Opportunities and Challenges for Mobilizing Resources for Preventing Violent Extremism

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Washington, DC

The Prevention Project and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) convened representatives of governments, the United Nations, think-tanks and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector at the Brookings Institution to discuss the opportunities and challenges for mobilizing resources for preventing violent extremism (PVE[1]). Among the questions the group addressed were: *What are some of the challenges government donors face in resourcing community-led PVE work at home and abroad, and how can they be overcome? What are the advantages and disadvantages of moving into development funds for PVE? What is a realistic role for the private sector and foundations and where can their resources best contribute?*

OPENING REMARKS - Ambassador of Norway to the United States, Kåre R. Aas

Ambassador Aas opened the roundtable by highlighting the generational challenge that violent extremism presents and the need for a long-term strategy, funding and political commitment from the international community.   He underscored the hurdles in some countries to advance PVE efforts and the reluctance of many NGOs to engage on this agenda. He spoke about the need to mobilize young people, who should be at the forefront of PVE efforts, to dispel violent extremist narratives and dissuade recruitment. He noted the priority that Norway has attached to supporting the development of global networks of sub-national actors to address violent extremism, including as a donor to GCERF, a European youth network that is expanding to Commonwealth countries, a network for women and CVE, and the Strong Cities Network, which is looking to grow its membership from 50 to more than 200 cities over the next two years.   He highlighted Norway's 2014 national PVE plan, and the emphasis it places on working with local communities and NGOs across Norway, while pointing out that these entities are often overburdened with other priorities and initiatives. Ambassador Aas noted the significant funding constraints on national governments in Europe arising from the migration crisis, with 20% of Norway's development budget reallocated to respond to the crisis.

He highlighted the need to gain a better understanding of the intersections between human security, development, and security; and that there were a number of development programs relevant to the PVE agenda, which can be leveraged, including education, health, and governance. Finally, he stressed that efforts to promote human rights and the rule of law should be at the center of PVE efforts.

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

PVE is a policy priority with no natural source of funding

- Participants discussed how GCERF was symbolic of the challenges faced in mobilizing resources to support PVE, despite the political priority that political leaders have attached to the subject. It was

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[1] PVE (preventing violent extremism) and CVE (countering violent extremism) were used interchangeably throughout the workshop.

pointed out that GCERF was created in 2014 to address the funding shortfall, but is now confronting a situation where there is no "natural source" of financial support for this work. GCERF currently receives funding from 12 governments and the European Union, but has yet to identify long-term funding sources in any of them. Some of the funds come as *ad hoc* contributions from counterterrorism (CT) or other security budgets and some come from development budgets. On the security side, it was mentioned that the overwhelming majority of these budgets are used to support traditional CT priorities. This includes building the capacity of law enforcement and security services. The point was made that limited amounts of funding from these budgets are often available for the kind of community-led PVE work that GCERF was established to support and that lies at the heart of the PVE agenda. **Participants underscored the need for security assistance budgets to be recalibrated to take into account the need to support PVE work.**

Securing development funding: the political space is there, but where's the money?

- The obstacles to securing development funding were highlighted. These include 1) shrinking development budgets; 2) the reluctance of many development actors to allow their funds, which go to support long-standing development priorities, to be used for security purposes; and, related 3) the concern that PVE is simply an extension of U.S. foreign policy.

- Participants also noted the recent decision by the OECD Development Assistance Committee to allow PVE contributions to be counted as "Official Development Assistance". Another recent initiative has been an explicit acknowledgement of the link between development and security in the new development agenda (specifically Sustainable Development Goals 10 and 16). This creates the political space for development agencies to allocate funds to support both PVE-specific and PVE-relevant work.

- Some argued, however, that since the PVE agenda emerged from the CT community, then PVE funding should come from the CT/security side rather asking development actors to take on more responsibility for PVE, especially with shrinking development budgets. In this vein it was noted that some retired military leaders in the U.S. are advocating for the transfer of funds from military to development agencies to support efforts by the latter to build community resilience to violent extremism.

- Participants suggested that the medium-term goal for PVE institutions like GCERF should be to secure funding from both security and development sources. Not only will this maximize funding, it will also help bridge the gap that has emerged between these communities in part as a result of counterterrorism initiatives over the past decades.

Securing private sector funding: the business case is there but where's the funding?

- Participants explored some of the challenges in securing resources from the private sector for GCERF and PVE work more broadly. They established the business case (e.g., violent extremism is bad for business, disrupts supply chains, and drains local labor and talent pools) for private sector involvement and the growing opportunity to present the business case for why corporations should get involved in supporting PVE work. This is starting to happen, it was noted, albeit very slowly. The example of a European-headquartered online media company was cited. The company has an office in Nigeria, but doesn't have any reporters with access to Northern Nigeria to cover the news there. The company has thus offered to train at-risk youth from that part of Nigeria to become journalists and provide them with jobs covering the news.

- **It was suggested that governments should create incentive structures to encourage the private sector – beyond the already engaged social media and technology companies – to invest in this agenda.** GCERF for example is currently launching PVE initiatives in Nigeria with matching funding to leverage private sector investment.

- **Participants also recommended that more attention be given to mobilizing resources from wealthy individuals**. Individual donors are more likely to take risks, willing to innovate, and

better positioned to get money out the door quickly. Individuals also don't have corporate boards to convince to support PVE work, the impact of which can be difficult to measure.

The elusive search for foundation funding: reluctance to support U.S. foreign policy agenda

- Participants discussed both the conceptual and technical challenges to securing the support of foundations, which are in the "international peace and security" funding space, for PVE. **On the conceptual side, the point was made that the vast majority of foundations will not fund anything linked to "violent extremism" as they don't agree with using it as a framework for understanding violence and conflict in different parts of the world.**

- Whether framed as CVE or PVE, many foundations don't believe that these efforts can be separated from the U.S. national security and broader foreign policy agendas. In fact, many of these foundations argue that it is the U.S. policies and interventions, (e.g., occupation of Iraq, drone strikes, and support for repressive regimes) have made communities more vulnerable to radicalization. **There is a misconception among some in the U.S. Government that a goal of foundations is to further U.S. national security goals, when this is simply not the case.**

- While hesitant to support anything with a "violent extremism" label attached to it, the point was made that U.S. foundations are funding programs aimed at building community resilience, focusing on issues like poverty, governance and gender. It was also noted that U.S. foundations might have more credibility within communities in the United States than the Departments of Homeland Security or Justice do – and thus the former's funding would bring less baggage than the latter. However, this was not the case overseas where funding from a U.S. foundation can bring the same liabilities as from the U.S. government.

- On the more technical side, foundations assert that **they are already working to build community resilience (PVE-relevant programs) through programs aimed at reducing poverty and economic marginalization, strengthening education and governance, and resolving conflicts.**

- Participants highlighted that, **despite the general reluctance of foundations to fund overseas PVE work, they do support some programs aimed at countering violent extremist messaging – mainly by supporting youth and civil society more broadly.** The argument for funding these but not broader PVE initiatives is that counter-messaging "feels more like neutral space" and that counter-messaging work generally focuses on youth and other civil society, stakeholders with which foundations feel comfortable engaging.

To define or not to define… that is the question

- Participants discussed the challenges that result from the lack of an agreed definition on PVE or VE, whether at global level at UN or among the various growing number of relevant stakeholders. **Some argued for a definition. They reasoned that that "you can't advocate for something that you can't define" and that the continued lack of a definition makes it harder to develop a budget baseline for PVE and then press appropriators for additional funds.**

- **Others suggested that the search for a definition would prove futile given the diversity of interests, stakeholders, and approaches that would need to coalesce around a common framing.** Instead, why not look at what's the end goal(s), e.g., reducing the pool of recruits for terrorist groups or propaganda to target**. PVE-specific work would then focus on, e.g., building community-led platforms to identify and address local grievances, build trust between the community and the government, and provide off-ramps for those identified as celebrating terrorist propaganda, returning foreign fighters or members of terrorist groups deemed not to present a security risk to the community. It was suggested that these types of programs – PVE-specific – should be supported by CT/security budgets and that work further upstream should be deemed PVE-relevant**

and leverage development funds and tools. In general, the point was made that efforts to mobilize resources would benefit from being clearer about what are PVE-specific and PVE-relevant areas, identifying what specific programs or interventions are not being supported by existing budgets and to link fundraising to addressing clearly identified gaps.

The framing matters

- **Participants discussed the need to be cognizant of how PVE (both programs and the broader agenda) are viewed in some communities around the globe.** For some, it is seen as trying to impose a Western normative agenda on the developing world. For others PVE is being used as an excuse for governments to clamp down on civil liberties.

- Some argued for using a "political violence" (as opposed to a "violent extremism") framework, which would allow focusing on addressing state violence, advocating against drone strikes and enable support for communities to address violence coming from within.

- It was also pointed out that **most of the money for PVE is currently being provided by donor governments whose policies are often viewed as among the key drivers of violence in the local communities being targeted by a PVE program**.

- It was pointed out that CVE in the U.S. continues to be framed as a security issue and is largely driven by the same agencies that also gather intelligence and investigate crime. While recognizing the challenge to doing so, it was argued that to be effective over the long run, CVE needs to be "desecuritized". Doing so is essential for building the trust and cooperation of the local communities (critical CVE constituents), who will only engage with government and help identify and intervene against early signs of radicalization to violence, if they see positive outcomes from cooperating.

UN eager to support PVE, but funding lagging

- **It was suggested that the UN Secretary-General's PVE Plan of Action, which integrates seven different elements of the PVE agenda into a common framework, might help address the "siloization" and lack of synergy that exists across the UN system (and government bureaucracies) when it comes to funding and engaging in the different thematic areas that make up the PVE agenda.** In the UN, for example, it was pointed out that different UN agencies are often designing and implementing PVE-specific and PVE-relevant programs in isolation of other relevant agencies.

- UNDP, it was highlighted, is particularly well positioned to implement the recommendations in the UN Secretary-General's PVE Plan of Action (PVE POA), as well as the action plan developed during the White House CVE Summit process. It was noted, however, that fundraising to support UNDP and broader UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF) programmatic efforts linked to the POA continues to lag. Some cited the increasing competition for limited PVE funding, which is exacerbated by the growing number of new or traditional peacebuilding NGOs getting into the PVE space. This is pulling money away from the long-standing entities, such as UNDP, that have existing capacity on the ground.

Limited coordination, risk-tasking and limited innovation: obstacles to more effective PVE efforts

- Participants noted the growing number of donors and agencies funding PVE programs (some PVE-specific and some PVE-relevant), a number that is likely to grow with the recent developments at the OECD DAC. However, there is limited coordination among donors, which is partly due to the lack of a common definition and approach to PVE, and because the funding comes from many disparate entities. In addition, there are too few opportunities to share lessons learned and good practices among the myriad of implementers (e.g., local civil society groups or international NGOs), let alone for donors to share their experiences with the different local partners they are engaging with on PVE work.

- **Participants expressed concern that PVE is becoming a plodding, programmatic, administrative, and technical exercise. Funding is taking months to reach the ground and generally going to those organizations that have a demonstrated capacity to comply with the often onerous requirements.** This leaves little room for risk-taking and innovation in a field that participants argued requires it. **Although local ownership over and demand-driven PVE programs are critical, the point was made that the approach donors are taking to supporting PVE undermines these objectives.** Too often, donors provide short-term project funding to implement narrowly-scoped programs rather than long-term core funding. Long-term funding is crucial to help grow the capacity of local civil society, and enable them to develop and implement in a timely fashion the kind of PVE interventions/programs they think will have the greatest impact on the ground.

- **Participants noted that governments and international NGOs are set up to be reactive – they can respond to crisis such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and famine – rather than proactive**. Other than USAID's office of Transition Initiatives, there are very few mechanisms in place that allow fast-tracking project proposals to enable PVE funds to be disbursed in a timely manner. This fast-tracking of funding is crucial to get ahead of the threat posed by violent extremist groups. One participant cited the example of a village in West Africa where a tribal succession conflict led to the death of 60 people and multiple youth riots, which gave way for ISIL recruitment. The threat of increased instability was urgent, yet NGOs that needed rapid funding were told funds won't be available until six months later.