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## Dealing with extremists : Applicable methods

A deep scrutiny of terrorism requires overviewing an array of factors and restraining from adopting prior interpretations to ascertain its nature without monitoring factual baselines that elucidate its essence. A series of fundamental points might help to understand violent extremism and could contribute to the development of systematic initiatives to counter it. The starting point in the process of understanding this phenomenon is the adoption of the principle of “do no harm” through resorting to rational rather than emotional analysis to ensure its clarity.

The second point is trying to figure out whether the goals of violent extremism are collective and violence is used as a tactic in an ongoing war or they are individual. The third point is determining what behavior is problematic? Maintaining fundamentalist beliefs or putting deeds by ones words? Who is the enemy: non-violent extremists or violent extremists?

We also need to detect the short-term individual factors playing on the emergence of violent extremism (live events, local conditions) which may be different from the long-term factors affecting the massive violent extremism (ideological, social and environmental). Likewise, we should revisit prevailing ideas about leadership and responsibility within mainstream extremist groups, and acknowledge that it is currently a networked structure instead of being a hierarchical command/control structure. Equally, we should understand that the reasons behind the emergence of violent extremism in the West (foreign fighters) are different from those in other communities, and every community should take it upon itself to recognize the local root-causes that have contributed to the emergence of violent extremism in order to be able to confront it.

We also need to recognize the role of the internet as element of network based violent extremism and a critical element for spreading extremist ideology and propaganda; to understand the relationship between online and personal contact which can be mutually supportive and very powerful. Additionally, we should comprehend the emotional context of propaganda to implement a similar one in counter narratives.

There are similar characteristics between individuals who have chosen the path of violent extremism, and most Westerners who have gone this route have previous criminal records, which could indicate a pre-existing marginal life. We should not overestimate the role of religion as initiator, as opposed to motivator or director once someone is already involved in violent extremism. We should also highlight the difference between people born into and brought up in a religious environment, where there is a limited sense of choice, and converts who have made a choice, as well as the significance of personal psychological factors and mental health as push factors, especially in the case of foreign fighters.

As for initiatives that have been adopted so far to confront extremism, none was a winning strategy. We will propose a series of questions that could be used as a road map to draft viable initiatives to contain violent extremism :

– What are the goals of these initiatives : Altering beliefs and behavior changing ?  
What is the measure of success : to stop violent acts or deterring the extremist ideology that drives this violence ?

– Whom these initiatives are reaching : Are they preventive aiming to reach the would-be extremists or they focus on the rehabilitation of those already involved in violent extremism ? Should they reach people who advocate terrorism or persons who are already engaged in violent acts ? Do they have to engage with extremists' broader families ? What are the foundations to be adopted in developing a strategy to contain violent extremism ? Should it use religion or should it focus on the economic factors ?

Finally, a post-release monitoring policy to detect recidivism and strengthening the process of reintegration into society is crucial.