

Tackling Insurgent Ideologies

Rapporteurs' Report



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As India continues to grow as a digital society, it grapples with the power of the internet to radicalise, justify hate, spread intolerance, and isolate communities. / Photo: Press Trust of India

Foreword

Maya Mirchandani

As India pursues new deradicalisation initiatives, the Observer Research Foundation organised a three-day dialogue, titled ‘Tackling Insurgent Ideologies’, in June 2018 in Delhi. The dialogue was held to exchange lessons from existing, global counterterrorism and deradicalisation programmes aimed at both Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), in accordance with the increasing emphasis being placed by the United Nations (UN) on the need for a comprehensive approach to counter the spread of terrorism.

Over three days, ORF brought together researchers and practitioners involved in the process of evolving strategies that deal with the proliferation of radicalism and violence. These strategies are being nurtured through state and civil society approaches from countries as diverse as Indonesia, Maldives, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Tunisia, Australia, USA and UK.

India’s minister of state for External Affairs, MJ Akbar, opened the dialogue. In his presentation, he explored the values of India’s syncretic culture and sustained democratic culture as a tool to fight seeping extremism and radicalisation. The UK’s Minister of State for Countering Extremism and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Equalities), Baroness Susan Williams of Trafford delivered the keynote address. In it she raised concerns over the power of the internet to radicalise, justify hate and division, spread intolerance, restrict the rights of women, and isolate communities. As India continues to grow as a digital society, the comments made by Minister Williams were of particular concern to Indians working in the field of CVE.

The conference, focusing on South and Southeast Asia, was timely. It sought to highlight the crucial challenges in PVE and CVE, and explore the role that India can play in deradicalisation efforts, both domestically and in the region. Representatives from the world of technology and social media addressed the challenges of identifying radicalising content online and taking them down, as well as the intersections between online hate and real-world violence.

The three-day dialogue also engaged with stakeholders working in the field of gender empowerment to address the role women play in CVE initiatives. The participants included scholars, as well as civil society actors like artists, teachers and community elders who discussed ways to mobilise communities in a digitally connected world. On the policy front, the panellists and participants included members of the UN working both in the headquarters and in fields like Marawi in the Philippines—where they tackle terrorism and violent extremism every day—senior army and police officers from India and Bangladesh, government functionaries from the United Kingdom, former CVE policy builders from previous administrations in the US, and NGO actors in Nigeria. They took part in sessions aimed at breaking down the distinctions between ‘counterterrorism’ and ‘counter radicalisation’, provide effective policy suggestions that address daily societal concerns of health and education, and help prevent or counter violent extremism and build appropriate counter-narrative platforms. A separate panel addressed the gulf between mainstream and social media while bringing these issues in the public domain.

The conference culminated in a programme entitled ‘Voice Positive’ that saw ORF engage with over 50 colleges and universities across the country to mobilise the youth in Counter Speech messaging on social media. The project, spread out over a four-month period, encouraged college students to create content to enable them to counter violent ideologies that they may face. The exercise was conducted in partnership with Facebook, where the teams hosted their messages and a jury of eminent citizens from the areas of national security, education and the arts judged their work. The best campaigns were awarded with a cash prize and encouraged to continue their efforts.

The team at ORF worked hard to bring together voices from as many places around the world to exchange ideas. The sponsors—the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Facebook, the British High Commission, and Swiss Embassy in India— were integral partners in making the conference possible.

While the participants in ORF's dialogue may have had different points of view, there was a consensus about the end goal: to prevent and counter violent extremism as effectively as possible, to obstruct the pathways to radicalisation that could lead to terrorism and violence. There was also agreement that the youth should be engaged in constructive ways through avenues such as education and sports. If citizens see themselves as stakeholders in the economic and social security of their own environment, there will be hope that the factors that drive individuals towards radicalisation and violence will be mitigated. ORF's effort was to begin the conversation in India. Each participant brought their own unique experience and perspective to the discussions and offered great learnings.

The challenges are many, however. As the world grapples with the growth of a global arc of terrorism emanating from the Middle East where groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda have thrived, India finds itself in a unique position. The country's advantage lies in a deeply intuitive multi-cultural ethos, where religion is as much a way of being as it is a matter of faith. It is up to the Indian people to preserve the melting pot of religions and linguistic, ethnic cultures that India is, and ensure that polarisation and hate-fueled rhetoric in public spaces do not become excuses that drive individuals towards violence. It has become increasingly imperative to address the drivers of radicalisation and terrorism today and prevent them from happening, rather than suffering the consequences later.

It is ORF's hope that the three-day dialogue enabled a safe space for the sharing of ideas and best practices from across the world and, going forward, will guide us in the shaping of effective P/CVE policies in India.



Terror groups like ISIS continue to exploit the internet for their propaganda. / Photo: Joel Carilett/Stock

Tackling Insurgent Ideologies

Pushan Das

With violent extremism evolving at a fast pace, the approach taken by various nations towards framing policies on terrorism and radicalisation will reflect larger concerns beyond the narrow security debate. Terrorism has constantly relied on communication platforms and technologies to reach out to, and connect with potential recruits, the public, perceived enemies and incite others to commit violent extremist and terrorist acts. The internet has only changed the way these communications occur.

The online terrain and environment is complex and chaotic. There is still no clear understanding of the role of the internet in radicalisation, with attention being focused largely on the role of preachers in mosques, madrasas and other offline institutions. The narratives around countering violent extremism are constantly changing and adapting to new events; information is key in the entire process. As Arian Sharifi pointed out at the “Tacking Insurgent Ideologies” conference organised by the Observer Research Foundation, there needs to be a long-term, comprehensive and coherent approach to fighting violent extremists.

National governments have primacy on matters of security as a service that states are obligated to provide for their citizens. In contrast, CVE strategies lay emphasis on communities—CSOs, local authorities, community groups, religious leaders, women, youth, families, and teachers and other local professionals, thus making it an inclusive and shared undertaking that mobilises society in a bottom-up manner. Government bodies have so far had to take the lead in producing and supporting counter narratives, particularly those aimed at the general public and reinforcing social or moral values shared by society.

Over the last few years, governments have succeeded in generating responses to violent narratives through the private sector and private platforms. Major social media providers are removing terrorist content from their websites at a much faster rate than before. Yet, this approach may still not be quick enough to cope with current developments in how terrorists are exploiting the internet. While terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) continue to use mainstream platforms like Facebook and Twitter to push their propaganda, they have adapted in the face of content removal, shifting to niche platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and SnapChat.

A lot of the responses from tech companies and platforms are based on their own standards and not necessarily in congruence with local law enforcement strategies. They also differ in severity. This raises questions around how comfortable we are with the standards that large technology companies and social media providers use for content removal. There are also questions on how standards will be created and applied to newer and smaller companies, or those with different political interests and outlooks in a rapidly changing online terrorism environment.

In theory, a lot more can be done to improve CVE and its practice. The results of CVE online are difficult to assess when evaluations are conducted in private by both governments and private companies (if at all). Monitoring and evaluating programmes and policies regarding violent extremism is crucial to the development of realistic objectives and indicators of success, and to help ensure that strategies adopted are effective and sustainable. Also, a CVE online programme cannot be effective if civil society has little space.

States in South Asia, including India, need to address the push and pull factors to radicalisation. Governments must be open to discussions to support dialogue with people who are vulnerable to radicalisation or recruitment given the complex and fluid nature of violent narratives. They also need to develop effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs to reduce the chances of radicalisation and re-radicalisation of individuals who have

committed acts of terrorism. This remains one of the key challenges in India and the region.

Civil society organisations (CSO) can play an important role in ameliorating conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, and thus countering violent extremism. CSOs can serve to promote greater responsiveness and transparency in government and law enforcement agencies. They can act as a platform for marginalised and vulnerable communities, including victims of terrorism.

Given the transnational character of the internet and the growth of radicalisation, governments and companies need to work together with a wide range of global stakeholders to craft a balanced strategy. Such strategy must include rule of law, transparency, and due process to tackle the thorny challenges surrounding extremist content online.



The conflict in Afghanistan shows that the context of armed conflict is important in tackling issues related to radicalisation and extremism.

Eye of the Storm: Experiences from the Field

Kriti M. Shah

While studying violent extremism and reasons for radicalisation, it is important to understand the context under which violent, radical or extremist ideology is able to flourish. More often than not, regions where extremist ideologies exist have seen a history of armed conflict and violence. The context of the armed conflict is vital in seeking an understanding that will help find solutions to the threat of extremism. It is the reasons behind the conflict that provide oxygen for extremist groups.

In areas of conflict, people join armed groups for a number of reasons—such as the need for economic and financial security or to protect oneself and their family. Often, joining an armed group becomes a survival tactic to ensure that one is not harmed in the ongoing violence. This makes studying the reasons for extremist radicalisation more complex. As one develops a deeper understanding about the root causes and drivers for violence and analyses what makes the messaging of extremist groups attractive, a more comprehensive picture on why disillusioned youth join such groups, can be formed. Therefore, as pointed out by Benedetta Berti of the NATO Office of the Secretary General, one cannot tackle extremism and study radicalisation patterns in society without dealing with the reasons for conflict and their legacy.

This idea—that the context of armed conflict is important in order to resolve issues related to radicalisation and extremism—is implicit in the case of the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The United States' 17-year-old war in the country is often seen by other

nations as solely an Afghan problem, without understanding the context of the violence. Unfortunately for Kabul, as Arian Sharifi of Afghanistan's Office of National Security Council highlighted, the ongoing violence is transnational in nature with over 20 different terrorist outfits operating in the country. While the Pakistani hand in exacerbating the conflict is not to be underrated, other regional and global terrorist groups—such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), al-Qaeda and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)—have also contributed to the complexity of conflict in the country. Another reason for the ongoing conflict has been the direct link between transnational terrorist groups and transnational criminal networks such as those engaged in drug smuggling. This has led to a steady flow of finances for the Taliban. Countering violent extremism in Afghanistan, therefore, must be done keeping in mind all the factors that make Afghanistan a conflict zone.

While looking for ways to develop a sustainable model for peace, Search for Common Ground's Hilde Deman underlined, it is important for countries to ensure that they have a wide CVE focus. This means that they need to understand that often it is the state's security apparatus or a lack of government services and facilities that leads to disillusionment. Driven by a sense of purpose and belonging, many choose to join extremist groups as a way to respond to their grievances against the state. In many areas, it is the state's security forces that react in a manner that aggravates the situation, turning many against them. The actions and the overall behaviour of the government in place, plays a big role in recruitment. It is, therefore, of crucial importance that governments work with their security forces to ensure that their role involves building trust amongst citizens, instead of being the trigger that makes many join extremist groups. In addition to re-evaluating their role in fueling extremist ideology and radicalisation, states must also track emerging extremist trends. Today, a larger number of extremist groups use social media to propagate their ideology, radicalise, and recruit cadre. That being said, their ability to move quickly between social networking sites,

and their use of smaller, newer online platforms ensures that they are not easily tracked. Richard Priem emphasised the fact that while majority of recruitment still happens as a peer-to-peer or face-to face interaction, the role of social media cannot be downplayed.

While cases of armed conflict are unique in nature, given their context, they do offer some overarching lessons. Patterns of joining violent groups, be it a terrorist group or a criminal gang are similar, and more often than not, the state or government's security apparatus has a role to play. It is therefore important to draw lessons from law enforcement, peacebuilding and peacekeeping when devising ways to counter violent extremism.



Countering violent extremism requires a multi-sectoral intervention and that includes recognising the capacity of key stakeholders, including the women. / Photo: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh©Flickr

Gendering the Agenda: Women in CVE Discourse

Vidisha Mishra

Despite mounting evidence of its centrality in countering violent extremism, the gender dimension of CVE efforts remains neglected and largely two-dimensional, where women are either victims or brainwashed perpetrators. In practice, it is true that women have been at the receiving end of violent extremism and have also been involved in encouragement, support, recruitment, strategy and combat. However, their role in CVE efforts and their exclusion from spaces where solutions for violent extremism are generated – security sector, intelligence agencies, police and army – need to be addressed.

According to Edit Schlaffer, Founder, Women Without Borders, Austria, global CVE strategies that were disproportionately focused on the top-down approach are slowly recognising the value of tapping into the often conservative placement of women in their households as a crucial ingredient of community-based interactive work. Trust-building is key to preventing and countering radical ideologies, and women can be effective mobilisers in the interactive processes.

Most countries have acknowledged the importance of regional cooperation in confronting extremism and have developed counterterrorism plans accordingly. However, upon review, it is clear that they completely ignore women as change agents, and as people who have common lived experiences in a post-conflict or conflict situation, which makes them community engagers for

increasing social cohesion. According to Nishtha Satyam, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women India, there is at least a 20-percent bigger chance of sustaining a peace agreement if women are involved in the process.

Policy narratives focus on the macro overview of violent extremism while the micro push and pull factors tend to be ignored. Mariam Safi, Founding Director, DROPS, Afghanistan, noted that it is imperative to find a connection between the top-down and bottom-up approaches in CVE and PVE efforts. Here, civil society could play an important role in understanding the roles that women are already playing within the household, at the village and district levels, and in informal structures of governance, such as tribal councils at the provincial level, for instance. Simultaneously, women need to be included in the formal structures in civil societies and the government – and these formal and informal structures need to be interlinked. Countering violent extremism requires a multi-sectoral intervention and that includes recognising the influence and the capacity of key stakeholders and credible voices. It is equally pertinent to evaluate who these key stakeholders are and whose voices are being left out.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that gendering the CVE agenda sometimes runs the risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes. For instance, while the role of mothers within the household could make them effective positive change agents, the assumption that women are inherently more peaceful than men, and if provided with the right tools, can stop radicalisation, is misleading given the lack of publicly available evidence to support this. It is important then to contextualise experiences while building positive narratives and supporting networks for mothers. There has also been some criticism of this gendered assumption that mothers are in a position where they are more able to spot the signs of radicalisation. This assumption can actually be alienating to mothers as it puts an extra burden on them; they might be

absent from a lot of public spaces in which radicalisation occurs, and so it can have the negative consequence of inducing shame and guilt that may end up excluding them from the CVE programmes.



In a highly radicalised environment such as in J&K, the state must facilitate the establishment of alternate avenues of engagement, such as sports. / Photo: Faisal Khan©Flickr

Creative Voices and Expressions: The New CVE?

Shubhangi Pandey

With the advent and subsequent growth of digitisation, radicalisation and popular culture have come to be closely associated. An example of this is the ISIS propaganda video based on the movie *American Sniper* that went viral on the internet in 2015. Extremists are increasingly utilising popular culture and technology to perpetuate radical narratives, as they have proved to be effective tools in reaching out to the youth, and convincing them of the extremist discourse. As a countermeasure, therefore, it is imperative to examine the role of sports, art, and other cultural programmes in addressing violent extremism, by locating the spaces for prevention and deradicalisation for these avenues.

During a discussion on ‘Creative Voices and Expressions – the new CVE?’, the panellists highlighted various means of effecting a change in mindset, especially that of the younger population. Priyank Mathur, CEO of Mythos Labs, highlighted the power of comedy, for example, in touching upon otherwise sensitive issues without getting embroiled in controversies, and creating space for questioning of existing insurgent ideologies. A video by the comedy collective, East India Comedy (EIC) titled “I Want to Quit ISIS” is an illustration. Although it is difficult to determine whether the video has had any positive impact, its release was followed by a 10-percent decrease in the mention of pro-ISIS terms on social media, as per assessments based on a monitoring and sentiment analysis exercise conducted for the same. While it is still not possible to draw a direct correlation between such videos and the reduction in radical activity, the improvement in overall

statistics indicates that they have not made matters worse, at the least.

Poetry on the other hand, is considered most effective when it is inspired by radical thought. This brings up a normative dilemma: does the use of poetry as a device for deradicalisation subvert the fundamental premise of deradicalisation itself, as poetry is a product of radical thought? However, poetry or any other form of artistic expression is based on the context in which it is created, and therefore should not be examined in isolation. The Progressive Writers' Movement for instance, was a revolutionary literary movement in British India which produced radical writings advocating anti-imperialism, as well as equal rights for all, and played a crucial role in the Indian freedom struggle.

In addition to contextual assessment, in order to gain adequate understanding of most poetry, it is equally important to understand the foundational tenets of the particular religion the poetry is based on. Urdu poetry for one, especially that of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sahir Ludhianvi and other distinguished poets of their time, is heavily steeped in religion. One may therefore assert that any creative expression presumes a certain level of knowledge, and knowledge in turn removes ignorance, a characteristic that is elemental to the psyche of a militant. Knowledge acquisition also helps in countering the process of "othering" of a specific community, and removes unfounded biases pervading mainstream culture, as noted by Rana Safvi, Founder and Moderator of #Shair.

The involvement of the state is another crucial aspect of countering violent extremism through popular culture, and sports in particular. In the state of Jammu & Kashmir, for instance, sports has emerged as a powerful tool in community building, cultivating youth leaders and icons by meaningful engagement across villages and districts. As observed by Waheed Para, Youth President of J&K PDP, in a highly radicalised environment such as in J&K, where the youth is constantly being fed negative narratives by homegrown militants and cross-border infiltrators,

the state can and must play a vital role in facilitating the establishment of alternate avenues of engagement. To better understand the importance of active state involvement, one can also take the example of Hindi cinema, which has over the years, legitimised violence and normalised radical action as a heroic way to deal with a situation, as noted by Ashhar Farhan, Co-Founder of Lamakaan – The Open Cultural Centre. He explained the correlation between pop culture and radicalisation by elucidating how people lose faith in the ability of the state to deliver justice, having learnt from the movies glorifying vigilante justice, and thereafter resorting to radical behaviour by defying state authority and the law altogether. Most radical movements are anti-establishment, claiming the inability of the state to address the demands of the henceforth radicalised group/community, which makes state involvement in prevention of radicalisation all the more integral.

Whether or not the use of sports, art and popular culture as tools to counter radicalisation prove to be effective in the long run, it has certainly begun a conversation that is likely to effect positive changes in the near future.



The Bangladesh government is working to involve civil societies and local communities in the fight against extremism. /
Photo: Moktel Hossain Mukthi©Flickr

(In)Security Challenges: South Asia

Swati Pant

South Asia is a tinderbox of religious conflict and violence due to an immense diversity in cultures. Despite this, the concept of CVE or countering violent extremism is fairly new, though the usage of counter-terrorism has been in place for some time now. The panel, '(In)Security Challenges: South Asia, shed light on the historical as well as the current landscape of violence and extremism in various South Asian countries.

Jehan Perrera of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, observed that the country has experienced violence for most of its post-independence history beginning in the 1970s, one being class-based Marxist violence and the other, ethnic-based extremist violence. Both have led to heavy human casualties. Extremism is still in the system. There have been two kinds of responses to this situation. NGOs and civil societies look at the causes of violent extremism and encourage political reforms, political solutions, power sharing. The other perspective of the State sees the hard military power as solution to violent extremism. In May 2009, under the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa, the ethnic-civil war ended, through purely military means. The current government under President Maithripala Sirisena is trying to reach a political solution with the ethnic minorities. However, this is not without its challenges, since what the minority sees as their just rights is seen by the majority population as extremism. This is exploited in a democratic system by the opposition political parties who use it to undermine the credibility of the government.

The ethnic minority population, which suffered as a result of the military campaign, wants accountability for war crimes. From the ethnic majority's perspective, the end of the war was a solution to their problems. The government is struggling because it is difficult

to prosecute an army that has the support of the majority population. The last government denied that such atrocities happened at all. The present one accepts that these may have happened and has accepted a transitional justice process. There is international pressure on the government in terms of truth seeking, reparations, institutional reform and accountability.

In the aftermath of the war, where Tamil nationalism and separatist movement had been suppressed, the threat to the Sinhalese population now comes from the Muslim population. This is due to a sense that the Muslim population is growing more rapidly than the Sinhala population and it is connected to a global rise in Islamic extremism. Social media propaganda is taking place with the rhetoric that in the past, countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia were not Muslim states; they were Hindu or Buddhist, and today they are Muslim and a similar fate would befall the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. This narrative, in turn, is being exploited by political parties.

On a similar note, Bangladesh, since its birth in 1971 dealt with Leftist insurgency, as explained by Maj. Gen. Md. Abdur Rashid of the Institute of Conflict, Law & Development Studies. This insurgency ceases to be a threat anymore. Thereafter it faced the Chittagong Hill Tracts' ethnic insurgency, where India cooperated in finding a political solution through a peace treaty, which minimised the problem.

Currently, the threat comes from ISIS by way of the Islamic terrorism in what is basically a Muslim country with a majority Sunni Muslim population. In July 2016, the Holey Artisan bakery, an elite area of Dhaka was attacked by extremists, using crude bombs, killing 20 foreigners, and in saving them, the police suffered great casualties. This incident brought Bangladesh to international scrutiny as another country in the grip of ISIS expansion. Thereafter the government took a mixed approach of soft and hard power, and tried to involve civil societies and local communities, including local Bangladeshi women, in the fight against extremism.

The Rohingya are a stateless community from Myanmar and as described by the UN in 2013, “the most persecuted ethnic group” globally. From 2017, the Myanmar Army started a pogrom against the Rohingya, causing more than 1.3 million of them to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh. This has caused immense strain on Bangladesh’s resources. Bangladesh wants its allies to put pressure on Myanmar, to take the Rohingyas back and give them a swift and safe repatriation. Indeed, a problem anywhere in the Indian subcontinent, is a threat to the South Asian security, since all the countries are attached to a single geographic mass.

Mohammed Hameed, of the Maldivian Democracy Network, stated that Maldives has recently gained notoriety for having sent maximum foreign terrorist fighters to Syria per capita. This claim is denied by the government, which seeks to downplay the perceived growing radicalisation in the country. After all, tourism accounts for 30 percent of Maldives’ GDP, and acknowledging such a link with terrorism will have a deep impact on the industry.

Islamic radicalism started taking place in the Maldives in the early 1990s when Maldivians travelled to the Middle East to seek Islamic knowledge and returned, bringing the ideology and narratives, associated with Salafism and Wahabism. Even prior to the threat of ISIS, Maldivians have reportedly gone to Syria and had affiliation with other terror outfits like the Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Taiba, having been to other conflict zones such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, according to studies carried out by organisations like ‘Combating Terrorism Center’. Maldives is a purely Islamic country, and 44 percent of its population below the age of 35, almost all with a social media presence, making them highly vulnerable to the spread of extremist messaging narrative via social media. Foreign funding promotes extremist ideology, and there are local NGOs that operate under the guise of promoting Islam or promoting the practice of Islam, but work in a more organised fashion to promote an extremist narrative. There is also a huge deficit in the public trust and confidence in the security apparatus.

Maldives publicised its first ever State Policy on Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism and later its strategy, only in the last two years. These might not be effective as since 2012, democracy is declining and the government is reverting to authoritarian rule. This has provided an unfettered opening for people who propagate extremist narrative in the country, and take advantage of vulnerable youth. It is easy to reach out to these youngsters and recruit them into more violent extremist campaigns. There have been assassinations, murders, disappearances of moderate and liberal politicians, journalists, writers, and bloggers, which shows the rising level of intolerance and extremism in the country. In 2012, for example, Afrasheem Ali, a liberal lawmaker and Muslim scholar, was killed. In 2017, an outspoken blogger, Yameen Rasheed, was stabbed to death.

In the early 20th century, in the Middle East and South Asia, parallel movements of ideology took place; Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami, both of them essentially anti-colonial. Most of the current violent extremist Islamic ideology finds its roots in these movements.

Gen. Syed Ata Hasnain, a veteran of India-Pakistan conflicts in Kashmir, stated that Zia-ul-Haq's rise to power in Pakistan in 1977, and his choice of retribution against India for the creation of Bangladesh, not through direct conventional war, but by a war of thousand cuts, marks a landmark in India's security challenges. Sufi Islam of Kashmir saw a radical change, over the last 20 years. Over 800 mosques were taken over and clergy from different sects or school of thought were brought in, to change the entire discourse there. There are hardly any Kashmiri Sufi scholars or clerics in Kashmir today.

While other models of CVE exist across South Asia, they lack uniformity. Even the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has proved ineffective in nurturing a uniform counterterrorism strategy for the region. To effectively counter violent extremism, it is necessary that countries neighbouring South Asia extend some cooperation. There needs

to be regular exchanges of ideas and sharing of experiences and capacities, since these violent ideologies are imported from outside. To tackle this ideology, it is very important to kill its mobility and sever its connectivity.

The security forces of South Asian countries have begun bilateral and trilateral cooperation, like those between India and Bangladesh. Instead of just looking at some aspects of staff exercises and capacity-sharing, we should start looking at sharing best practices.



With polarising majoritarian politics on the rise, India must not lose sight of its syncretic character. / Photo: Press Trust of India

Syncretic Societies: The Indian Experience

Swati Pant

In May 2018, a report titled *Spiders of the Caliphate* was released, which mapped online ISIS activity in the world through social media sites and other parameters. The researchers discovered intense cluster points of ISIS activity that are to the West of India, a huge number of cluster points all across the Middle East and the AFPAK region, and then a huge gap and the cluster points resume from Bangladesh onwards. The researchers called India a “circuit breaker”, implying that in this vast geographical landmass, ISIS activity was not visible. This ties in with Indian government statistics as well on the numbers of people who have been either suspected of or arrested on charges of being associated with ISIS. Observer Research Foundation, in September 2017, released a report in which that number was 0.0002 percent of India’s 180-million-strong Muslim population.

What is so unique in India, despite having the world’s second largest Muslim population that has immunised it against the kind of global spurt in Islamic extremist radicalisation observed in the past few years? The panel discussion, ‘Syncretic Societies: The Indian Experience’, saw an insightful exchange of views between the panellists. According to Pavan Verma, former member of Rajya Sabha, one of the biggest push factors for any kind of radicalisation and extremist behaviour worldwide, is a sense of not belonging or an alienation from the social fabric. India has had Hinduism as the majoritarian religion since its advent. Despite being conquered by two of the biggest proselytising religions – Islam and then Christianity, the former by way of Mughal invasion and the latter, through British rule, India has remained a

predominantly Hindu country. Hinduism, for all its rituals and iconoclasm, remains a way of life that has always been inclusive. Its teachings welcome the mixing of different religions and their ways of life. Therefore, Indian culture is generally viewed as being syncretic and people of different faiths have lived together relatively peacefully, threaded in a common culture that transcends individual religious identities.

Journalist Rashid Kidwai observed that Indian madrasas or Islamic religious schools that are considered a training ground for extremist ideologies, are systemically different in India, than the ones found in neighbouring countries. Their curriculum is relatively modern and teach social inclusivity. Indian clerics also perform the admirable role of preaching against hatred and violent extremism.

The fact that India is a democracy and therefore dependent on vote-bank politics is also an important factor in preventing alienation of the Muslim population, since it forms the second largest religious group in India.

Akhtar-ul Wasey, President of Maulana Azad University in Jodhpur, observed that what sets Indian Muslims apart from those in other countries, is that following independence, they were provided an equal stake in the running of the country, under a secular Constitution.

Recently, however, there has been an upward swing in polarising majoritarian politics that has led to a more aggressive stance against Muslims, which resultantly has led to a sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction in the Indian Muslim population. The threat of self-styled evangelists and preachers, feeding disillusionment and hatred towards the other community has grown, and what is frightening is that these evangelists have found an audience. There is no mandate in Hinduism for its followers to learn its teachings. Hence the majority of Hindus are still stuck in customary rituals instead of trying to understand their own religion. The so-called evangelists too, exploit this gap in

knowledge and feed into the fears of the masses. There is also a sense that politicians have in the past undertaken appeasement of minorities for vote-bank politics and sided with hardliner conservative Muslim clerics instead of encouraging progressive reforms.

Public and vocal dialogues from liberal Muslim and Hindu leaders will go a long way in ensuring that Indians need not fear and hate each other and can co-exist and thrive peacefully together. The underlying social structure and inclusivity of India can, despite its lacunae, be a model for the rest of the world.



Policymakers must contend with the explosion of information brought about by the growth of mobile telecom and internet in India, especially in addressing radicalism among the youth in conflict areas like Kashmir. / Collage by Masood Hussain

New Frontiers: The Indian Experience with Countering Online Radicalisation

Khalid Shah

In comparison to other countries, the number of Indians joining the ISIS has been negligible and almost non-existent, noted SM Sahai, a joint director at National Security Council of India. The facts do corroborate the assertion made by Sahai – the number of individuals who have joined ISIS, since the group came into being, is estimated at 157. (To put that number in context, the population of Muslims in India is about 170 million.) Yet even as the number of Indians recruited so far by ISIS is relatively small, there are other aspects of the possible threat that need to be dealt with.

The online propaganda of ISIS has seen takers within the country, as many Indian youths have made attempts to join the group. India's intelligence agencies are monitoring the trends of radicalisation and keeping a watch for possible recruits. Instead of sending the radicalised youth, who make attempts to join ISIS, to de-radicalisation centres – a phenomenon prevalent in the West – security agencies in India are relying predominantly on societal controls to address the threat.

There has been a huge debate on how the reaction of Indian Muslims towards ISIS has been different from the Muslims elsewhere in the world, particularly in the west. Officials like Sahai suggest that it is the nature of Indian society and the syncretic interaction among the different communities that has kept the threat of radicalisation at bay. The larger society has played a role in maintaining the checks and balances required to control the spread of ISIS influence in India.

Some analysts have noted that European societies, for instance, have failed to assimilate their Muslim populations. This has helped breed contempt, and in turn fuels radicalisation. India, for its part, has historically welcomed and assimilated different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups.

However, the case of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is different from the rest of country, given the long, historical context of the state and the meddling of outside forces, particularly Pakistan, in propagating and nurturing terrorism. The complex political situation in J&K does seem to have played a predominant role in the recent upsurge in insurgency but in fact, it is the outside influence (of Pakistan) which acts as a catalyst.

The insurgency in Kashmir has lasted for more than 30 years. While the situation in the 1990s was at its worst, with thousands of active insurgents and as many as 12 major militant groups active in the valley, the statistics suggest that the threat has reduced in comparison to the numbers in the 1990s. Sahai asserted that while current numbers are not alarming, at the same time, there has been a renewed increase in the recruitment of indigenous Kashmiris to terror groups since 2013.

With the rapid penetration of mobile telecom and internet in India, an explosion of information has taken place, especially for the youth. This exposure to information has moved the youth away from traditional control systems of society such as parents, teachers and community elders. This has in turn given rise to a lethal concoction of identity politics and youth aspiration, which has led to many caste-based agitations within India. Sahai maintained that the agitations in Kashmir are no different. However, in the case of Kashmir, the political context plays a larger role.

India has also faced the brunt of political insurgencies in the northeastern states, as well as the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency. However, analysts note that both the insurgencies are now on a downslide and the areas affected are stabilising. Negotiations with

the insurgents in the Northeast, for example, have led to a ceasefire with most of the groups and as developments reach farther corners, the trends of violence and radicalisation will subside. On the flipside, new threats in the Northeast are coming from the unchartered territories in the neighbouring countries where the governments are unable to control the spread of the insurgency.



An Indo-Pacific approach to CVE needs to address maritime transgressions that provide financial resources to extremist groups in the region, and requires coordination and joint patrolling of territorial waters. / Photo: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command©Flickr

New Theatres of Conflict: The Indo-Pacific and CVE

Tuneer Mukherjee

Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism takes on different shapes and forms all around the world and should ideally be tailored towards the countries where such strategies are being implemented. Strategies to counter violent extremism (CVE) in India are very different from CVE designs in Western Europe, and these may both vary as to how CVE programmes are implemented in places like North Africa. South-east Asia is a prime example of this premise. CVE approaches in Indonesia and Malaysia vary due to the different societal dynamics in the two countries and the different motives that exist among their citizens that lead them to be radicalised and act against the state. Some groups in these countries propagate extremist ideologies, without delving into hard power, making the task for the authorities to CVE even more difficult. Developing counter-narratives to such ideologies require closer engagement with the population. However, given the current globalised nature of extremism and radicalisation, strategies to counter violent extremism need to be concerted and all-encompassing, and extend beyond national borders.

When geo-political constructs like a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ are put forth by countries to maintain security of the wider region, counterterrorism becomes pivotal. Counterterrorism is one of the few planks on which all major partners in the region agree to cooperate with each other or have existing cooperation mechanisms. And, as such conversations to establish counter-narratives to radicalisation and create innovative approaches to tackle violent extremism move to larger multi-lateral

organisations, the discussions need to move beyond a few basic principles of what constitutes CVE, or what common features exist among the radicalised populations of these countries. Instead, there is a need to block the spaces that exist between the state apparatuses, which these extremists maliciously exploit.

Primarily being a maritime-centric strategic theatre, an Indo-Pacific approach to CVE will need to address other maritime transgressions that provide financial resources to many of the extremist groups in the region, i.e. armed robbery, piracy, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. Tackling such issues will need close coordination among countries facing such problems, and joint patrolling of territorial waters. Some of the terrorist groups operating in the region have ties to global extremist groups, and as such inform and practice radicalisation tactics well beyond the immediate borders of the states where they are based. The Maute Group and the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines are examples of terror groups that have committed crimes on sea and used that to finance terror activities against the state. Extremists have identified the digital space as the best platform to propagate their views to the outside world, and target audiences that will sympathise with their cause. Ties to the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) give groups such as the ones mentioned, access to information channels that they can then utilise to radicalise citizens inside and outside their state. Multiple scenarios exist where a small band of extremists can carry out a maritime terrorist attack, and cripple important sea lines of communication, which serve as the underbelly of the Indo-Pacific.

Identifying tactics and perfecting CVE mechanisms can be a plausible starting point for security cooperation among countries in the Indo-Pacific. Information sharing on extremist networks among security agencies can help build trust in the region and actualise protection of the maritime commons in other areas. Japan and Australia have programmes that help in building capacity to counter terrorism in many of the developing nations in the region, and such programmes can be expanded to develop

efficient CVE mechanisms in many of these countries. Every CVE mechanism is coalesced around conversations, and in a strategic space that is nascent in construct, maritime terrorism and violent extremism is slowly taking root. Going forward, the Indo-Pacific countries need to examine these issues and chart a coordinated Indo-Pacific CVE strategy.



How influential is the media in not only the spread of violent extremism, but more importantly, in countering it?

Fourth Estate at the Frontlines

Kanak Gokarn

The increasing democratisation of the information space has raised many concerns about its effect on the public consciousness, particularly the role of the media in the spread of and in countering violent extremism. As mass media occupies a fundamental role in society as an information broker, its reach and influence does understandably demand greater scrutiny. The problem of ‘fake news’ is well-known, but when it comes to countering violence and extremism, other problems also come to the fore. Some of these concerns were discussed during the panel, ‘Fourth Estate at the Frontlines’.

Regarding the spread of extremism, the diffusion of information through either traditional or social media occurs in distinct ways. One provides credibility, while the other promotes inclusivity. While each differs in its system of checks and balances and its advantages and disadvantages, in an ideal world they can work in conjunction to make up for the shortcomings of the other. In either case, when it comes to countering violent extremism, the media is more a conduit of information rather than an active participant. The co-optation of the traditional news media in promoting one agenda or the other, such as through counter-messaging campaigns, however socially beneficial they may be, compromises its role as an information provider. Some of the panellists felt this “instrumentalisation” of the media was not constructive. Social media is more amenable to this role owing to its relatively non-hierarchical structure.

Essentially, the real value of the media lies in an objective assessment of the realities on the ground, which is key for

policymakers to formulate plans to address the true causes that drive people towards extremism and violence. However, this presupposes on the behalf of officials and politicians a will as well as an ability to act. The media cannot make up for this unwillingness or inability, and in the absence of results on the ground, in its role as an observer, it provides a convenient scapegoat.

This is not to say that there are no biases inherent in the practice of reporting news. The causes behind this are numerous, from revenue considerations, to a lack of expertise or an unwillingness to develop it, external influences, selective reporting or simply human error. A panellist felt that field reporters try their best to be authentic and credible, but are limited by their own access to information. Another described the tendency for reporters to look for consensus, rather than try to document the nuances and diversity in the views expressed by people. All this shows is that the media landscape is imperfect, although it is rightly held to a high standard. But this imperfection naturally creates a trust deficit. Selective or sensational reporting further distorts the information landscape, sometimes giving an outsize voice to groups whose real influence may be marginal. These shortcomings are true of traditional media houses as well as social media.

This ultimately begs the question of how influential the media really is in the spread of or in countering violent extremism. Exposure to a particular message is not a sufficient condition that leads a person to commit an act of violence, unless they have already reached that conclusion independently. Social networks and face-to-face interaction are equally, if not more, important. There is a tendency to underestimate how discerning consumers of news really are, and being sceptical of what one hears or reads is healthy. Those responsible for inaccurate or misleading reporting should be held accountable, but their influence should not be overstated. However, an excessive focus on the messenger

diverts attention from the real causes of violent extremism, which ironically, the media is well-placed to document on the ground.



In conflict areas such as India's Northeast, the absence of good governance can create conditions for radicalisation. "Where the state did not reach out to the people, the Naxals have." / Photo: IPS News Agency©Flickr

Building Blocks: Mobilising Communities against Extremism

Aastha Kaul

“There is no military solution to terrorism.” As the terror threat environment becomes increasingly complex, this quote, often attributed to former US President Barack Obama has never rang more true. Given the dynamic shifts in both the motivations and tactics used by violent extremist groups, solely relying on conventional counterterrorism methods is no longer an option. It is crucial, therefore, to understand these dynamics before a violent extremist act has been perpetrated, by engaging with communities in the pre-criminal space. This engagement falls under countering violent extremism (CVE) – policies that aim to reduce violent extremism by working in conjunction with traditional coercive methods where the community becomes a direct counterpart in creating a holistic counter-terrorist strategy.

Involving communities in CVE initiatives is crucial in contextualising not only the drivers of extremism, but also vulnerable demographics, as they vary over regions and even time. During the panel discussion on ‘Building Blocks: Mobilising Communities against Extremism’, there was a lack of consensus amongst the panellists on the push and pull factors that give rise to violent extremism. Some pointed to globalisation and the subsequent rise in inequality as the main cause, whereas others pointed to “spiritual extremism” – idealistic individuals recruited by extremist groups over the internet in the hopes of a more “pure” world. In a similar vein, vulnerable demographics also vary – while the assumption may be that those on the lowest rungs of

society are more prone to be radicalised, the advent of the internet has meant a significant rise in what Ajai Sahni, Executive Director Institute for Conflict Management, India, described as “cyber-radicalisation” – where educated, well-off individuals are targeted.

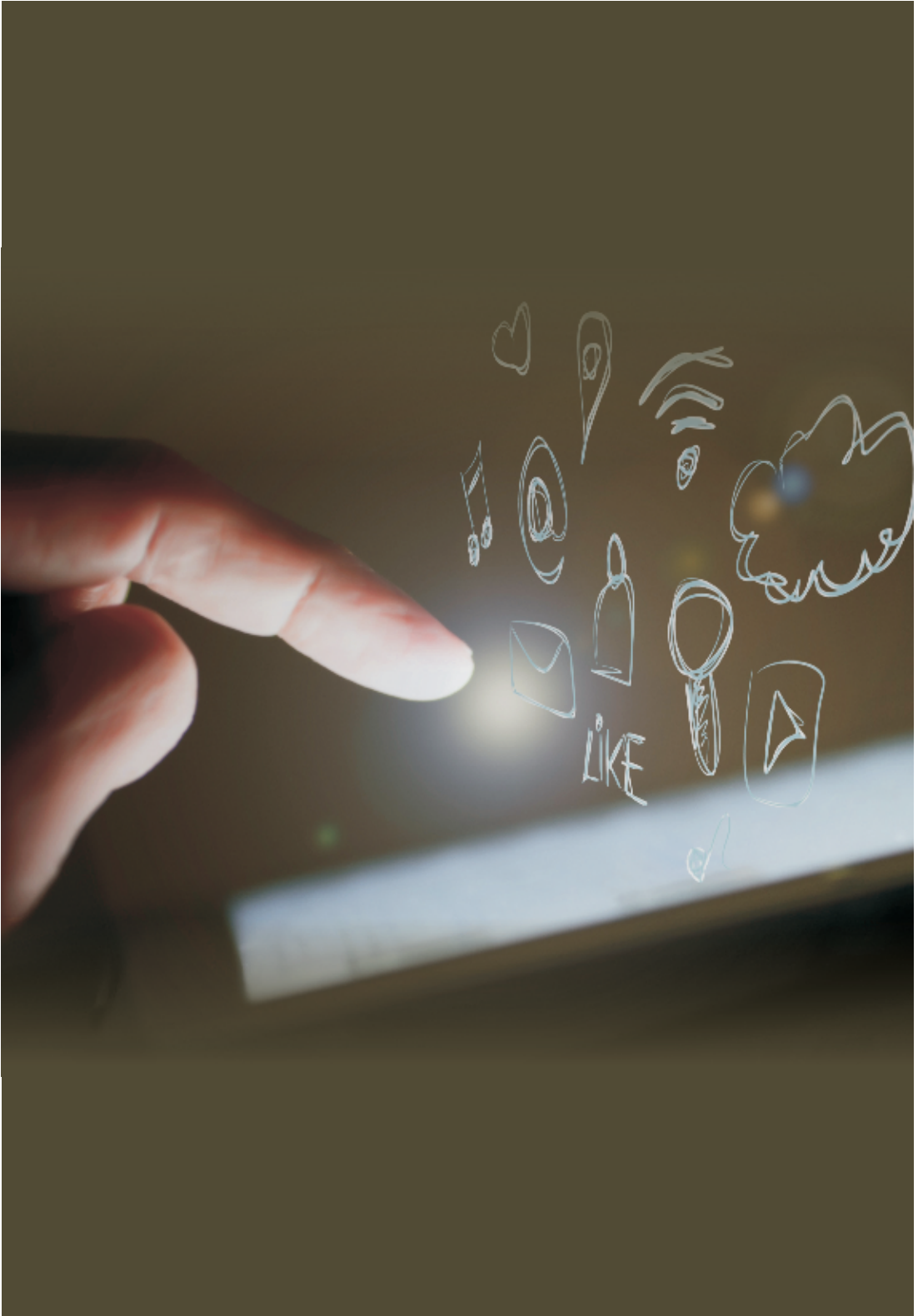
However, one key demographic that remains constantly vulnerable regardless of social status, and requires perhaps the most engagement, is the youth. As highlighted by Christina Schori Liang, Senior Fellow, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), it is the youth that is hardest hit by the world’s inequality – rising poverty levels and diminishing economic opportunities create feelings of alienation, making young populations especially susceptible to the “siren call of extremism”. Therefore, while it is important to build infrastructure and create opportunities for economic growth, the feelings of alienation and marginalisation must also be addressed. Adewale Olakunle Joel, through his work as founder of Tender Arts, Nigeria, demonstrates the ability to use art to not only reintegrate survivors of Boko Haram, but as a tool to strengthen social cohesion and build trust within the community. Violent extremist groups like Boko Haram primarily recruit young men from low socioeconomic status who do not engage in civil society, and art can be used to build their self-esteem and give them a sense of belonging, making them resilient to “this kind of brainwashing”.

While community-led initiatives in CVE are important, it is imperative that the state leads the efforts. An absence of good governance can lead to a breakdown of society, creating conditions for violent extremist groups to thrive by replacing the state as providers of socio-economic services. Using tribal areas in India as an example, Durga Prasad Kode, Adviser, Home Government Andhra Pradesh, illustrated the “vacuum” created by state failure by their inability engage with the communities - “where the state did not reach out to them, the Naxals have”. When the state is unable to provide security to the citizen, the social contract between the state and citizen breaks down, giving

rise to extremism. It is the state's responsibility to restore this social contract and create a "culture of co-operation", where the "state carries civil society on their shoulders". National Action Plans are an example of such cooperation, through which programmes created by the state flow through the community. However, as highlighted by Dr. Liang, it is imperative that the state maintains a level of transparency and "clearly states their aims and goals", as lack of direction can hinder progress.

As current violent extremist organisations operate on a regional and even global scale, it is important to examine CVE in the international context. While considerable steps have been taken, the current discourse still revolves around counter-terrorism where the issue is securitised, and as a result human security and community engagement has been side-lined. Dr. Liang, through her work at GCSP has advised the United Nations (UN) to create an advisory board consisting of civil societies to include CVE in the discourse and de-securitise the issue. If the UN, and other international organisations take the lead in adopting CVE in their counter-terrorism strategies, national governments will follow.

While an effective CVE strategy requires the efforts of all stakeholders – local, national and international to work together, building strong community networks remains imperative to provide a holistic solution to the issue and stop the cycle of violence altogether.



Social media platforms must walk the tightrope of effectively banning malignant content without censoring users.

Capturing Imaginations: Counter-Narratives and Digital Platforms

Khalid Shah

Social media platforms have taken centre stage in encouraging violent extremist ideologies, with various institutions making efforts to curb and counter the amplification of the extremist ideologies on the internet platforms. The CVE programmes of various social media platforms are at a nascent stage and each platform has a different mechanism to deal with the problem. During the panel, ‘Capturing Imaginations: Counter Narratives and Digital Platforms’, the representatives of social media giants Facebook and Twitter discussed the policies and frameworks developed by the companies to tackle violent content. They posited their approaches with the creative use of Big Data by Moonshot CVE and the traditional methods employed by the UNESCO, Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education & Peace.

On one hand, Twitter has dealt with challenges posed by ISIS through its rapid and active use of the platform to broadcast its ideology and attract recruits across the globe. In the year 2015, ISIS-related accounts had become a big problem for the social media giant. It employed the policy of removing the content that promoted ISIS and its ideology. Mahima Kaul, Director for Policy at Twitter India noted, “Since 2015, about 1.1 million terrorist-related accounts have been removed from the platform.” The numbers suggest the massive scale of the threat that emerged on Twitter and the platform had to develop tools to remove the ISIS-related account even before the first tweet was made from the account.

However, with changing dynamics, the problems are also changing and digital platforms have to come up with more creative ways of tackling the problems at hand. Another school of thought is more inclined to use a Gandhian way of dealing with extremist ideologies. This school envisions social media as a space for dialogue, instead of banning the content or accounts. It believes in conversations based on compassion, empathy and mindfulness in order to understand the extremist individuals and at the same time have a critical inquiry of their message. “Allow the process of deconstructing the message rather than just countering with another narrative which is to actually have an inquiry, a critical inquiry approach. Break down the narrative and then reconstruct it using the various information that is available,” said Anantha Duraipappah, of UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Education & Peace.

However, to counter the narrative deconstruction of the message is not the only way framework. Big Data can give insights into the thought process and behavioural aspects of the audience at the receiving end of CVE campaigns. The data can help in developing counter speech to help deradicalise individuals with a surgical focus. Apart from removing content that is deemed as extremist, another hugely popular platform – Facebook – is running global Peer to Peer challenges, which encourage students, working professionals and other members of civil society to develop ideas on counter-speech campaigns and counter-narratives based on their local context.

One crucial challenge is that the social media platforms are walking a tightrope in effectively banning malignant content without censoring the users. To counter this, companies are employing experts who can analyse the flagged content and decide whether to remove it or let it stay on the respective platform. However, the process is subjective and is vulnerable to the biases of the experts. Facebook has employed 200 specialists in counterterrorism, apart from its 10,000-strong team on content review, whose job is to review flagged content.

Another issue that arises from banning and blocking any account is that the content is moved to different, smaller platforms that may have neither the expertise, nor the resources to employ policies to counter the violent extremist platforms. Now, a coalition of 50 small companies has come together on counter-terrorism to get assistance from larger companies in devising methods to tackle the extremist content on the platforms. Twitter has created a database of over 40,000 hashes containing images, videos and content pertaining to extremist ideology, this shared resource is used by other companies to remove to remove content from platforms.

While social media has turned into an enabler and amplifier of the violent extremist ideologies, the same platforms are now being utilised in countering and preventing these same ideologies. At the institutional level, there is a realisation within companies to expand the scale of operations and at the same time assist other platforms in developing solutions for CVE. Civil society organisations too, are coming together to utilise Big Data to devise effective solutions. With the fast changing dynamics of violent extremist groups, the individuals, organisations and companies will have to think on the go and devise creative solutions to deter the emerging threats.



States must make doctrinal changes in the way they conceive of conflict and security in the digital age.

Interaction with Raghu Raman, Former CEO, NATGRID

Akhil Deo

Over the past year, 29 individuals have been lynched in India following rumours and misinformation that circulated on social media—only the most recent example of how today’s information flows can disrupt social stability. After all, the velocity of today’s information communication revolution is unprecedented. The confluence of modern IT infrastructure, digital platforms, and affordable mobile technology is changing the way individuals communicate, network and organise. And for all the social and commercial opportunities this phenomenon brings—it also facilitates the flow of speech and narratives that are malicious and designed to incite tension or violence.

Addressing these realities, Raghu Raman, former CEO of NATGRID, argued that states and communities must now be prepared to address the doctrinal shift in the way war and conflict is understood. Today’s theatre of engagement is no longer physical; “The battlefield of the future,” he says, “is the mind.” This change influences the character of conflict in a significant way—in so far as it democratises it.

Cyberspace hosts a multitude of actors with diverse motivations, intentions and methods. State actors like Russia have manipulated popular social media platforms to disrupt democratic processes; non-state actors such as ISIS have successfully waged a propaganda blitzkrieg to attract new recruits; and even a variety of domestic actors have broadcasted ‘fake news’ to further perverse political agenda. Conflict is now less about whose army wins, and more about who tells the better story.

This democratisation, Raman argued, is a natural consequence of the digital ecosystems through which societies now operate. Data, which fuels personal services, commercial ventures, and governance, flows relatively freely through an opaque web of platforms, intermediaries and brokers. Today, more than ever, this data is increasingly granular, providing deep insight into individual and societal patterns of behaviour—and its misuse can have adverse consequences on social stability.

For centuries, humans have co-existed, experiencing shared realities and truths—given that the information gatekeepers such as news-media were relatively limited. The emergence of a “digital public sphere” has changed this. As Joseph Nye writes, the information communication revolution has led to the “paradox of plenty;” in other words, “an abundance of information leads to scarcity of attention.”

State actors, large corporations, criminals, terrorists and informal networks are today fully capable of manipulating this attention with the “intention of attacking the homogeneity of communities,” as Raman put it. A process that is only aided by rapid advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning. States like India, lamented Raman, have been unable to respond to these changes because they remain trapped in the philosophies of the past century.

Countries like India, he said, must make doctrinal changes in the way they conceive of conflict and security in the information age. First, they must craft a holistic strategy towards balancing the need to secure information resources (including “mind space”), and exploiting the social, commercial and strategic opportunities of cyberspace.

Second, these changes must not only reflect at the policy planning level, but should also take place through an “all of the society” approach. Businesses, individuals and communities will be as much on the frontlines of the information age as states; if not

more so. They must be equipped with the infrastructure, tools and skills to guard against risk.

Third, security in the “attention economy” requires cross-domain knowledge spanning data networks, behavioural sciences, design thinking and so on. States and business must invest in leadership with across the spectrum understanding of the threats and opportunities presented by the information age.

In the balance of things, communities must be prepared to wield and protect the power that comes with rapid digitisation. This requires protecting channels of communication and information flow from perverse interferences; reforming data ecosystems to improve transparency, resilience and trust; and ultimately, concluded Raghu Raman, it requires telling the truth more effectively and compellingly.

Annex

Conference Agenda and Panellists

TACKLING INSURGENT IDEOLOGIES

A Conference Organised by the Observer Research Foundation

11 - 13 June 2018 | The Oberoi, New Delhi

Day 1 (11 June 2018)

Welcome address:

Sunjoy Joshi (*Chairman, ORF*)

Ambassador Christian Dussey (*Director, Geneva Centre for Security Policy*)

Tamara Mona (*Chargé d'affaires a.i, Embassy of Switzerland, New Delhi*)

Keynote address:

MJ Akbar (*Minister of State for External Affairs, India*)

'Tackling Insurgent Ideologies'

Assan Ali (*P/CVE specialist, Commonwealth Secretariat CVE Unit, UK*)

Farah Pandith (*Adjunct Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, US*)

Raffaello Pantucci (*Director of International Security Studies, Royal United Services Institute, UK*)

Dr. Arian Sharifi (*Director, National Threat Assessment, Office of National Security Council, Government of Afghanistan*)

Moderator - Samir Saran (*President, ORF*)



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Chairman
Observer Research Foundation



Ambassador Christian Dussey
Director,
Geneva Centre for Security Policy



Samir Saran
President,
Observer Research Foundation



M J Akbar
Minister of State for External Affairs,
India



Raffaello Pantucci, Director
International Security Studies,
Royal United Services Institute,
UK



Assan Ali, P/CVE specialist,
Commonwealth Secretariat
CVE Unit, UK



Tamara Mona
Chargé d'affaires a.i.,
Embassy of Switzerland,
New Delhi



Dr. Arian Sharifi, Director,
National Threat Assessment,
Office of National Security Council,
Government of Afghanistan



Farah Pandith
Adjunct Senior Fellow,
Council on Foreign Relations, US

Day 2 (12 June 2018)

Keynote address:

Baroness Williams of Trafford (*Minister of State for Countering Extremism, UK*)

Moderator - Samir Saran (*President, ORF*)

Eye of the Storm: Experiences from the Field

Dr. Benedetta Berti (*Head, Policy Planning, Office of the Secretary General, NATO, Belgium*)

Dr. Arian Sharifi (*Director of National Threat Assessment, Office of National Security Council, Afghanistan*)

Richard Priem (*Associate Political Affairs Officer, UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate*)

Hilde Deman (*Country Director, Search for Common Ground, Tunisia*)

Moderator - Dr. Ali Khan Mahmudabad (*Assistant Professor, Ashoka University, India*)

Gendering the Agenda: Women in CVE Discourse

Mariam Safi (*Founding Director, DROPS, Afghanistan*)

Archana Kapoor (*Founder, Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation-SMART, India*)

Edit Schlaffer (*Founder, Women Without Borders, Austria*)

Nishtha Satyam (*Deputy Country Representative, UN Women India*)

Moderator - Philippa Chancellor-Weale (*CVE Advisor, UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office*)

Creative Voices and Expressions: The new CVE?

Priyank Mathur (*CEO, Mythos Labs*)

Ashhar Farhan (*Co-Founder, Lamakaan- the Open Cultural Center*)

Waheed Para (*Youth President, J&K PDP*)

Rana Safvi (*Founder & Moderator, #sbair*)

Moderator - Abhinandan Sehkhri (*Co-Founder & CEO, Newslandry*)

(In)Security Challenges: South Asia

Jehan Perera (*Executive Director, National Peace Council of Sri Lanka*)

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Syed Ata Hasnain (*Defence Analyst, India*)

Maj Gen (Retd.) Md. Abdur Rashid (*Executive Director, Institute of Conflict, Law & Development Studies, Bangladesh*)

Mohamed Hameed (*Deputy Chair, Board, Maldivian Democracy Network*)

Moderator - Kabir Taneja (*Associate Fellow, ORF*)

Syncretic Societies: The Indian Experience

Akhtarul Wasey (*President, Maulana Azad University, Jodhpur*)

Rasheed Kidwai (*Visiting Fellow, ORF; Journalist*)

Ambassador Pavan K. Varma (*Former Member of Parliament-Rajya Sabha; National General Secretary and National Spokesman of the Janata Dal [United]*)

Moderator - Maya Mirchandani (*Senior Fellow, ORF*)



Dr. Benedetta Berti
Head, Policy Planning,
Office of the Secretary General,
NATO, Belgium



Baroness Williams of Trafford,
Minister of State for Countering
Extremism, UK



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Waheed Para
Youth President,
J&K PDP



Rana Safvi
Founder & Moderator,
#shair



Abhinandan Sehkhri
Cofounder & CEO,
Newslaundry



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National Peace Council of Sri Lanka



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Defence Analyst, India



Kabir Taneja
Associate Fellow,
Observer Research Foundation



Rasheed Kidwai
Visiting Fellow,
ORF



Amb. Pavan K. Varma
Former Member of Parliament,
Rajya Sabha; National General
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of the Janata Dal (United)



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Maj Gen (Retd.) Md. Abdur Rashid
Executive Director,
Institute of Conflict,
Law & Development Studies,
Bangladesh



Akhtarul Wasey
President,
Maulana Azad University,
Jaipur



Dr. Ali Khan Mahmudabad
Assistant Professor,
Ashoka University, India

Day 3 (13 June 2018)

New Frontiers: The Indian Experience with Countering Online Radicalisation

Shiv Sahai (*Senior Joint Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat*)

Moderator - Sushant Sareen (*Senior Fellow, ORF*)

New Theatres of Conflict: The Indo-Pacific and CVE

Dr. Greg Barton (*Research Professor in Global Islamic Politics in the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Australia*)

Bonifacio Alfonso Javier III (*Humanitarian Coordination & Conflict Resolution Specialist, UN FAO, Philippines*)

Thomas Koruth Samuel (*Director of the Digital Strategic Communications Division, SEARCCT, Malaysia*)

Moderator - Maya Mirchandani (*Senior Fellow, ORF*)

Fourth Estate at the Frontlines

Praveen Swami (*Consulting Editor, Business Standard*)

Dr. Waeil Awwad (*Senior international correspondent & political analyst, Syrian Arab News Agency*)

Anand Ranganathan (*Independent Journalist*)

Marya Shakil (*Political Editor, CNN-News 18*)

Moderator - Indrani Bagchi (*Diplomatic Editor, Times of India*)

Building Blocks: Mobilising Communities against extremism

Adewale Olakunle Joel (*Founder, Tender Arts Nigeria*)

Durga Prasad Kode (*Advisor, Home Government of Andhra Pradesh, India*)

Ajai Sahni (*Executive Director, Institute for Conflict Management, India*),
Dr. Christina Schori Liang (*Senior Programme Advisor and Senior Fellow,
Emerging Security Challenges Programme; Terrorism and Organized Crime Cluster
Leader, Geneva Centre for Security Policy*)
Moderator - Ed Bossley (*British Foreign & Commonwealth Office*)

Capturing Imaginations: Counter Narratives and Digital Platforms

Clark Hogan Taylor (*Analyst, Moonshot CVE*)
Dr. Anantha Duraiappah (*Director, UNESCO Mahatma Gandhi Institute for
Education & Peace*)
Mahima Kaul (*Head, Public Policy & Government Partnerships, Twitter India*)
Kavitha Kunhi Kannan (*Public Policy Manager, India and South & Central
Asia, Facebook*)
Moderator - Saikat Datta (*Asia Times Online/Centre for Internet & Society*)

Interaction with Raghu Raman (Former CEO, NATGRID)

Moderator - Samir Saran (*President, ORF*)

Novel Narratives: Storytelling & Social Media

Vani Tripathi Tikoo (*Member, Central Board of Film Certification*)



Sushant Sareen
Senior Fellow,
ORF



Shiv Sahai
Senior Joint Secretary,
National Security Council Secretariat



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