Reference Aid: Responding to Misperceptions about Countering Violent Extremism Efforts

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is an approach to proactively counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence. CVE programs complement law enforcement tools, public safety programs, and overall violence prevention efforts to keep Americans safe.[a] There are many misperceptions about the intent and scope of US Government CVE and terrorism prevention programs. Here are fact-based answers to overcome such misperceptions.

Misperceptions

- **CVE Represents a "One-Size-Fits-All" Federal Program**: CVE is the US Government's prevention and intervention response to violent extremist recruitment. In reality, there is no one prototype of a CVE strategy, framework, or program; rather, the US Government supports local stakeholders who develop and implement a variety of activities. These activities are designed to build trust and awareness between the government and the public, provide personalized intervention or "off ramp" services for individuals before criminal activity occurs, and assist individuals in disengaging from violent activities and reintegrating into a community. Law enforcement operations, such as investigations and arrests, are not considered part of CVE.

- **CVE Is a Cover for Surveillance Activities**: In actuality, US Government programs addressing CVE do not include gathering intelligence or performing investigations for the purpose of potential criminal prosecution. Consistent with current policy, federal law enforcement agencies have safeguards in place to ensure there is an appropriate separation between community outreach and intelligence gathering or criminal investigations.

- **CVE Focuses on Specific Communities**: Community members have raised concerns that the US Government's CVE efforts have disproportionately focused on specific communities, notably Muslim Americans. In the United States, violent extremists have many motivations and are not limited to any single community, region, or ideology. Over time, different forms of violent extremism have come to the fore, and new forms will likely emerge in the future. Tragic events perpetrated by violent extremists espousing a range of foreign and domestic ideologies underscore the need to work across all communities and with a broad array of partners, instead of focusing on any specific community.

- **CVE Is Based on Junk Science**: Since 2010, the US Government has invested over $20 million into research aimed at understanding all forms of radicalization to violence and effective prevention and intervention measures. This work is supported by federal agencies such as the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science & Technology Directorate. Reports and project descriptions are available to the public through agency websites such as the NIJ's portal for research on domestic radicalization to violence, DHS Centers of Excellence such as the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) and the University of Southern California's Center for Risk and Economic Analysis of Terrorism Events (CREATE), the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, and the Department of Defense's Minerva Research Initiative. Many of these reports can also be found on the interagency CVE Task Force's website.

- **Stand-Alone CVE Plans and Programs Are Unnecessary**: While in some cases, CVE plans may be integrated into existing violence prevention efforts, in other cases, stand-alone programs may be particularly valuable. For instance, some local communities may see value in developing presentations that help parents understand violent extremist recruitment and ways to protect their children. To learn more about CVE-related strategies, frameworks, toolkits, organized networks, and grants, please visit the interagency CVE Task Force's website.

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[a] **Radicalization** is defined as the process through which an individual changes from a non-violent belief system to a belief system that includes the willingness to actively advocate, facilitate, or use violence as a method to effect societal or political change. Some radicalized individuals elect to mobilize by inciting, supporting, or preparing to engage in violence.