools to raise awareness on violent extremism, specifically in areas with poorer populations. Cherifa Kheddar created Djazaïrouna, an Algerian organization with similar goals, to support families and youth who have lost loved ones to violence.[14]

The success of these women's efforts at the local level can translate to efforts on a larger scale. By applying the same skills beyond their immediate communities, women can expand

Photo by Alberto Abouganem Stephens

the important work of educating younger populations and help prevent recruitment to violent extremist groups.

On both a local and national level, ensuring female leadership positions in policy development is crucial to developing gender-informed CVE initiatives. On an international level, the United Nations has provided a platform for women to contribute to CVE policy development through U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace, and security. The resolution highlights women's import role and perspectives in government-led conflict resolution, security, and peacebuilding efforts.

WOMEN AS SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY & FAMILY MEMBERS

Because the status of women varies between societies, in some cases they serve as powerful extremist leaders and recruiters, and in other cases they serve as equally powerful agents in the private sphere as community members, mothers, wives, and sisters. Women are uniquely effective in influencing and educating their communities and in encouraging or discouraging people to embrace the merits of violent extremism.

Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith note that the Western women of ISIS "are aware that they are key actors in ensuring there is a next generation to this Caliphate," noting "as agents of state-building these women contribute to ISIS's expansion efforts as wives and mothers."[15]

Joby Warrick describes Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's path to notoriety as the vicious leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, noting the man's weakness for his mother. Ultimately, "it was his mother who nudged Zarqawi into joining the Islamists."[16] Warrick explains that she "signed [Zarqawi] up for religion classes at the local al-Husayn Ben Ali Mosque, hoping he would find better models among the imams and pious youth, with their theological debates and fundraising drives to benefit Muslim holy warriors in Afghanistan."

But where women can inspire and actively promote extremism, as al-Zarqawi's mother did, they may also be able to counter it. Mothers' keen understanding of their children's motives and the substantial weight their voices carry in their children's lives present tremendous potential. Mothers have reduced violence in the context of gang involvement, a form of organized violence that shares similarities with violent extremism.[17] Moreover, case studies of mothers' and sisters' contributions to CVE efforts in Yemen, Pakistan, and Afghanistan underscore the efficacy of women in CVE projects.[18]

Out of more than one thousand women interviewed throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, more than 80 percent said that what they needed most was education in how to detect warning signs and training in how to react appropriately.[19] Culturally sensitive capacity-building efforts are vital to maximizing women's potential in detecting and preventing violent extremism.

It is imperative that policymakers and program developers pair women-inclusive initiatives with capacity-building efforts that account for local norms and traditions. Under these circumstances, women act effectively and play a significant role within their families and communities to counter violent extremism.

Women's efforts in CVE movements can counterbalance the efforts of their extremist counterparts. While women may assume diverse roles to counter violent extremism, they present specific potential in roles as enforcers and informants, leaders and recruiters, and supportive community and family members.

WOMEN AS FULL AGENTS IN CVE

Moving forward, policymakers, law enforcement officials, and civil society must consider any inherent limitations to women's full participation in CVE efforts. CVE policies and programs must take into account the environment in which they seek to prevent or counter violent extremism. The strategies that integrate women into CVE practices in places such as Canada or the United Kingdom will not necessarily work with women in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Persons tasked with designing CVE programs should be wary of relegating women to support roles and exploiting women to achieve their aims. Instead, women should be included as full partners in developing and designing CVE approaches, and women's multiple roles as crucial agents in CVE should be understood appropriately. Female viewpoints and skills, like those of their male counterparts, must be integrated into the push against violent extremism.

Violent extremists give women a role in their ranks and a voice in their communities. The CVE community must take into account the variety of roles that women play in extremist organizations in order to counterbalance them. Women can and do fill an increasingly critical role in meeting this challenge.

To more effectively counteract the rising power of women in extremist and other violent organizations, CVE policies and practices must integrate women fully into their efforts and encourage the inclusion of women in the field of CVE more generally.

U.S. Army and Air Force leaders of regional female engagement teams stand with female Afghan police members near Kabul, Afghanistan. (Photo by Private Andreka Johnson, U.S. Army, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division Public Affairs)

RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years, the complex nature of women's involvement in extremist groups has become increasingly apparent to policymakers, law enforcement officials, and academics. The escalation of attacks perpetrated by violent extremists, including women, creates urgency for gender-conscious strategies to deescalate violent extremists and dissuade their sympathizers from engaging in violent action. In response, there is heightened demand for investigating and designing gender-conscious CVE strategies that could, for example, explore gender identity as a component in radicalization and recruitment or employ gender-specific strategies to address the grievances of men and women.

Equally important is the need to improve knowledge about the intersection of gender and CVE. Gender-conscious CVE approaches may include both men and women, but there is evidence that women have a role in CVE that differs from that of men.[20]

CVE policies and programs should account for the environment in which they seek to prevent or counter violent extremism. Gender inequality is an important context to understand in developing interventions.

Women must be involved as equal partners in developing interventions to push against, counter, and prevent violent extremism. The inclusion and integration of women in the CVE field is essential to counteract the rising power of women in extremist organizations.

Policies and interventions to counter violent extremism should be informed by research about the variety of roles women play and the ways in which they can be change agents. For example, women participate in extremist movements as enforcers, as in the al-Khanssaa brigade; as leaders, including recruiters and fundraisers; and as community members and mothers who support their children and raise the next generation of extremists.

Considering the variety of roles of women within extremist groups, efforts to counter violent extremism must consider how best to present a counterbalance in which women are empowered as change agents, leaders, and community members who are determined to prevent and combat extremism.

Women from Indonesia, Myanmar, and Nepal met in Thailand for an advocacy and mobilization workshop. The workshop involved 19 women who are active in peace processes, including members of Myanmar's parliament, Nepalese police officers, and Indonesian leaders, working to bridge the divide between Muslims and Christians.

Photo by Inclusive Security (2014)

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TIPPING POINT: REJECTING OR EMBRACING VIOLENCE

Photo by Andréa Portilla

Myriad psychological factors and social circumstances contribute to individual choice to commit extremist violence. An understanding of the unique combination of circumstances, motives, and factors that bring people to that point—including gender differences in those factors—is crucial to shaping effective prevention of this violence. Theory, research, and practice are building this understanding. Practitioners and researchers have learned that no one profile or pathway sufficiently explains why people are pushed or pulled into extremist groups, causes, or ideologies. In addition, the relationship that individuals have with a group, cause, or ideology may vary significantly in intensity, length, influence, and significance in their lives, and all these factors may affect whether and how they support, facilitate, or commit extremist violence.

> A woman, 25 years old, volunteered for a suicide mission after her father refused to allow her to marry the man that she desired. The man's family could not raise the dowry that her father demanded, and the father ignored her pleas to waive the sum. Knowing that the chances of getting married at her 'advanced' age were slim, she decided to become a martyr, as 'my life was useless; my life had no use to anyone'.[1]

There are, however, commonalities across individual accounts, intelligence data, and other sources. The reasons individuals may agree to be recruited to extremist groups fall into two overarching categories: one related to identity and another based on opportunism.

In the first category relating to identity, individuals become involved with an extremist group, cause, or ideology when it becomes significant to who they are, how they live their lives, and what they stand for. These individuals may experience strong feelings of:

- injustice and grievance about particular political, religious, or social circumstances and want to change such circumstances[2]
- threats and persecution by other groups (and often want to defend and protect their values, communities, and traditions[3]
- identity seeking—with its associated sense of belonging, purpose, and significance and often in response to feeling confused or conflicted about who they are and how they fit into society[4]

In the second category rooted in opportunism, reasons are based on more superficial, opportunistic, and conventional criminal motives: for example, to make money, for excitement and adventure, to facilitate other criminal enterprises, or to be violent simply for the pleasure of it.[5]

While some individuals may simply engage with such groups, causes, and ideas, others identify with them. Furthermore, personal accounts commonly show that emotions play a central role in an individual's involvement in violence, such as: severe anger, threat, hate, passion, stress/trauma, love, and pride. These distinctions have significant implications for how we understand, intervene, and manage such issues.

GENDER-SPECIFIC FACTORS

Research into the role gender plays in recruitment, growth, and perpetuation of terror and control is in the early stages.[6] Although the underlying reasons for extremist involvement may be the same for men and women, there are also gender-specific factors and circumstances. Individuals may be drawn to extremist groups, causes, and ideologies because of the opportunities they present to establish or reinforce gendered beliefs or identities, for example.

For some women, extremist groups represent opportunities to develop a sense of "sisterhood" to challenge and/or seek freedom from gendered expectations and norms.[7] For example, women are promised that they will be valued as wives supporting a transformative cause, as mothers nurturing new leaders, or, in some cases, as fighters and commanders organizing other women.

For some men, extremist involvement fulfills a desire to project a masculine self-image, resolve gender identity confusion or conflict (especially those who have grown up with absent or weak fathers or male role models), reinforce masculine beliefs, or satisfy other needs considered important to them as men. For example, men have described how involvement allows them to see themselves as heroic soldiers (strong, significant, tough), to protect their communities, and also to provide opportunities for marriage and sexual activity.[8]

MOVING FROM IDEAS TO ACTS OF VIOLENCE

> We say the guy in the uniform is a pig, he is not a human being, and we have to tackle him from this point of view. It is wrong to talk to these people at all and the use of guns is allowed.[9]

Some people become interested and involved in extremism but do not support, facilitate, or commit extremist violence. So what makes some step over the threshold while others do not? What reduces or removes their inhibitions to commit violence?

History has shown that people who would not otherwise support or commit violence may do so under certain social and political circumstances. The obvious example is German citizens who during World War II were complicit in acts that they likely would not have engaged in, or indeed may have actively opposed, in a different time and place. Context matters. Therefore, it is important not to overpathologize extremist violence for all individuals in all circumstances.

Some individuals may be willing to commit extremist violence when they feel that they do not have personal responsibility for such actions, when culpability lies with someone else (such as group leaders), or when such acts are encouraged by family, friends, or associates.[10] They may develop attitudes and beliefs that justify, entitle, and glorify violence committed against other out-groups.[11] Such beliefs may include specific ways of thinking—for example, that the ends (political goals) justify the means (violence). Often, reference to scripture and mythology reinforces or informs such thinking, or leaders and fellow group members may sanction it.[12]

Some develop divisive "us and them" perceptions, demarcating a demonized enemy out-group from an angelic in-group, which can provide a basis for abusing or harming those in other groups.[13] In dehumanizing members of out-groups, some may strip away their human qualities and associated worth, sanctity, and dignity so they may abuse and harm them with little remorse.[14] Finally, some individuals appear so identified with their groups, causes, or ideologies that they are willing to sacrifice their former morals, relationships, liberty, and lives.[15] When they believe there is nothing to lose (and all to gain), they are more prepared to commit violence. A mind-set of dehumanizing the "other" may equally enable individuals to commit sexual violence against women, men, or children on behalf of extremist groups.

Many people also commit violent extremism out of fear, coercion, desperation, and mental fragility. There is growing understanding about how individuals, especially children, may become involved through such circumstances and about how exposure to extremist violence, mental illness, and subsequent involvement in violence interrelate.[16] Post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety caused by exposure to violent extremism have been associated with involvement in subsequent violent extremism, including suicide bombings.[17] Thus a person's initial reasons for committing extremist violence may not be the same as the reasons for subsequent violence.

Witnessing, committing, or being victims of extremist violence, and severe violence generally may influence a person's future willingness to be violent. Adverse childhood trauma may hinder a child's development, but research also shows that the right interventions can help heal and disrupt harmful outcomes.[18] This relationship between early experience and future violent acts needs to be better understood so that more effective intervention efforts can be crafted.

Similarly, the role that gender beliefs, identity, expectations, norms, and needs contribute to a willingness to commit extremist violence also needs to be better understood. For example, how do beliefs about how men or women should be or act affect their willingness to be tough, dispassionate, or unsympathetic toward those from other groups? The diversity of circumstances that may facilitate extremist violence must inform attempts to prevent it.

Photo by Jonathan Daroca

WHAT MAKES AN INTERVENTION EFFECTIVE?

Whilst Maajid Nawaz—former leader of Hizb al-Tahrir—was serving time in an Egyptian prison, Amnesty International accepted him as a "prisoner of conscience," pressing the Egyptian government to release him from custody. Viewing the West as the enemy, he was shocked that Amnesty would be willing to support him, and he admits that this "opened my heart to the fact that the 'enemy' went out on a limb to defend me, making me realize that there were good non-Muslims." This was one of the factors that led him to re-evaluate his belief system, and it was the turning point in the process that led to his public renunciation of Hizb al-Tahrir.[19]

Preliminary findings and observations about effective interventions to prevent extremist violence are critically important, since robust outcome data remain limited, generally of poor quality, and in most cases inadequate.[20] Even information about the theory, methodology, and delivery of such programs internationally remains sparse and limited. Nonetheless, there are emerging promising practices about the features and components of interventions that appear effective:[21]

- Effective intervention programs not only address factors and circumstances that contribute to extremist violence but also those that contribute to desistance from violence.
- There are psychological and social circumstances that may encourage individuals to disengage and desist: for example, becoming disillusioned with a group or its leaders, coming to realize ideologies are flawed, changing personal circumstances and priorities, and experiencing conflict in personal values, beliefs, and actions.[22] Everyday events may trigger an individual's questioning, reexamination, and doubts about their involvement.

Facilitating these circumstances through interventions may play a crucial role in preventing extremist violence. However, disillusionment is rarely a straightforward process, as it often brings real or feared repercussions—threats to life, stigmatization, exclusion, and emotional disturbance, including feelings of fear, grief, and trauma. To be effective, interventions need to be sensitive to these repercussions.

Photo by J. Stimp

Both Al Qaeda and ISIS draw support from individuals along personal, non-ideological lines—whether it be a youth seeking to make money to pay for his dowry or a fighter joining to defend his community from external threats. Preventing individuals from supporting these groups for what they provide, not their message, means focusing on the needs within the very communities within which al Qaeda and ISIS recruit.

—Katherine Zimmerman
Research Manager, Critical Threats Project, American Enterprise Institute

PREVENTION

Can a better understanding of the factors that lead individuals to desist and disengage from extremist groups, as well as the personal repercussions for such decisions, be used to prevent initial interest and involvement? It is a question worth further study and application. For example, perhaps the factors that enable people to discredit ideologies and establish prosocial identities can be brought to bear before individuals seek out or join extremist groups.

Effective interventions prevent people from becoming or remaining engaged (or identified) with groups, causes, or ideologies; prevent them from being prepared to commit extremist violence; and reduce the likelihood they will be capable of committing violence, especially acts of terrorism.

Those seeking to prevent extremist violence should adopt a holistic approach, incorporating psychological, social, theological, and practical components whenever appropriate and feasible. A thorough assessment should guide design of the intervention. More specifically, interventions must be tailored to individuals' personal and social circumstances—gender, culture, religion, and mental well-being. They should include clear, specific goals and objectives such as these:[23]

- facilitate opportunities and activities to help individuals develop a positive, healthy identity that allows them to fulfill certain needs (belonging, purpose, significance), which they may otherwise seek through involvement in extremism
- empower and enable individuals to pursue political goals and objectives through legitimate and legal means
- strengthen an individual's sense of personal agency over their decisions and behavior, including their ability to reflect on and question ideas, beliefs, and actions
- strengthen beliefs, perceptions, and ways of thinking that make them resistant to harming others
- enable individuals to express their values, beliefs, and emotions (including those brought on by trauma) in constructive, prosocial ways
- reduce individuals' capacity to commit extremist violence by disrupting relationships, networks, and communications[24]

Photo by SPC Anthony Murray Jr. US. Army

IDENTITY & INTERVENTIONS

Although knowledge is limited about what constitutes effective gender-responsive approaches and interventions in this field,[25] it is clear that identity contributes to decisions to engage in or desist from extremist activities. By inference, gender identity will be important in intervention efforts. Some programs—such as the *Healthy Identity Intervention*, used in the prison and probation services of England and Wales—explore how gendered beliefs, expectations, and self-image may contribute to involvement in extremist activities and how they may facilitate disengagement and desistance.[26]

Beliefs, norms, and expectations about being a man or woman have in a number of cases contributed to involvement in extremist violence and also provided opportunities for personal change.[27] For example, psychologists in clinical settings have sought to achieve the following:

- enable men to establish a healthy sense of masculinity without subscribing to distorted notions of toughness, ruthlessness, or loyalty—traits that many extremist groups advocate that are often affirmed through violence
- enable women to have more agency over their lives where the lack of agency previously contributed to involvement in violent extremism
- facilitate and provide a combination of support, relationships, and opportunities for men and women, boys and girls to determine the values, beliefs, relationships, and occupations that will define who they are and what they stand for, rather than letting extremist groups choose for them

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the development of policies and programs, a strong priority must be prevention of initial engagement in violent extremism and also engaging with former extremists and survivors to learn from their experience, prevent their relapse, and assist their recovery and reintegration. The recommendations below will enhance the capacity to achieve this goal.

Create a process in which research and practice can develop concurrently and jointly rather than in fragmented isolation. Best results are more likely when research focuses in on the urgent challenges that practitioners encounter and vice versa when practitioners apply research and evidence-based practices.

Develop intervention programs that build personal resistance to becoming interested and involved in extremist groups, causes, or ideologies and becoming willing to support, facilitate, or commit violence on behalf of them.

Advance policies and programs that:

- take into account, are sensitive to, and respond appropriately to the diversity of motives and circumstances that contribute to violent extremism
- acknowledge and respond to important identity issues (including gender) that affect individuals' choices to become involved in extremist groups, commit extremist violence, and disengage and desist
- acknowledge and accommodate the role that context, thinking, feeling, and relating to others may play in violent extremism and its prevention

Invest in critical research to improve understanding of why people disengage and desist from extremist violence and how this can be translated into interventions to prevent initial interest and involvement. Examine:

- how gender beliefs, identity, expectations, and image may contribute to interest and involvement in extremist groups, causes, or ideologies and violent extremism
- how gender beliefs, identity, expectations, and image may contribute to individuals being more willing and prepared to commit acts of violent extremism
- how interventions to prevent violent extremism can be improved by focusing on and being responsive to gender-related issues

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YOUTH, TRAUMA & RADICALIZATION

Photo by Lars Plougmann

Youth from 10 to 24 years old constitute one-fourth of humanity. But in many developing countries, young people make up the majority of the population. Surging youth populations create an opening for violent extremists who successfully recruit from among deeply disenfranchised young people and those who have experienced severe violence. There is an urgent need to learn how to prepare young people to participate as fully engaged members of communities rather than contributing toward greater instability.

> There are about 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24—the largest youth population ever. Many of them are concentrated in developing countries. In fact, in the world's 48 least developed countries, children or adolescents make up a majority of the population.[1]

Many factors increase susceptibility to radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism. Exposure to traumatic stress and violence as a child has deep, long-term consequences that increase the risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including recruitment to violent groups.

The path to violent extremism is neither direct nor predictable. It manifests across a broad continuum but frequently commences during childhood. Nonetheless, researchers have identified strategies to help reduce susceptibility to radicalization and organized violence.

THE PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION

Qualitative research on trends and patterns can serve as a starting point for understanding violent extremism and radicalization. The United Nations Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism identifies "push factors" that create conditions conducive to violent extremism: lack of socioeconomic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance and violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; or imprisonment where radicals are held.[2] Yet only a small percentage of those who share these experiences will ever be radicalized.

A second focus for examining radicalization are the "pull factors": individual motivations and human agency that help determine whether an individual is vulnerable to radicalization. Witnessing torture or the brutal killing of a relative or friend, experiencing severe humiliation, or being denied rights over a sustained period can all increase an individual's susceptibility. A charismatic leader can take advantage of these factors, creating compelling narratives that tap into the fears and personal experiences of potential recruits by distorting and misusing their beliefs, political ideologies, and ethnic and cultural differences.

For the recruit, the connection to the cause that the leader espouses takes place on a personal level and becomes the basis for an attractive social network. Susceptible youth make the transition within neighborhoods, schools (classes, dorms), workplaces, common leisure activities (soccer, barbershop, café), and, increasingly, online chat rooms by way of family and friends.

A study of ISIS recruits on six continents revealed the following:[3]

- None of the ISIS fighters interviewed in Iraq had more than primary school education.
- When asked, "What is Islam?" they answered, "My life." But they knew nothing of the Quran or Hadith, or of the early caliphs Omar and Othman.
- They had learned of Islam from al Qaeda and ISIS propaganda, which maintained that Muslims like them were targeted for elimination unless they first eliminated the impure.
- They grew up in a hellish world of guerrilla war, family deaths, and dislocation and had been unable to leave their homes or temporary shelters for months on end.

These responses underscore the personal rather than ideological nature of their ISIS allegiance and engagement. The reference to the "hellish world" they had experienced invokes the greater question about how traumatic stress contributes to radicalization, especially for children and youth.

Photo by Arlo Ringsmuth

THE CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMA

Research is shedding new light on the impact of trauma on radicalization and participation in organized violence. As a result, efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism are usefully focusing on the long-term consequences of childhood exposure to violence.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention confirm that children and youth who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk for depression and deficiencies in empathy.[4] These impairments can increase vulnerability for perpetrating violence and recruitment into extremist groups and organized violence. The impact trauma has on the health and well-being of these children can last a lifetime. Exposure to violence in early childhood can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.[5] These conditions generate a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, but there are interventions that can interrupt and reverse these outcomes.

While traumatic stress is not an automatic trigger for involvement with violence or violent extremism—indeed, it does not appear in most instances of radicalization—it is often a key contributor in combination with other pathways to violence.[6] Extensive interviews with 44 former members of violent white supremacist groups by the University of Maryland revealed the following:

45 percent reported being the victim of childhood physical abuse;

21 percent reported being the victim of childhood sexual abuse;

57 percent reported experiencing mental problems, as diagnosed by a medical practitioner, either preceding or during their extremist involvement; and

72 percent reported problems with alcohol and/or illegal drugs.[7]

Photo by Tom Woodward

Photo by Asian Development Bank

Globally, over half of all children aged 2 to 17—one billion of them—have experienced violence. Analysis of 38 reports from 96 countries with data on the prevalence of violence against children shows that in 2015 at least half the children in Asia, Africa, and North America experienced violence, defined as severe mistreatment, sexual exploitation, battering, sustained humiliation and verbal abuse, or witnessing domestic violence.[8]

Parents, relatives, neighbors, teachers, friends, dating partners, or strangers are the most frequent perpetrators of this abuse, which typically takes place within familiar locations like homes, schools, or in the streets. Such violence occurs during war and peace.

An array of domestic and international studies shed light on the impact of this exposure.

- A study of child soldiers conducted in northern Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2010 revealed that exposure to violence forms neural connections that are integrated with an appetite for aggression toward others.[9]
- A 2003 study of urban elementary school children's exposure to violence demonstrated an increase in aggression, more favorable attitudes toward aggression, and aggressive fantasies.[10]
- Exposure to violence can enhance the appeal of radical or black-or-white social ideologies and decrease the individual's acceptance of nuanced appeals to social cohesion.[11]
- The social disruption that comes with communal violence can decouple (increasingly) aggressive individuals from normative strictures rooted in compromise and the rule of law, leaving them in search of ideologies that promote simple answers or that paint one side as good and another as evil.[12]

In many regions, exposure to violence adds another layer of susceptibility for children and youth who already are at higher risk due to poor living conditions and diminished opportunities to develop and grow.

Nigerian children among the thousands who fled when Boko Haram attacked their town. Violence in North-east Nigeria has led to the displacement of an estimated 2.1 million people many to neighboring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

© EC/ECHO/Wim Fransen

TOXIC STRESS & THE DEVELOPING BRAIN

Traumatic life experiences can happen anywhere to anyone, irrespective of social or economic standing. Sexual or physical abuse, neglect, emotional or mental abuse, serious accidents, witnessing domestic abuse or violent crime, natural disasters, forced displacement, or war are all examples of traumatic life experiences that increase susceptibility to manipulation.

Such common traumas are compounded in regions with an overabundance of war, conflict, and violence, especially where they are also correlated with scarce resources, injustice, instability, and insecurity. It is critical to understand and to bolster individuals' ability to cope with these challenges to human development.

> Childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs can be prevented and interventions can reduce and mitigate their impact.[13]

Teaching children how best to cope with adversity is part of healthy child development, but in some cases the adversity and threats appear too severe, too widespread, and perpetually imminent. Loss of a parent, natural disasters, or injury are referred to as "tolerable stresses" that can be buffered, especially when there are caring, supportive adults to help a child cope and adapt. However, strong, frequent, or prolonged adverse experiences produce physiological responses that are more acute, consequential, and potentially long term.[14]

When human beings are threatened, their bodies activate a variety of physiological responses, including increases in heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones such as cortisol.[15] When there is no adult support, these ongoing stressors become toxic and trigger release of excessive cortisol, which disrupts developing brain circuits. During infancy and very early childhood, when the brain and body are developing rapidly, exposure to toxic stress hampers development, brain function, and even alters DNA.[16] The longer children experience such stress—severe poverty, abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence—the greater the risk of developmental delays and other problems.[17] Early intervention and prevention are the least costly and most impactful ways to turn the tide on long-term impacts of toxic stress.

"There's a lot of fear and hatred toward Boko Haram," and it ends up being directed at those who lived with them, even unwillingly, and they become the targets of hate. People call the girls "Boko Haram wife" and sometimes harass and beat them. "It annoys me a lot that people here in the community view me as a Boko Haram abductee. I hate it," said one of the freed teenagers. And along with everything else, she's terrified that Boko Haram will come back to get her.

—Reported by Larisa Epatko, *PBS Newshour*, October 19, 2016

TRAUMA & RADICALIZATION

Through effective messages, recruiters create the cause-and-effect narratives that explain and assign blame for in-group suffering to an "other" group whose policies, actions, or presence is often identified as the source of the trauma.[18] Some experts in psychopathology of religious and cultural conflict describe violent extremism as a situation in which an injustice is experienced and blame must be assigned to an antagonist. Narratives like "Islam is under attack" impactfully assign blame, dehumanize potential targets, and underpin strategic plans to eliminate the source of trauma. The conditions and experiences that tend to increase individuals' vulnerability to trauma also makes them more susceptible to the narrative. Just as a group could be exposed in one setting to the same flu virus while only one actually contracts the flu due to compromised immune system, a group of individuals could be exposed to the rhetoric and narrative of violent extremists, but only the most compromised will likely join. Combating violent extremism thus requires an understanding of what those vulnerabilities are in order to take measures to inoculate individuals.

Over the last several years, a Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) team—in partnership with think tanks, academia, and federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health, Department of State, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the Air Force Research Laboratory, and the Army's Engineer Research and Development Center—explored radicalization and political extremism. They looked closely at factors that influence individual decisions to radicalize and divided them into endogenous and exogenous factors. Endogenous factors referred to a person's inherent characteristics: genetics, culture, environment, values, and emotions. While often necessary, they are not typically sufficient to propel an individual toward violent action. Exogenous factors are external ones, which are not inherent. These factors often trigger a susceptible person to act: exposure to narratives, radical social networks, perceived grievances, and traumatic life experiences.

Syrian refugees along the Syria-Lebanon border.
(Photo by Mustafa Öztürk, IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation)

Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani advocate for female education and the youngest ever Nobel Peace Laureate (2014), speaks to leaders at the United Nations. (Photo by Norwegian Mission to the United Nations)

FACTORS FOR EVALUATING RISK	FACTORS THAT INCREASE RESILIENCE
• Ability to trust others	• A strong relationship with at least one competent adult
• Sense of personal safety	• Feeling connected to a positive role model/mentor
• Ability to manage emotions	• Having talents/abilities nurtured & appreciated
• Ability to navigate & adjust to life's changes	• Having a sense of belonging to a community, group or a cause larger than one self
• Physical & emotional response to stress	

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's collaborative work, pulling from the experiences, research, and work of academic and community-based service centers, identifies how long-term trauma can interfere with healthy development. The network also outlines factors that build resilience among children who have experienced trauma.[19] These factors are listed in the table.

Many of these risk factors and protective factors surface during radicalization. Recruiters have strategically tapped into and manipulated these protective factors to draw susceptible youth into a life of violent extremism. Those who want to inoculate traumatized, disenfranchised youth against violent extremism must offer more attractive alternatives:

- something that enables youth to dream of a life of significance through struggle and sacrifice in comradeship;
- a concrete chance to realize a positive personal dream;
- an opportunity to create their own local initiatives.[20]

REFUGEE & INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN & YOUTH

There are over 60 million refugees in the world today. Children and youth in refugee camps or in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) are exposed to violence and traumatic stress on a large scale, and those experiences are overwhelming. They are more likely than nondisplaced youth to have experienced or witnessed war atrocities, torture, the brutal killing of a loved one, imminent life-threatening danger including anticipation of random executions, homes destroyed, overt presence of armored vehicles, as well as extreme poverty, loss, and insecurity. Whether as refugees or as IDPs, these youth experience despair, grief, and uncertainty.

Within the camps, traumatic stress is compounded by lack of medical care, extreme temperatures, lack of sanitation, irregular schooling, pressure to supplement family finances, exposure to unjust and abusive treatment, and a dearth of law and order. These experiences are far too common among refugees and IDPs, who urgently need recovery and resilience-building programs.

CONDITIONS THAT CAN CAUSE ADVERSE STRESS

Pre-Migration

- Exposure to war atrocities
- Disruption of schooling
- Disruption of home setting and access to food, water, shelter
- Victims of intimidation or violence

Host Country

- Exposure to violence
- Separation from family
- Uncertain future
- Poor nutrition
- Exposure to harsh living conditions

Resettlement

- Adaptation to new setting
- Learning of new language
- Shifts in ethnic and religious identity
- Experience with social exclusion & discrimination
- Gender role conflicts
- Fear of and actual recurrence of abuse & injustice

CHILDREN IN EXILE

What I am is not important, whether I live or die—
It is the same for me, the same for you.
What we do is important. This is what I have learnt.
It is not what we are but what we do,
Says a child in exile, one of a family
Once happy in its size. Now there are four
Students of calamity, graduates of famine,
Those whom geography condemns to war…

—James Fenton, Poet

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Violent extremist recruiters have effectively manipulated these traumatic experiences. Recruiters target those who are most desperate and susceptible to radicalization, providing them a sense of belonging, purpose, financial gain, and even a path for revenge. Amid the reality of daily struggles in a war-torn setting, such promises may be very welcome.

The West's overarching counter-narrative aims to diminish the lure of violent extremism by "shedding light" on recruiters' false promises. This approach, while imortant, misses a major point: Those attracted to extremist messages are frequently longing for something better than what they have or what they feel. Without offering something tangible and positive in return, a message that tells youth they are being duped will not diminish the attraction of the recruiter's siren song. Instead, it just highlights the void they want filled and may leave them frustrated, angry, and wanting. A policy focused on counter-narrative messaging must be replaced with a policy of providing programs that build resilience.

Psychological, sociological, and emotional needs must be met before an individual can nurture their life's purpose. Current services and provisions for refugees and displaced persons do little to address their psychological needs. In part, this is because physical needs like water, food, and shelter are much easier to identify. Psychological needs lay hidden and often go unaddressed: the need to feel secure, to belong, and to have a purpose beyond survival. A recruiter steps into this vacuum and manipulates it to his advantage.

A strong antidote is strengthening a person's protective factors: Nurturing a sense of community belonging, strengthening a talent or ability, and connecting with a mentor or role model all help build resilience among children and youth who have been exposed to trauma. These same factors can also be used to strengthen the youth most susceptible to radicalization.

A young woman holds the Somali flag during a demonstration by a local militia formed to provide security. (Photo by AU UN IST PHOTO / Tobin Jone)

RECOVERY & REINTEGRATION

Youth who have survived persistent or widespread violence committed at home or in their communities are at high risk for harmful outcomes and perpetuation of violence. It is important not only to understand the lasting consequences violence has on learning, behavior, and health but to find ways to reconnect children and youth to life and opportunities. Community-based interventions are possible, effective, and affordable.

Development assistance aimed at improving confidence for girls, improving interactions between girls and boys, and engaging girls and boys in sports, arts, and other interest-driven activities have been found to be successful, particularly when such programs explicitly teach healthy relationships, respect, and better understanding about gender equality. Such programs not only help youth succeed, they also diminish their susceptibility to engaging in violence and violent extremism.

In years of research on interventions to help child and youth survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and those forced to commit violence, Theresa Betancourt has focused on recovery and reintegration. As director of Harvard's Research Program on Children and Global Adversity, Dr. Betancourt led a team to develop and implement the Youth Readiness Intervention (YRI), which is one example of a program for which there are now longitudinal data on recovery and reintegration outcomes.

YRI was piloted in Sierra Leone, where the 1991–2002 civil war had displaced massive numbers of people and where abuses against girls and boys was especially widespread. An estimated 15,000 to 22,000 children of all ages were forced to commit brutal acts of violence in association with armed groups. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) alone abducted more than 4,250 children and forced them to commit brutal acts to sever ties to their families and communities. Then they were officially demobilized and returned to their homes and communities. Many of these children not only suffered deep trauma during the conflict, they were tormented after returning to their communities, where they were known to have committed atrocities while forcibly conscripted. These youth suffered further isolation, feelings of hopelessness, and difficulty getting along with others.

The YRI approach relies on forming groups to solve problems, and it is designed to help youth socialize again, develop coping skills, create relationships, and regulate their moods. YRI took local culture into account, incorporated local leaders, and was structured to deliver interventions effectively despite the absence of skilled therapists. The design sought to minimize retraumatization and to enable youth to share with each other, naturally and gradually, in group settings. Psychoeducation and cognitive restructuring practices have targeted participants' traumatic stress.[21]

As a result of this local intervention, Sierra Leonean youth and their communities are gradually increasing reintegration and recovery. Measured outcomes have included better emotional regulation, pro-social attitudes and behaviors, diminished psychological distress, greater social support, and better daily functioning. Moreover, students were six times more likely to stay in school and generally demonstrated better classroom performance and attendance than non-YRI participants.[22]

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no single cause for radicalization and no single path to becoming a violent extremist. Neither ideology, nor policy grievance, nor poor economic conditions, nor disenfranchisement, nor exposure to violence and war alone explain it. What is clear is that the recruiter taps into the missing piece in a potential recruit's life, identifies susceptibilities, and provides the narrative that best responds to the need.

The increasing youth bulge in the developing world and the astonishingly high number of refugees increase the pool of potential players in the roster of violent extremism. These populations are ripe for recruitment. It is critical to provide support and opportunities that build youth resilience and improve their ability to make positive contributions to their communities.

When women experience violence, their children are also affected. The cornerstone for healthy childhood development is a safe, stable environment built on nurturing family relationships. Violence in the home often impedes close relationships and attachments between parent and child. Children who witness violence also experience adverse trauma with harmful health consequences.

RESEARCH

In an effort to develop priority program interventions that yield the greatest outcomes: Measure and evaluate more interventions for building resilience among youth and for determining relevant differentiations on what works with whom, under what circumstances, and why.

Identify and better understand the following:

- Which are the protective resources that have the greatest potential for addressing multiple risk factors?
- What are the varied push and pull factors?
- Do implemented programs address key drivers of violent extremism?
- To what extent does exposure to trauma become a contributing factor to, or increase a person's susceptibility to, participating in violent extremism?

RESOURCES

Dedicate funds toward programs that support proven interventions for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE)—many are community-based. Note community context, however, and understand when it may be harmful to categorize or represent programs as security focused initiatives rather than development programs, for example.

Create private-public partnerships that encourage corporate and business entities to increase their investment into marginalized communities domestically and refugee and resettlement programs internationally. This work can align with corporate social responsibility commitments to build better and stronger communities.

PROGRAMS

Implement community-based programs designed to build resilience without transforming civil society actors and initiatives into security instruments advancing a military agenda.

Frame programs around positive messages aimed at strengthening communities and providing opportunities for individuals and rather than potentially provocative messages of countering violent extremism.

Integrate explicit curriculum for teaching healthy relationships, respect, and better understanding about gender equality into school-based intervention programs for youth around sports, arts, and more areas of interest.

Avoid investment in building counter messages that lack positive alternatives to fill the void in the lives of susceptible and traumatized youth.

Leila Milani is Senior International Policy Advocate for Futures Without Violence, where she leads their work on global violence prevention, with a focus on women and children. In this capacity, she is instrumental in developing innovative policy solutions, driving advocacy efforts, and influencing the agendas of national coalitions such as Girls Not Brides, Coalition for Adolescent Girls, the US Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace, and Security, Alliance To End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST), and the Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, for which she serves on the executive committee. Milani was recently named to the Board of Directors of Soccer Without Borders which aims to use soccer as a vehicle for positive change, providing underserved youth in the U.S. and overseas with the tools to overcome obstacles to growth, inclusion, and personal success. Milani is a lawyer and human rights advocate with special expertise on women's rights, religious freedom, and conditions in Iran.

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BOKO HARAM'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

Nigerian women demonstrate outside the parliamentary building in Abuja, the country's capital, in April 2014, demanding the government to search harder for more than 200 schoolgirls abducted by Islamist militants Boko Haram. (Photo by Afolabi Sotunde, Reuters)

I am still afraid to go anywhere because he could be any one of the people around me. Every time I see a huge dark man, I jump in fright that it might be him coming to get me back. I stay awake some nights because I dream of those terrible weeks I spent in their camp.[1]

—This woman's testimony about her abduction in 2013 by Boko Haram reflects the experiences of thousands in the region who live in fear of the insurgency.

Although Boko Haram is notorious for the abduction of the Chibok girls, the group's impact extends far beyond that event, affecting women and girls throughout northeastern region of Nigeria. The insurgency's violence has particularly affected children, many of whom have been exposed to unfathomable violence and abducted. Nigerian women and girls have not only suffered from direct violence by the sect, they also suffer from abuse by the Nigerian security sector and rampant discrimination. Women thus face insecurity from many sides: the insurgency, their government, and from the burden of caring for many crisis-affected children.

The international community has largely failed to realize that rebuilding the region will fall to women—despite their marginalization and victimization. Similarly, the international community has often overlooked the violence Boko Haram has perpetrated against young men. Although the Chibok abductions garnered international headlines, abductions of boys from their dormitories have not galvanized similar action. Empowering women and dealing with the trauma that all children have experienced throughout the crisis will thus be critical to postconflict redevelopment.

WHAT IS BOKO HARAM?

Boko Haram has waged a campaign of violence and instability unseen in Nigeria since the country's bloody Biafran War in the 1960s. The insurgency has thrust the region into a humanitarian and security crisis. Despite its fearsome reputation now, the group was founded at the turn of the century as a largely peaceful dissident religious group. The founder, Mohammed Yusuf, had been a popular preacher with Indimi Mosque, a mainstream Salafist mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State. Yusuf fell out with the community as a result of his radical positions condemning Western education and collaborating with the Nigerian government. Following a harsh crackdown by the Nigerian government in 2009 in which an estimated 700 to 1,000 people were killed—including Yusuf—the movement eventually regrouped under Abubaker Shekau with more sophisticated military tactics and propelled by a set of grievances that extended beyond the local political and religious figures that Yusuf had condemned. Under Shekau, Boko Haram became a brutal anti-government insurgency.

In recent years, the crisis has spilled across the country's borders into neighboring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In all four countries, the insurgents have overrun villages, attacked militaries, and bombed crowded civilian areas. The death toll from the fight against the insurgency is at 30,000 and rising daily. More than two million people have been displaced as a result of the violence, and the disruption in agriculture and regional trade patterns has kicked off a food crisis that is thought to affect fourteen million people in the region.

BOKO HARAM'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST WOMEN

As the United States seeks to contain violent extremism and stabilize a critical US partner in West Africa and the Sahel, it is critical for it to recognize how this conflict affects women and girls. Of all of the destruction wrought by Boko Haram, the sect is perhaps best known for its abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls from their dormitories in Chibok in 2014, a town in Nigeria's hard-pressed Borno State. The kidnapping led to a global campaign, #BringBackOurGirls, which attracted the support of Malala Yousafzai and Michelle Obama, who amplified the voices of local activists. The campaign moved President Muhammadu Buhari to state by the end of 2015 that he was willing to "negotiate with Boko Haram for the release of the Chibok girls without any preconditions."[2] In October 2016, negotiations resulted in the release of 21 Chibok girls, who were returned to their overjoyed families.

Their release, and the escape of an additional girl with the help of her insurgent husband in May 2016, is certainly worth celebrating, but the fact remains that most of the Chibok girls remain under Boko Haram's control.[3] And the Chibok abductions are the tip of the iceberg. Amnesty International estimated in April 2015 that the group had abducted more than 2,000 women and girls in the region. The number is sure to have risen since then.

[Boko Haram] went from house to house. When they arrived at our house, they wanted to marry me, and I refused. I told them I wouldn't marry anyone without my father's consent. They came back again at night and kidnapped me." Aisha (17) was forced to "marry" a fighter, and she became pregnant. "I hated the baby," she said, but a woman she didn't know showed her kindness and taught her to love her son. "She preached to me about his innocence."

—Reported by Larisa Epatko, *PBS Newshour*, October 19, 2016

Interviews with those who were abducted reveal that their time with Boko Haram was marked by near-daily Quranic education, training in how to be suitable wives for the insurgents, strict gender segregation, and strictures imposed by a strict interpretation of Sharia law that mandates corporal punishment for violations. As the crisis has worn on, Boko Haram itself has felt the effect of food shortages; abductees often reported that they were given little food. Many reported that they spent most of their time as captives trying to find a way to escape. Many of the abductees experienced sexual violence at the hands of the insurgents, and following marriage to insurgents, they were expected to have sex with their husbands.[4] Many of the women who escaped suffer from trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health challenges. Despite government attempts to train additional counselors, the resources available are tragically inadequate.

Young men and boys in the sect, both voluntarily and by force, are trained in horrifying ways to perpetrate violence against their communities. Communities throughout the country's north tell stories of young men and boys who are forced to kill members of their own family—even parents—as a sort of initiation ritual. As Yan St. Pierre of the security consulting firm MOSECON observed,

By making them kill their own parents or their own family, it makes them be in a position where they can't go back.... Psychologically, they are absolutely broken. They killed their parents. They literally murdered what brought them to life. In that sense, their loyalty becomes to the only family that they have now, which is the army or the terrorist group that kidnapped them.[5]

Even those who have been merely exposed to violence report trauma. Not only does this violence undermine social trust, it also traumatizes those (especially the children) exposed to these acts, and it fosters a notion of masculinity and power that is intrinsically linked to violence. Extreme subservience of women and girls and the acquiescence of violence against them deeply affect not only the victim but also those forced to witness and perpetrate such acts. Children who are deeply traumatized by exposure to violence become more vulnerable to perpetuating violence. As long as these attitudes are held, women are not safe: Across a number of countries, rates of domestic violence spiked at the end of conflicts.

The postconflict reconciliation process must recognize that the end of the insurgency will not mean the immediate dissipation of the impact of the violence. However, children's experiences of witnessing violence can be counteracted through early, consistent, effective counseling. Failing to do so will not only be a great disservice to these children but will prime the region for future conflict.[6]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS BY THE STATE

While insurgent violations of women and girls have created an international outcry, condemnation of the abuses by the Nigerian state has been muted at best. In October 2016, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting the sexual abuse, exploitation, and rape of women and girls in a number of displacement camps in Maiduguri. This abuse is not merely "a few rotten apples spoiling the bunch." A review of all the displacement camps in Maiduguri, which hosts the most internally displaced people (IDPs) of any city, concluded that such practices were taking place at nearly every camp. In a poll of displaced people in the three most-affected states, 66 percent reported that camp officials engaged in sexual abuse.[7] Women I spoke to in the camps reported trading sexual favors for access to food and talked of soldiers charged with guarding the camps "taking girls" for weeks at a time. Clearly, the limited humanitarian aid provisions and restricted movement of the IDPs make it easier for security and camp officials to exploit women and girls. Few women report these violations to government officials for fear of stigma and retaliation.

The proximate sexual violence committed by representatives of the Nigerian State against those in displacement camps is an extension of the structural violence that women in Nigeria face because of their cultural and legal marginalization in the country. In 2015, the country was ranked 152 of 188 in the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Equality Index, which gauges gender parity.[8] Although there is gender discrimination throughout the country, it is particularly acute in the north. An estimated four in five women in the north cannot read. Maternal mortality in the north is five times the global average, a result of a number of factors, including inadequate health services, high fertility rates, and young marriage ages. One of every three women in Nigeria reported having experienced "some form of violence, including battering and verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, marital rape, sexual exploitation, or harassment within the home."[9]

Clearly, Boko Haram's destruction will not resolve the issues women face in Nigeria. Not only do Nigerian officials need to be held accountable for their abuses against women, the social system in the country must be more female-friendly. Such reforms will make it easier to rebuild the north after the conflict is over and also make a relapse into violence less likely.[10]

CONCLUSION: POLICY OPTIONS FOR REDEVELOPMENT

Stabilizing Nigeria has been a priority for the United States in the global war on terror; it requires recognition of the risks posed by the persistent marginalization of women and girls.[11] Widespread gender-based violence infects society as a whole and perpetuates a climate of heightened insecurity and propensity for conflict. Achieving peace for women means winning peace in the war on the battlefield but also ending violence that women face off the battlefield—whether in captivity or at home. The following reforms are recommended for the short, medium, and long term:

Short Term: Design Humanitarian Assistance and Redevelopment Programs around Women

- Prioritizing gender equality while scaling up donor assistance to the Lake Chad Basin crisis would undoubtedly have a huge effect. The United States and other major donors can play an important role. Nigeria's reconstruction plans do not yet sufficiently incorporate women or gender considerations. The Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative's 800-page report deals with women only at the margins despite the fact that resettlement and redevelopment requires that they be included in the programming.[12] Nascent development programs for the postconflict era are failing to target women as beneficiaries, putting them at a particular disadvantage.

- The United States and other donor governments and institutions, while providing technical and financial assistance, should advocate for amendments to include consultations with women (and their organizations, where they exist) throughout the region to identify what support and initiatives they would prioritize. With leadership backing from the international donor community, women's groups and advocacy networks can ensure the postconflict agenda provides much-needed assistance to women.

- Recognizing the trauma that widespread violence and terror tactics have inflicted on the population, special attention is urgently needed to enhance recovery and improve reintegration for all members of the community.

Medium Term: End Impunity for the Harassment of IDPs

- Women and children make up the vast majority of the population in IDP camps. To make recovery possible and build the groundwork for reintegration, the rights of IDPs must be respected and protected. There have been numerous reports of gross human rights violations in the camps by humanitarian workers, members of the military, and members of the civilian joint task force. Yet reporting abuse in IDP camps often means filing a complaint with the perpetrators. Alternative reporting mechanisms, coupled with swift and public discipline of offenders, is necessary for ensuring women's and children's safety within the camps.

- Assistance programs must prioritize building safeguards against abuse, integrate gender-informed processes, and strengthen accountability mechanisms in the initiatives that it sponsors, and help establish this approach as a norm for organizations operating in Nigeria.[13]

Long Term: Implement Gender-Sensitive Security Sector Reform

- Military-to-military training exercises are a prime opportunity to help mainstream gender into security sector reform initiatives. The United States and other critical security partners must prioritize gender analysis in training and equipping missions to Nigeria. Nigeria is a partner country for the Security Governance Initiative (SGI) and the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), so there are ample opportunities for bilateral and multilateral engagement on these issues.
- Insist on accountability for those responsible for abuses and establish programs to prevent abuses. The United States and other security partners should design training programs for the Nigerian military that emphasize best practices for interacting with women and civilians generally. Of particular use would be training on how to interact with the (often female) family members and associates of suspected insurgents without violating human rights and on best practices for counterinsurgency.

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The Program provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program produces empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study; develops pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public; and brings together experts from various continents and a range of disciplines, including government officials, scholars, former extremists, counter-extremism practitioners, and professionals providing firsthand assistance to families grappling with radicalization.

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Futures Without Violence and Open Square convened world-renown experts in Washington D.C. for a robust discussion and bold thinking about the intersection of violent extremism and gender-based violence in 2016. We did so because our political leaders have traditionally separated the discussion of national security and violent extremism from those of gender-based violence and women's empowerment. We believe moving forward this must change.

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