Countering Violent Extremism through Communications Work Stream
Practical Seminar on Monitoring and Evaluation Techniques for CVE Communication
Programs
10-11 February 2013
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Meeting Summary

Overview
This event, one of a series of practical workshops planned by members of the Global
Counterterrorism Forum's countering violent extremism through communications sub-working
group, aimed to explore the practical considerations and challenges of applying a range of
monitoring and evaluation techniques and methods to CVE communication programs. The
organizers invited eight subject matter experts who presented on a range of monitoring and
evaluation issues relevant to CVE communication practitioners. These presentations formed the
basis for discussions held in two breakout groups which convened three times during the course
of the seminar. Most importantly, these two breakout groups strove to identify actionable steps
the GCTF can take to improve the approach to monitoring and evaluation efforts used in CVE
communications. In order to encourage and facilitate open, frank, and respectful discussion, the
seminar operated under Chatham House Rule, whereby participants are free to use the
information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker or speakers, nor
that of any other participant, may be revealed unless permission is granted.

Key themes that emerged during the seminar include:

- Proposing that monitoring and evaluation be incorporated into communication projects as
  part of an active feedback cycle as opposed to being used to generate end-state
  documents
- Cultivating a multilateral terms of reference on best practices and establishing a feedback
  forum similar to the OSCE's effort at partnership for cooperation in order to encourage
  information sharing and dialogue on monitoring and evaluation issues
- Applying novel and innovative open source tools that can process large amounts of data
  to draw conclusions relevant to CVE communication projects at the regional, national,
  and local level to allow ideas to be tested for viability in a two week time frame
- Comparing and contrasting the capability and value of data-driven metrics in
  programmatic review versus use of anecdotal analysis
- Acknowledging the interest and support multilateral organizations and private sector have
  in supporting effective CVE communication programs
- Exploring the impact credible voices can have in creating "safe space" to engage violent
  extremists and victims of terrorism
- Examining the importance of allowing failure in counter narrative development in order
  to achieve an effective message and use the appropriate medium

GCTF
GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM FORUM

Hedayah

CSCC
A U.S. Interagency Initiative
Center for Strategic Counterterrorism
Communications

- Using case studies to understand the opportunities and pitfalls of engaging on social media in complex environments where access and interpersonal engagement is difficult

Session One: Improving, not reinventing, the wheel
An exploration of what lessons CVE communication programs can adopt from interdisciplinary monitoring and evaluation techniques and experiences

- The first presentation addressed six research questions to explore how other fields outside of CVE have harnessed and adapted monitoring and evaluation tools to communication programs. The presenters explored 1) problems CVE is attempting to address, 2) questions in applying interdisciplinary research to CVE, 3) academic research completed about communication and behavior change, 4) the communication evaluation field, 5) implications of measuring impact, and 6) understanding how interdisciplinary studies can be used by CVE practitioners and organizations.
- In addition to exploring communication programs used by public health, environmental, gang violence, and child abuse fields, the presenter stressed how academic research into the power of peer groups, power of habit, the power of language, and the power of understanding behavioral change can be applied to measures of effectiveness in CVE communications. The two main takeaways from this presentation were: evaluations are tools, not ends unto themselves; these tools need to be applied differently when addressing simple, complicated or complex problems. For complex problems, such as CVE, evaluations are best utilized as part of a feedback loop to encourage project adaptability to fluid environments.

Session Two: Mapping root causes with storytelling
A demonstration of how thousands of brief narratives focused on a topic can reveal (with the right tools) how Somali youth weigh the decision to join an extremist group, or how Kenyans & Ugandans view the impact of civil society organizations.

- The presentation on "mapping root causes with storytelling" focused on using a methodology for collecting stories from a target audience to utilize as effective research before a communication intervention. This methodology uses advanced analytics tools to analyze text and see patterns in responses but local partners to collect simple, targeted survey data. This effort is based on the scientific method of trial and error to determine the most effective method to draw insights from the audience. The results can be powerful, and text can be analyzed in minutes with web-based tools using algorithms. The presenter specifically used: https://bigml.com/; http://djotjog.com/kti/; http://djotjog.com/search.html; http://djotjog.com/bubbles.html

Session Three: Focusing down from 8000 meters
Multilateral monitoring efforts and their application to CVE communication programs

- A presentation on further focusing on more specific CVE communications topics called "focusing down from 8000 meters" discussed the importance of establishing a counter-narrative to extremist messages. The presenter argued there is a need to invest resources to work through the media, just as terrorists do. Using ex-extremists and victims of terror are examples that provoke strong reactions from audiences, which can be a good measure

of effectiveness of this
counter-narrative. Essentially, adjusting the message to local audiences can be more
effective than such tactics as drone strikes because it is continuing to turn perceptions and
attitudes of those affected into antagonists and extremists.

Session Four: The private sector and infinite data
*Discussion comparing performance management with monitoring and evaluation and
exploration of private sector efforts to manage the limitless data the internet offers*

- The presentation on the private sector and infinite data highlighted the power of the
private sector in harnessing vast amounts of data into real-time analytics to be used to
craft counter-narrative communications. Predictive data can help uncover hidden trends
and insights to inform proactive communications that can more effectively frame the
message so the audience can effectively receive and understand it. The presentation also
shared a CVE program evaluation conceptual framework that was used in the public
diplomacy field. This framework including a performance model using input, outputs,
and outcomes centered on attitudinal change.

Session Five: Measuring the emotional and the effective
*Understanding the nuances and experiences of communication programs supporting and
involving victims of terrorism*

- This presentation provided an example of how to counter the extremist narrative by using
a very human, emotional story to show the impact of terrorist violence on a family and
community. The founders of an organization which supports victims of terrorism works
with both local British communities as well as international ones, to help individuals
traumatized by terrorist acts and guide at-risk youth away from extremism. They use
techniques such as storytelling, conflict resolution and peace building, and leadership
development and advocacy. Having victims of terror be able to share their story can
connect with others, including those at-risk of turning to extremism, and illustrate how
they have chosen peace as a response, rather than violence.

Session Six: Appealing 2 youth
*Discussion on the current terrorist narrative in appealing to the youth and developing the
possible counter-narratives*

- The "Appealing 2 youth" presentation focused on youth and extremism and the process
of developing a counter-narrative to dissuade youth from using violence as a viable
option to serve an extremist cause. Rather than using violence to counter violent
extremism, the counter-narrative developed through intensive focus groups allowed to
freely critique messages allows for conversational narratives to be created which defeat
ideas stemming from radical thought. Extremists use specific messages that target youth
and appeal to their sense of victimization and perceived sense of injustice. The counter-
narrative should address these same messages and be presented in an engaging way
where youth will listen and respond (e.g. utilizing social media, multi-media approaches).
Youth have a desire to be active, the counter-narrative must shepherd them to positive
activities and show an alternative to violence.

Session Seven: A voice of 140 characters and an image

- The presenter, a photojournalist active on social media, discussed the importance of imagery to break down stereotypes and bring mutual understanding to opposing groups such as the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. These efforts, which take place on social media, can be part of developing a counter-narrative which brings the use of violence into question. Social media can play a vital role in engaging these opposing groups when they can't engage psychically, and playing the role of a responsible "curator" of a Facebook page can develop you as a credible voice and a trusted source of information. This authentic journalism can be a powerful tool in reporting on relevant stories that aren't part of the broader media's agenda and can resonate with the target audience people. That said, there are difficulties with engaging online, with privacy, security and information rights for those active online being prime among them. Furthermore, the presenter emphasized social media will never serve as a full replacement for in-person engagement. Indeed, the presenter makes every effort to meet with individuals interested in the conflict he monitors in third countries.

- During the question-and-answer period, participants and the presenter engaged in an animated debate regarding the differences and tension between data-driven measures of effectiveness and people-driven measures of effectiveness. Some participants bristled against the perceived denigration of data-driven evaluation, arguing that data is a valuable tool to increase awareness of a wide body of information which hedges against the pitfalls of insular, decision-making processes and biases. Others argued people-focused interactions needed to be respected on par with data in informing measures of effectiveness despite the difficulty in putting these events into numbers.

Breakout session one review: Group One

- Participants discussed the idea of failure as being important to improving CVE programs. Failure can provide very beneficial lessons learned that could help you arrive at an optimal methodology for measurement and evaluation. This is challenging in a government bureaucracy because there is a low tolerance for failure, when it is time-sensitive and there are so many different stakeholders (e.g., legislative bodies, citizens, media).

- The more multi-disciplinary the approach of data collection is in evaluations, the closer governments can get to developing accurate approaches to help identify groups at risk of joining violent organizations. Data validity and data quality are very important to CVE monitoring and evaluations efforts. Using data to establish a baseline at the onset of the program conceptualization is vital to success.

- GCTF can be a venue for members to share both successful and failed practices in CVE measurement and evaluation.

Breakout session one review: Group Two

- The moderator asked for constructive criticism in applying some of the techniques that were addressed by speakers. Participants agreed that it was difficult to determine hurdles or potential problems without a regional focus and recommended for future seminars that

regional breakouts groups be
formed to allow for substantive application of ideas. Participants agreed monitoring and evaluation efforts for CVE communication programs should take place at a regional and local level.

- Depending on the country or region, another alternative target audience or monitoring partner would be the Diaspora communities.
- Participants also discussed the value of assessing at CVE Communications from an economic perspective in order to more effectively monitor and evaluate programs (e.g. supply/demand for service or message put forth or using economic data to measure behavior change)
- Participants also discussed at length the pros and cons of government/state control of internet in the case of terrorism or violent extremism. Although no agreement or consensus was reached, participants weighed how one would measure the effectiveness of engaging on the internet with the possible cost effectiveness of trying to control the internet.
- Participants also voiced interest in developing a Terms of Reference for Communications and particularly for CVE communications, establishing a peer review process in developing monitoring plans, and best practices for benchmarking. Participants queried whether Hedayah would be able to collect and collate benchmarking data and advise member nations in addition to providing a "safe space" where CVE communication practitioners could convene for unbiased and effective learning for governments, civil society, and NGOs.

Breakout session two review: Group One

- Participants discussed the growing responsibility/interest on the part of the private sector to be involved in employing unemployed workers/youth. This interest can be harnesses both by governments and local NGOs, which may provide CVE benefits by employing youth and drawing them away from radicalization while providing businesses an employable workforce. Training and mentorship is another area where the private sector may be able to contribute.
- GCTF members can focus more on identifying CVE hotspots to collaborate on to harness expertise and trainings to these regions/areas. Further collaboration could also center on de-conflicting overlapping CVE efforts.
- Messaging is not the only component of communications it can be positively amplified by using arts/sports/cultural diplomacy and exchanges as part of a broader CVE program.

Breakout session two review: Group Two

- Participants opined Hedayah and GCTF should pursue media training for CVE, including ethics training for journalists, specifically with relation to victims and storytelling. There was also acknowledgement that misinformation posed a large problem to traditional and social media and supporting "social media curators" is another avenue of interest in regards to training.
- One of the gaps identified in measuring the effectiveness of social media is the "multiplier" effect. In other words, even if a region has a low internet accessibility, there

are other ways which ideas
may spread throughout society that are sourced through social or online media.
Participants agreed exploration of this topic would be of interest. Participants also voiced
a desire for methods to assess violent extremists' use of internet communications and to
challenge the assumption that extremist messaging is always effective.

- One participant also raised the idea that "big data" is exploring techniques to analyze
imagery through scene recognition and metadata with video are alternative approaches to
using the internet to communicate messages and to understand imagery resonance.

Breakout session three review: Group One

- Participants agreed reaching out to students is important, but it is challenging for
governments to do so, therefore government officials should strive to be accessible and
keep engagement on the student's terms. Reaching out specifically to student
organizations is assessed to be productive and helpful. It can also be challenging to
engage younger audiences, but the primary goal of all student engagement is that the
message must be adopted by the receiver and must incorporate critical thinking and
creativity. Communication involves listening and messaging is just a small part of
communications. Indeed, data derived from listening to audiences to develop programs is
assessed to be critically important.
- Participants also agreed the role of the female voice is critically important in CVE efforts.
A mother or grandmother's voice can be very helpful in deterring male terrorists from
extremism. One country shared that they had spent more resources on engaging the
wives of convicted terrorists to help prevent their sons from radicalizing. Role of women
can be powerful, but can be more powerful in the context of men.
- Participants also voiced appreciation for "space space". A trusted space can be a physical
or virtual communal meeting place so that people with different points of view can come
together and address divisive issues in a safe, facilitated/curated, non-threatening
environment.

Breakout session three review: Group Two

- Participants discussed at length the quick response communications dilemma a
government faces: social media elements act faster than governments to develop and
disseminate effective responses. A participant shared that even when governments are
working online, for example on Facebook, when putting up a post, it took 2-3 days to be
cleared
- Participants also discussed different capabilities for governments to access former
terrorists or extremist organizations due to national policies or laws prohibiting
engagement with violent extremists. Two messaging benefits were identified for
countries that have access to terrorist organizations as a result of historical negotiations
and engagement: Access to extremists to collect data and understand motives; When
governments try to engage with former and current extremist organizations and are
rejected, the government is able to form a counter-narrative that de-legitimizes the former
and current violent extremist organizations

- Participants also pondered
  whether Hedayah would be able to act as a third party to facilitate conversation between NGO's, public, and governments and preserve the neutrality of the voices
- Discussion also follow-up on the people versus data divide during which participants expressed interest in obtaining further insight and commentary on this debate in terms of developing measures of effectiveness and conducting effective evaluation.

Issues highlighted as possible avenues for follow-up:

- **Failure:** GCTF can be a venue for members to share failed practices in CVE measurement and evaluation in addition to functioning as a platform where the importance of failure as part of the evaluation process could be supported and encouraged.
- **Seminars on monitoring and evaluation with regional/country experts:** Participants agreed that it was difficult to determine hurdles or potential problems without a regional focus and recommended for future seminars that regional breakouts groups be formed to allow for substantive application of ideas.
- **Diaspora community outreach:** Particularly in areas of populations where direct engagement is untenable, forums where outreach to Diaspora communities could prove to be an avenue for communication and messaging.
- **Students:** Non-government entities such as Hedayah or multilateral initiatives such as the GCTF may be useful in cultivating outreach programs to communicate with students and youth to obtain their feedback on CVE messaging.
- **Hedayah as a data resource and advisor:** Discussions identified Hedayah as being a possible entity which could collect and collate benchmarking data and advise member nations seeking to improve monitoring and evaluation efforts.
- **Media training:** Participants opined Hedayah and GCTF should pursue media training for CVE, including ethics training for journalists, specifically with relation to victims and storytelling.
- **Countering misinformation:** There was also acknowledgement that misinformation posed a large problem to traditional and social media and supporting "social media curators" is another avenue of interest in regards to training.
- **Understanding the multiplier effect in communications:** One of the gaps identified in measuring the effectiveness of social media is the "multiplier" effect. In other words, even if a region has a low internet accessibility, there are other ways which ideas may spread throughout society that are sourced through social or online media.
- **Evaluating the effectiveness of violent extremist communication:** Researching, developing and sharing methods to assess violent extremists' use of internet communications and to challenge the assumption that extremist messaging is always effective is another area of interest for future Hedayah and GCTF exploration.
- **Explore the perceived data versus people divide:** Participants expressed interest in more fully fleshing out the people versus data divide in terms of developing measures of effectiveness and conducting effective evaluation which appeared as a result of theoretical content of day one and the case study content of day two.

For additional information on this seminar, please contact Katherine Sepponen (sepponenka@state.gov) or Nejla Grabowski (grabowskinr@state.gov)