Berghof Foundation

Alternative Approaches to Transforming Violent Extremism
The Case of Islamic Peace and Interreligious Peacebuilding

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Content

1 Introduction

In order to get funding for our peacebuilding programs, now we have to describe them in the context of violent extremism, otherwise we have no chance of being supported or even making it to the initial screening. (**Head of an International NGO, Washington DC**)[1]

The above quote reflects shared experience among peacebuilding practitioners in various gatherings: the emergence of "violent extremism" (VE)[2] as a central framework and priority adopted by most Western and non-Western government agencies. It has become the primary lens through which to describe many of their activities, especially in conflict areas around the world, even when the issues are not or are only remotely related.

There is no doubt that VE narratives, especially those promoting violence in the name of Islam spread by groups such as Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, Taliban and Daesh, have gained strength and visibility in the last two decades (regardless of the differences in the groups' motivation or type of justification – be it nationalism, anti-Western intervention or religion). However, it is an overstatement to solely explain the motivation for endorsing or adopting VE in Muslim societies as a result of theological factors; as explained below, there are many other factors besides religious identity and theological reasoning contributing to the phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is possible to trace historical factors that led to the creation of such groups in predominantly Muslim countries. In Afghanistan, for example, one such factor is rooted in the Cold War dynamics between the United States (US) and the USSR at the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. To fight communism, the US government mobilised local Afghan communities, which included some fighters who subsequently employed extreme Islamic religious narratives. The US's fervent desire to prevent the spread of communism thus led to the arming of members of Afghan society who later utilised the concept of jihad against non-believers in certain Sunni interpretations:

One of the greatest criticisms of U.S. policy, especially after the rise of the Taliban, has been that the CIA directly supported Arab volunteers who came to Afghanistan to wage jihad against the Soviets, but eventually used those American arms to engage in terrorist war against the West. However, the so-called "Afghan Arabs" only emerged as a major force in the 1990s. During the resistance against the Soviet occupation, Arab volunteers played at best a cursory role... Nevertheless, by delegating responsibility for arms distribution to the ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence Agency of Pakistan], the United States created an environment in which radical Islam could flourish. And, with the coming of the Taliban, radical Islam did just that (Rubin 2002).

Unfortunately, in the fight against Taliban, Somali Al-Shabab after 9/11 and Al-Qaeda before and after 9/11, international policy-makers shifted the focus from US-Soviet Cold War dynamics to a fight against the threat of Islam as a religion and then as a civilisation, a thesis that gained certain credibility when Al-Shabab continued their actions against the US intervention.

As a result of this shift in focus and perception, terrorist attacks led by Al-Qaeda and later Daesh in Europe, the US, Middle East and elsewhere since the early 1990s have fuelled fear and insecurity, strengthening negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims around the world. Global and national media have also contributed to the link between Islam and Arabs (their religion, tradition and culture) on the one hand and terrorism, extremism and violence in general on the other (Morgan/Poynting 2016).

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[1] Participant at a United States Institute of Peace (USIP) workshop on Confronting Hate Speech, October 2016.

[2] There are various definitions of VE. For the purpose of this paper, the generic working definition is based on the following: "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives" (USAID 2011, 2-3)

The outbreak of the Syrian war and Daesh's occupation of Iraqi and Syrian territories triggered new waves of refugees into neighbouring countries (Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey) and beyond (European countries). When the refugee crisis reached European borders in 2014, several politicians and political parties expressed the need to respond to the threat of VE, thus raising countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) to a high-priority level for most international agencies and policy-makers (Keiswetter/Chane 2013). Preventing the radicalisation of Muslim youth at home and among the incoming refugees jumped to the top of the agenda of international and national agencies such as the UN, OSCE, DFID and CIDA (Koehler 2016). In this process, new intervention programmes were developed and the objectives, success measures and scope of old programmes were redesigned and revised. The primary focus on external factors (not European or American policies) in such agencies' VE frameworks may have contributed to the ongoing institutionalisation of Islamophobia in such societies. It also allowed countries responding in this way to absolve themselves of responsibility for VE in general.

> **Examples of international CVE/ PVE bodies and programmes**
> ≡ Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies:
>   CVE Monitor Project;
> ≡ Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF);
> ≡ United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTED);
> ≡ Club de Madrid (CdM): Madrid +10
> ≡ CdM supported by European Commission: PVE: Leaders Telling a Different Story
> ≡ OSCE: United in Countering Violent Extremism (2017)

While few would deny the need to address violent extremism, underscoring the importance of CVE/PVE programmes' aims, they often fail to address its root causes. Ultimately, addressing VE is fundamentally about conflict transformation, yet CVE/PVE interventions are rarely designed to be transformative. What is truly needed to effectively address VE is the development of either CVE/PVE or other programmes that take into account the "human factors" – the community context, culture and religion, building trust with the community, fostering intra-community relationships through dialogue, finding a language of peace and peace education, etc. These are necessary in transforming a "culture of war" into a "culture of peace" (Boulding 2001), but are often left out of current CVE/PVE programme designs and implementation. The following article examines CVE/PVE programmes and the challenges they face, and looks at examples that offer alternative practices that together can provide a basis for redesigning programmes to address VE and shape transformative interventions.

2 Addressing Violent Extremism

2.1 Overview of basic approaches to CVE/PVE

Stage One: Counter- and Anti-Terrorism

The evolution of various approaches to confronting VE encountered numerous challenges. In its early stage, the traditional approach relied on counter- and anti-terrorism strategies, often involving counter-intelligence, surveillance and covert and overt military operations to eliminate active and suspected terrorists, etc. Such approaches were largely security- and military-oriented, with many strategies implemented following the terror attacks on 11 September 2001 (9/11) and evolving over the last 16 years along with new ones that emerged in the wake of later terror acts. These strategies range from anti-

Government anti-terrorism policies, such as FISA in the US (1978), pre-date 2001 by decades, but the number, variety, nature and expansiveness of many countries' post-2001 CVE strategies have increased inside and outside national borders (Haubrich 2003; Williams 2011).

terrorism legislation (both domestic and international) to direct military intervention. In the European Union, this has included a number of codified coordination efforts and operational cooperation among member states (Argomaniz 2009). In the US, the "historic 'redefinition' of the Justice Department's mission" – referred to in John Ashcroft's testimony to the House Judiciary Committee – "turned the focus of federal law enforcement from apprehending and incarcerating criminals to detecting and halting terrorist activity on American soil and abroad" (Whitehead 2002, 1086).

The military tactics used aimed to isolate terrorists and prevent them from gaining access to recruits, supplies, finance and targets (Freedman 2005, 24) or engaged in "search and destroy" tactics such as those deployed by the US in the assassination of Osama bin Laden. They also included the use of Predator drones for targeted killings of Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders (Williams 2010).

Stage Two: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)

At a later stage, the CVE[3] framework was introduced to respond to the effective recruitment strategies utilised by Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, Boko Haram and Daesh. At its core, CVE focuses on counter-recruitment strategies, targeted messaging, youth engagement strategies and religious counter-narratives to confront the spreading discourse of Daesh and Boko Haram. Intelligence continues to play a major role in CVE strategies, stressing the need for intelligence gathering and processing to identify potential threats and facilitate appropriate action (Lazarus 2005; Oliver 2006). Examples include policing strategies combined with intelligence gathering at the community level with the aim of early intervention to prevent terror acts (Bettinson 2009; Brown 2007; Pickering et al. 2007). Other examples include border security and crisis reaction, which refers to being able to handle a potential situation with numerous casualties (Oliver 2006).

Examples of IO and NGO PVE strategies

≡ 2011 UN Resolution 16/18
≡ 2012 Rabat Plan of Action (OHCHR)
≡ 2015 Fez Plan of Action (UNOtPG, KAICIID, WCC)
≡ 2015-2017 Fez Process (UNOtPG, KAICIID, WCC)

Stage Three: Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

The third evolution in responding to VE is reflected in the development of the PVE framework: agencies emphasise the need for a more comprehensive approach, with a particular emphasis on engaging local communities and providing alternative religious discourses.

PVE approaches include actions such as bringing religious leaders and organisations into the spotlight to emphasise "normal" religious practices and to help prevent radicalisation. This has led to an emphasis

KAICIID's "Social Media as a Space for Dialogue" trained hundreds of religious leaders and dialogue practitioners to use social media for the purpose of counter-narratives.

on selected leaders and organisations within the Islamic religious community as having a central role in countering VE (Nasser-Eddine et al. 2011, 47). Such actions are often fostered by international intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), such as OHCHR, the UN Office on Genocide Prevention (UNOtPG) and the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), and international NGOs such as the World Council of Churches (WCC). Their resolutions and programmes target intolerance

and discrimination based on religious affiliation and counter national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

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3 The term is a recent addition to the lexicon of counter-terrorism. The importance of extremist ideas in terrorist recruitment and radicalisation has been known for some time. But it is only in the last decade that a more sustained focus on the ideational aspects of terrorism has emerged and that CVE as a field of policy and practice has become more coherent (Romaniuk 2015).

The more recent actions by Facebook and Twitter in actively removing Daesh propaganda, beheading videos and hate speech, as well as government efforts to monitor Daesh online, are the manifestation of what was argued in the literature more than a decade ago (Brimley 2006; Kohlmann 2006). Alternatively, counter-narratives may be used, such as stressing Islam as a religion of peace and rejecting violence (Qureshi/Marsden, 2010). Other counter-narratives might include those by people who have left groups such as Daesh describing the difficulty of life, fear and general dismantling of the romantic picture painted by recruiters (Kessels 2010).

Lastly, governments, IGOs and NGOs have launched initiatives to "tackle the problem" by going to the roots, developing innumerable projects directed towards anything from development to state-building and citing challenges faced by populations due either to lack of infrastructure and opportunity or to displacement, fear and outbreaks of violence associated with failed states (Cordesman 2006; von Hippel 2008). Development organisations may not work under the pretext of CVE or PVE directly, but indirectly do so through programmes that aim to alleviate poverty and develop infrastructure and democratic institutions. The hypothesis is that the successful establishment of sustainable democratic institutions goes hand in hand with countering terrorism (Briggs 2010).

The government agency focus beyond traditional security and military approaches is a much-needed development; such efforts are necessary for effective responses to both ideological and security challenges posed by the various groups that promote violent extremism. These efforts have been enhanced by the support of IGOs, NGOs and globally recognised think tanks. The various cross-border partnerships and alliances have strengthened the capacity of governments, [4]especially those which lack the local infrastructure to deal with such militant groups (Newman 2007).

Integrating CVE/PVE programmes into the well-established international development and humanitarian aid programmes has also resulted in more systematic implementation of these programmes.

2.2 CVE/PVE is not the cure

The above approaches, while abundant and varied, face a number of criticisms. One of the major concerns is the possible (in many cases very real) infringement upon civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, in longstanding liberal democracies (Pearson/Busst 2006) or the specific targeting/profiling of one group, such as the singular focus on Muslims in the United Kingdom's CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Thomas 2010). In addition to the policy implications, there are various gaps in the research on CVE/PVE (Romaniuk 2015).

Push Factors:
poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, sectarianism, government oppression, lack of opportunity, etc.

Pull Factors:
monetary benefit, protection or safety for a person's family, sense of belonging, revenge, personal empowerment, religious rewards, etc.

While the amount of research being conducted is growing, it is still sparse compared to the number of programmes being implemented by various agencies. The limited scope and volume of systematic evaluation of these programmes are especially problematic (Koehler 2016). Empirical data directly relating to CVE/PVE is also lacking, especially in community contexts, which continues to be a major challenge in the design, reporting and analysis of these initiatives.

Although the study of drivers that lead individuals to join VE groups has developed a great deal in the last decade, the majority of these studies focus on generic factors such as poverty, government policies, extremist religious discourses or personality traits. The tendency to seek a universal formula to explain and detect drivers of VE has led to the lack of serious consideration of the impact and uniqueness of local contexts and local actors in shaping the dynamics of the drivers. Many

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4   The UN-based Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTED) has put together five policy papers on guidelines for UN member cooperation against terror networks, to be found on its website. Security Council Resolution 2253 (2015) reinforced the existing international counter-financing of terrorism framework by calling on member states to move decisively to cut off the flow of funds, other financial assets and economic resources to Daesh.

studies emphasise the push rather than pull factors in their diagnosis of the drivers. A great deal of effort is also made to involve member states or their political representatives, resulting in the politicisation of both CVE and PVE that risks a greater degree of community distrust (an agenda for political rather than community gain) and therefore a lower level of acceptance of these efforts.

In addition to these macro policy aspects, there are various CVE/PVE programmatic challenges that hinder lasting results, including:

1. Securitisation of CVE/PVE and the question of whose security: Although security and intelligence gathering are strong drivers behind many counter-terrorism programmes, CVE/PVE initiatives are also influenced by the drive to enhance global, regional, national and local security. A number of projects, especially community early-warning programmes and other forms of CVE/PVE, aim to gather intelligence rather than taking genuine interest in community development practices. "...While the objective behind CVE is laudable, in practice, many of the efforts have been problematic and their impact limited or even negative in some cases. One of the key issues has been the tension felt by many communities that CVE initiatives were not there to support them but rather to spy on them..." (Houry 2017). Even those programmes initiated for local capacity building (education, elections, democracy, youth rehabilitation and vocational training, etc.) are being reframed with CVE/PVE language and terminology. Enhancing regional and international security is also considered a primary measurement of the success of many of these programmes (for example, expecting and training imams to become law enforcement agents). Furthermore,

> Many US- and European-led programmes in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger are mainly aimed at countering the expansion of Daesh and Al-Qaeda in the Sahel region.

policy-makers in European and American agencies often hold briefings about intervention programmes to determine whether these programmes actually contribute to their security. Such programmatic rationale is easily detected by beneficiaries of these interventions. As veteran participants in local community development programmes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have repeatedly said: "We know that you are worried about American security and not our security; that is why you came here to work with us. Why do international agencies suddenly care about VE when we have had political violence and mass crimes for decades?"[5]

2. Externally imposed programming and designs: International donors' and government agencies' priority on CVE/PVE and the urgency to counteract terrorist movements in their regions affect the impact

> Does focusing on changing Islamic religious narratives, by publicly putting on symbolic gestures of diversity or international conferences to denounce VE in the name of religion, really add value to CVE/PVE initiatives?

and sustainability of these programmes; many programmes are externally imposed and intended to carry out the externals' own political agendas. Programme designers face pressure to rapidly produce success indicators, causing programme designs to fall short of long-term effectiveness. Their designs specifically target selected communities and neglect wider stakeholders who are also in need of such programmes.[6]

3. Real added value of CVE/PVE initiatives compared to structural factors: When these initiatives are presented as a cure and often as an effective response, they sometimes ignore the deep-rooted infrastructural factors driving violent extremism. The question to ask is what the added value is of these programmes, considering factors such as collapsing educational institutions, corruption, discriminatory governance and lack of a national vision, lack of policies to ensure the basic collective and individual freedoms, control and

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5   Voiced by community leaders from Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Kurdistan, Jordan and Lebanon during workshops on education for peace that took place between 2011-2017.

6   This criticism was expressed by several officers in Niger and Chad between 2012-2103 during various consultations on the effectiveness of peace and development programmes.

censorship of media and territorial occupation systems. Are national and international agencies willing or seriously interested in confronting these issues? Can international agencies deal with these issues, which directly and indirectly impact youth in these contexts? How many – and what kind of – foreign interventions are needed to make a transformative change in these contexts?

2.3 From denial to an integrative approach: engaging religious agencies and marginalised actors

The lack of sincere engagement with or even denial of religion and its identity components has been a programmatic limitation of many CVE/PVE initiatives. As a result, in most cases IGOs and government agencies have historically relied on secular international, regional or local civil society entities to implement their programmes (Abu-Nimer/Kadayifci 2008). The lack of engagement with faith-based organisations (FBOs) has been documented not only in CVE/PVE but also with programmes on peacebuilding, democracy, post-conflict reconstruction, etc. (Abu-Nimer 2003, Abu-Nimer/Kadayifci 2008). Denying the need for positive, constructive engagement of religious actors has been, until recently, a characteristic of many international policy agencies (Gopin 2000, Appleby 2000, Abu-Nimer 2003).

Not recognising the need to engage religious agencies is largely due to the fact that most organisations operate within secular or non-religious governance frameworks. Thus their officers and managers are not aware of the need to engage religious leaders in the community. When they design their programmes, they therefore tend to build partnerships with secular civil society groups and professionals, who share with them the same secular ideological assumptions of promoting diversity, human rights and sustainable development. Beyond the lack of awareness, there is basic resistance towards engaging religious leaders by policy and development practitioners, who are themselves secular and believe that religion and religious institutions should be confined to their primary function of providing theological and spiritual services to communities. Additionally, they assume that any engagement beyond these parameters constitutes a violation of the principle of separation of church and state. What is missing in such approaches, however, is an authentic read of the local context, including major players and power relations, which would reveal that religion and FBOs are relevant beyond mere theological issues.

Nonetheless, there has been progress in recent years towards engagement of religious agencies and FBOs. The steps towards engaging religious agencies strongly resemble those of other areas: racial and ethnic studies, gender, peacebuilding and other fields working with marginalised minorities. As in other areas before, the process of engaging FBOs and religious agencies in the field of international policy-making, including CVE/PVE, is evolving from denial towards a more integrative approach, which could be described as one fundamental necessity of a transformative approach. These steps are as follows:

Instrumentalised ('token') engagement: In response to the pressure exerted on the centres of power (supporters of hegemonic discourse and/or dominant majority institutions) to include women and ethnic and racial minorities, new but slow steps of engagement were taken. The early steps were mostly in the form of symbolic involvement of gender, racial minorities and now religious agencies or paying lip service to peacebuilding discourse (the token minority representative syndrome) through programmes that highlight only the harmonious and ritualistic features of the relations and avoid any structural aspects of the conflict.[7]

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7   Peacebuilding for the purpose of this article is defined as an umbrella term that refers to intervention processes aiming at bridging the gap between conflicting parties pre, during, and post conflict (those can include conflict resolution processes such as mediation, facilitation, arbitration, problem solving, and other types of peace activities such as dialogue, peace education, nonviolence campaigns, etc.).
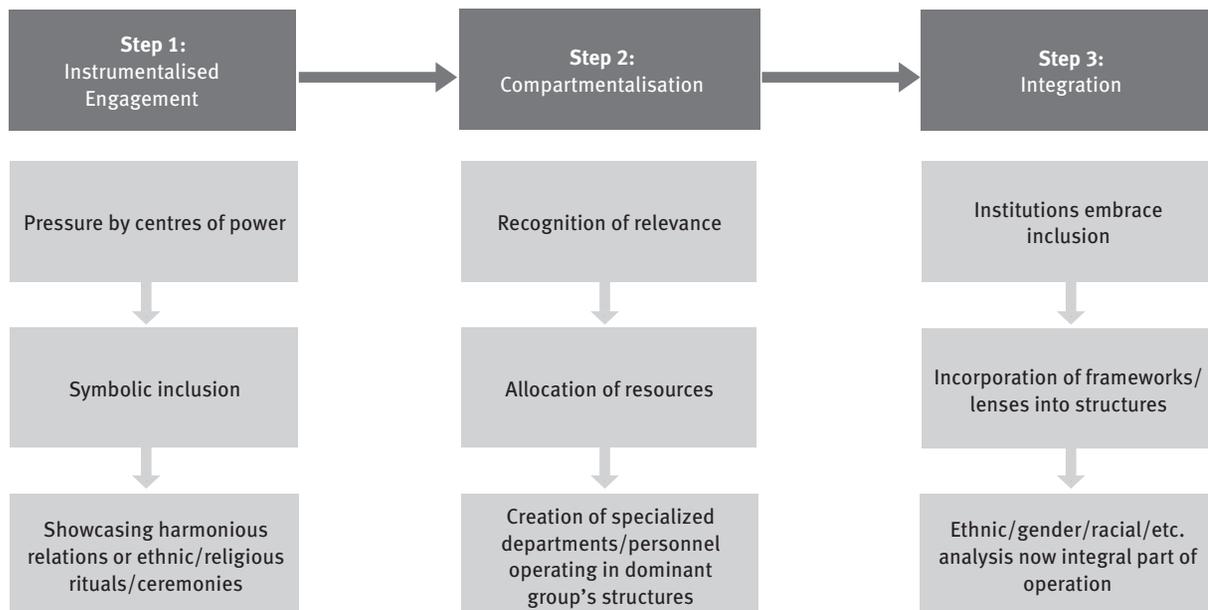
Step 1: Instrumentalised Engagement		Step 2: Compartmentalisation		Step 3: Integration
Pressure by centres of power		Recognition of relevance		Institutions embrace inclusion
Symbolic inclusion		Allocation of resources		Incorporation of frameworks/ lenses into structures
Showcasing harmonious relations or ethnic/religious rituals/ceremonies		Creation of specialized departments/personnel operating in dominant group's structures		Ethnic/gender/racial/etc. analysis now integral part of operation

Figure 1: From instrumentalisation to integration

Compartmentalisation: The dominant discourse and its institutions partially recognise gender analysis, racial and ethnic perspectives, peace and conflict analysis, etc. as relevant or necessary frameworks. During this phase, the institutions might even allocate resources or personnel to handle race, ethnicity, gender or peace, while continuing business as usual in the remaining units or in the dominant institutional culture. Academic or policy institutions thus create ethnic, racial, gender or peace studies departments. However, the primary paradigm and its operational structure continue to exist in the dominant group's norms. The racial, ethnic, etc. structure continues to be exclusive in its functions.[8]

Integration: Some institutions have moved from the compartmentalisation phase to the integration phase, in which ethnic, racial, gender or peacebuilding frameworks and lenses have become an integral part of the structure. Their affiliation is no longer an obstacle to their integration or advancement in the structure. This means that academic and policy institutes have adopted ethnic, gender, racial, etc. analysis as an integral part of their framework and operation.[9]

CIDA, DFID, GIZ, the EU, SIDA, USAID, UNDP, UNFPA, the World Bank and other agencies have either initiated new programmes to engage FBOs or begun adjusting existing CVE/PVE programmes to engage with religious stakeholders (Karam 2016).

Religious leaders, institutions and symbols are increasingly part of CVE/ PVE programmes. In recent years, there has been an increasing desire among international donors, government agencies, IGOs and NGOs to work with religious actors, based on the realisation and assumption that in order to effectively respond to VE it is necessary to engage with religious agencies, especially at local community levels. However, and unfortunately, in many cases, the nature and scale of the engagement remain at the level of *instrumentalisation*. The role of religious actors is confined to providing theological interpretations aimed at legitimising

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8 Between 2014-17, the author facilitated over 25 consultations with policy-makers and religious leaders in the context of UN, EU, OSCE, African Union and various government agencies. In each of these settings, religious leaders wondered whether the recent intense increase in policy-makers' interest in engaging religious agencies to support their fight against VE would become an institutional commitment to work with the religious agencies on other issues, building long-term partnerships that could contribute to the transformation of troubled and complicated relationships between secular and religious stakeholders and their respective institutions.

9 The institutional implications of such transformation are the fundamental changes in the balance of power, decision-making centres, representation on boards, allocation of resources, public discourse, etc.

the secular framework of programmes in CVE/PVE. Such examples include: requesting religious leaders from Yemen to provide Quranic verses or hadiths supporting democratic values for a youth training manual on participatory democracy developed by an American team for youth training in the Balkans in 2009; or inviting Grand Muftis, Patriarchs or other religious leaders to ceremonial openings of CVE/PVE programmes, then implementing secular tools. This symbolic engagement of religious agencies and leaders with CVE/PVE programmes can have negative implications for the legitimacy and credibility of these leaders, particularly when the programme's "securitisation" agenda surfaces. For example, Chadian religious leaders questioned their imams about the agenda behind the Peace through Development (PDVII) programme initiated by USAID from 2012-2016.[10]

> Since 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland has been committed to strengthening the engagement with religious leaders by founding and supporting a new network: the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

With the realisation that religion and religious agencies are necessary partners in responding to CVE/PVE, new initiatives have been formulated to build the capacity of the international agencies and national political and diplomatic institutions. New religious literacy courses (basic religion courses) are thus being offered as part of junior foreign service officers' training. The Foreign Service Institute in Virginia, Swiss government agencies and some academic and professional training institutes have begun offering courses on politics and religion or diplomacy and religion.

The process of *compartmentalisation* of engagement with religious agencies or FBOs in policy-making institutions is recently reflected in various international and national agencies. An example is the 2013 decision by the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, to open the first State Department Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, dedicated to partnering with global faith communities and leaders on priority issues such as Arab transitions, Middle East peace, climate change and disability rights. With the support of the Obama Administration, the Office grew significantly (over 30 staff members). However, the new administration has reduced its capacity and limited its budget and operation to a few officers.

Other national agencies that followed the compartmentalisation model – such as the Finnish and Swiss Ministries of Foreign Affairs – have created special units or assigned special officers or envoys to monitor and promote engagement with FBOs and other religious agencies.

A unique example are UN agencies, such as UNDP and Alliance of Civilizations, which have further evolved their engagement with FBOs to an institutional level; in some cases, new platforms have been established, such as the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Work (UNIATF). The inter-agency model of operation is certainly a stronger mechanism that allows wider engagement of FBOs with many UN bodies. However, the lack of resources and structures for UNIATF reduces its capacity to fully promote systematic engagement with religion in all UN agencies, while the lack of enforcement capacity leaves FBO engagement as an option and reduces monitoring or documentation processes.

Unfortunately, there are no examples or practices in international or national policy-making institutes to date that would illustrate systematic and institutional *integration* of engagement with FBOs or religious actors in their entire operation. The secular nature of these IGOs and their member states is certainly one of the obstacles hindering institutionalisation of engagement.

Additionally, FBOs and religious agencies which advocate working with policy-makers on CVE/PVE have yet to develop comprehensive, systematic strategies to structure their engagement. Clear strategies and tool kits on how best to build mutual engagement on PVE/CVE without threatening each other's (religious and secular) identity and constituencies are lacking. Furthermore, like policy-makers and

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10 PDVI and II were launched by the American development agency with the intention of countering the risk posed by Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Sahel region. The programme was framed for American policy-makers as part of a larger counter-terrorism campaign sponsored by US government and focused on strengthening local security and military forces, borders and intelligence gathering. However, on the ground, no direct link was made between these two types of interventions.

development agencies, traditional and conservative religious agencies often see their role as confined to providing religious and spiritual guidance to their followers; they thus avoid engaging in their wider communities' social, political or "earthly" affairs.

Internal limitations may also hinder the process of engagement and include: the lack of capacity in utilising tools to engage religious agencies, and the reliance on secular peacebuilding tools for interreligious peacebuilding. Regarding the first point, the field of interreligious peacebuilding, which includes intra-religious intervention and secular religious relations programmes, has only recently begun conceptually theorising its practices, and while there are efforts to do so (Little 2007, Appleby 2000, Lederach 1997, Abu-Nimer 2001 & 2003, Gopin 2000, etc.), significant gaps continue to exist in the field, especially regarding its theoretical and disciplinary foundation. Most literature relies on anecdotal and abstract conceptualisation rather than empirical and systematic research to build grounded theories of interreligious peacebuilding. A similar challenge characterises the tools offered to policy-makers and development and relief agencies on integrating religious agencies in their operation. While many practitioners in many workshops embrace the need to engage religious agencies, they are often not given adequate tools to do so. In fact, in many cases, the trainer or the interreligious peacebuilder offers the same tools that any secular peacebuilding agency would share. The problem with this is that they may not reflect the methodological uniqueness of interreligious peacebuilding and thus are not fully applicable, relevant or useful in aiding interreligious peacebuilding processes or peacebuilding processes which need to include religious actors and dimensions.

Interreligious peacebuilding is unique in the depth of its sensitivity for the participants since religious identity relates to the core being of the person and his/her calling and meaning in life. Any mistake or mischaracterisation of the person's identity can thus provoke a serious reaction among the participants. The existence of the sacred and profane or prohibited in many religious practices adds to this sensitivity and reduces the margin of error for each of the participants and practitioners, especially if they belong to different faith groups.

Nevertheless, there has been progress on this journey. Today, few policy-makers and religious entities can publicly deny the need for mutual engagement to effectively respond to VE and while few entities can

In building interreligious peacebuilding programmes, there are several guidelines to keep in mind:

1. **Integrate spirituality and faith language** in the programme design and framing of the intervention. For example, when we invite religious leaders to work on a specific project related to health or women's/girls' education, we should not shy away from integrating an intentional space for prayer or other rituals.

2. **Provide space for religious actors to utilise their religious rituals and sacred texts** to enhance the comprehension, motivation or application of the programme in their communities.

3. **Include intra-religious dialogue** and platforms that focus on internal and critical examination of the current and historical religious interpretations that facilitate the justification of VE. Intra-faith forums can also be a tool to avoid the classic limitation of "preaching to the converted", by allowing the inclusion of less moderate voices, in particular those who oppose dialogue with outsiders.

4. **Adopt an institutional approach** instead of creating "individual stars": The hierarchical and authoritative nature of many religious institutions can be a unique feature that often impedes the capacity of the participants and partners to fully engage with the policy-makers and development agencies without the full endorsement of their highest authorities. Seeking endorsement is thus a first step to ensure institutional and sustained impact. The historical background (colonialism, communism, civil war, tribal and ethnic structures, etc.) and current conditions (authoritarian governments, educational systems, regional conflicts, international interventions, extremist groups, etc.) also have negatively affected Islamic religious institutions and their capacity to respond – they therefore need to be empowered. Without working through the religious institutions (formal and informal), the current top-down approaches to CVE are also fairly limited in reaching the relevant Islamic religious leaders.

3 Dilemmas and Obstacles

3.1 Islamisation of CVE/PVE

As indicated above, CVE/PVE campaigns are largely rooted in a response to Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Daesh and the many other smaller regional groups which claim Islam as their basis and manipulate Islamic identity and its components to justify exclusion, violence and destruction against others (both Muslims and non-Muslims). Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the victims are Muslims in Muslim countries, the threat of these groups, particularly to European and American societies and interests, is seen as the primary motivation behind policy and priority change.

Muslim and Arab communities widely believe and discuss this assumption. In consequence, when international agencies refer to CVE/PVE, this is interpreted as a code for countering exclusively or primarily the discourse of groups affiliated with Islam and not Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism or violent secular ideologies.

This perception is confirmed by the sheer number, scale and focus of CVE/PVE programmes implemented by these international, regional, national and local agencies in Muslim countries. While such programmes exist, it is rare to identify or give wide media coverage and recognition to a programme that addresses VE motivated by the Jewish settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, white supremacist groups in the US, Sri Lankan and Myanmar Buddhism, or Indian Hinduism in Gujarat or Kashmir.

Obviously, the threat and the scale of the terrorist groups motivated by their "Islamic ideologies" are being reported and portrayed as far more intense and widespread. Yet the fact that other forms of VE are not being addressed seriously by policy-makers and donors reduces the legitimacy, credibility and trust in the intentions of the message and messenger.

The Islamisation of CVE/PVE is also evident when policy-makers and media fail to distinguish between genuine Islamic teachings/values and the negative/destructive interpretations espoused by the VE groups. Many mainstream media and politicians, especially in European, American and even in some Muslim contexts, have consistently and systematically utilised certain VE framings that generalise and stereotype Islam and Muslims (Ali et al. 2011; CAIR 2016).[11] The most discussed question in such media outlets is: "Does Islam support VE and terrorism?" At the same time, the attacks on Muslims and Islam are often neglected or marginalised in Western media. Such an approach has directly fed into the growing Islamophobia in the Western hemisphere.[12]

In general, public de-Islamisation of CVE/PVE approaches is an essential step towards a more effective and credible response to the threat posed by groups which promote violent extremism in the name of Islam. The de-Islamisation approach can include various elements:

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11 This includes the mainstream media's naming of violent acts committed by Muslims, even if they are lone wolf attacks, as "terror attacks", and the general avoidance of such terminology when the person who committed the act is not a Muslim, in which case attention is more likely to focus on the perpetrator's mental health. This is a recurring issue after mass shootings or bombings and is widely discussed in non-traditional media sources (such as social media).

12 The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is one of several organisations which monitor groups that promote Islamophobia, doing so through its Islamophobia Network.

To an outsider, jihad is often interpreted as "religious war", whereas jihad means "struggling or striving". In the Quran, jihad has many meanings, not at all associated with war but rather with an individual striving in the path of God, in other words the personal struggle to live according to principles of faith (see Quranic verses 49:15, 9:20, 9:88).

First, avoid linking Islam as a religion or Muslims as people and communities with CVE/PVE campaigns, for example by avoiding the use of terms like "Islamic terrorism", "Muslim terrorists", "jihadists", etc. This can help delink Islam from VE.

Second, systematically provide examples and illustrations that most, if not all, other major religious and faith traditions have had groups within them which manipulated their faith and tradition by justifying violence and exclusion. Members of these groups are also not representative of these faiths and traditions and the vast majority of their respective adherents. In fact, massive atrocities have been committed by misusing religions (including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism) throughout modern history. This does not mean providing legitimacy for the acts of violence, but making sure they are put into historical and theological perspective.

Third, delink religion from the CVE/PVE debate by focusing the primary analysis not on religion and religious actors, but on the root causes that produce structural violence in any given context. These root causes include the nature of the governance system, institutional corruption, social class divides, gaps between have and have nots, tribal divisions and loyalties, security/military structures and operations, weak educational systems, social norms and structures that support all forms of exclusion (gender and patriarchal), basic human rights violations, etc.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Niger, there are root causes that will continue to generate violence and exclusion even if all religious actors and agencies in these countries are converted to the discourse of pluralism and diversity and nonviolence.

When CVE/PVE programmes are implemented in conceptual and practical isolation from the above factors, their effect can be limited and unsustainable. In many of these contexts the problem is generated by various drivers and requires a multi-layered and multi-stakeholder approach, not further segmentation and sector-based divides such as those which arise when CVE/PVE programmes are focused only on youth, women or religious leaders but neglect to engage other sectors in the community. In fact, the exclusive religious framing of VE can contribute to the preservation of the status quo, the same order that produced it. When explaining problems in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Palestine, etc. as primarily religious or sectarian, international agencies are de facto supporting the internal structures that generate political and social violence. CVE/PVE programmes that neglect these factors and exclusively focus on launching initiatives to revise Quranic interpretations, train imams on values of peace and conflict resolution, issuing public denunciations of violence, etc. are unable to gain legitimacy in the local communities. Instead, participants in these programmes react by stating that the problem is not religious and "religion has nothing to do with it". Yet the implementers insist on religious framing of the problems in the community.

Other beneficiaries of these programmes have voiced the suspicion that linking violence in the community and country to religion is in fact contributing to the intractability of the conflict and preventing genuine change. Such hypotheses have been confirmed by studies and analyses of fragile state systems, in which the problem lies not in the religion or religious interpretation, but rather in symptoms of a weak central state that does not provide services to its citizens (OECD 2016).

3.2 Institutional responses to CVE/PVE in a Muslim context: Locked in securitisation

Similar to European and American contexts, policy-makers in Muslim countries have joined the global CVE/PVE initiative campaign. This is reflected in a growing number of special centres and initiatives launched by many of these governments. In addition, policy-makers and security agencies have mobilised religious leadership and institutions (religious endowments, ministries of religion, Dar al-Ifta, religious education

institutes such as Al-Azhar, Al Azytouna and Al Akhawain) in the fight against Daesh, Al-Qaeda and Boko Haram. As a result of this mobilisation, we have witnessed significant increases in the number of religious fatwas (decrees), conferences and statements that denounce acts of terrorism carried out by these groups.[13] The security motivation reflected in the design, media coverage, etc. has cast a significant shadow on these meetings. Some religious representatives whisper: "Are we an extension arm of the security apparatus?"[14]

Additionally, new centres have been established to this end, such as Sawab (True), a centre sponsored by the Foreign Ministry of the United Arab Emirates that focuses on the fight against Daesh. Its programmes aim to strengthen the capacity of media, social media, women, youth, etc. and to counter Daesh's recruitment efforts. Al-Marsad (An Observer) is another media monitoring initiative supported by Al-Azhar, one of the leading Islamic theological educational institutes in Egypt. Their aim is to monitor VE messages issued by Daesh and other groups in eight languages and to selectively respond to Daesh's religious interpretations by setting the record straight in terms of authentic Islamic theological discourse. A third example, Hedayah (The Right Path) Centre based in Abu Dhabi, was created as an IGO to focus on counter-terrorism. Similar to other organisations in the field, it has also moved to focus on CVE research and training in various parts of the world.

There is no doubt that these organisations launched by and operated through Muslim governments are much needed to support the public discourse of anti-exclusion and to counter the manipulation of religion to justify violence. Nevertheless, they remain focused on the securitisation of CVE/PVE campaigns rather than a human security framework. Their approach is not far from other CVE/PVE operations that have failed to delink religion from their CVE/PVE analytical framework. In fact, some continue to link religion with violence and look at the community solely as a source of data and intelligence gathering to help security agencies' work to ensure order. The sustainable development community approach is certainly lacking in such operations. Additionally, since none of these centres deal with root causes of VE, their target audience and effect might also be limited.

> Human security framework principles include the protection and empowerment framework. Human security promotes people-centred,comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented measures that seek to reduce the likelihood of conflicts, help overcome the obstacles to development and promote human rights for all.
>
> http://www.un.org/humansecurity/human-security-unit/human-security-approach

Although Muslim formal governmental institutional responses continue to be overwhelmingly rooted in the securitisation approach, there are a few examples that also reflect the potential role that religious agencies and actors can play in this context. Such examples aim to spread a culture of peace and promote religious diversity and pluralism, such as the newly launched Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams Morchidines and Morchidates (male and female spiritual guides) in Morocco[15], geared toward training imams in CVE by instructing them in values of openness and tolerance. However, similar to CVE/PVE programmes, these interreligious initiatives are still not organically or systematically linked to the grassroots and remain under the general auspices of the governments and their political agendas. Additionally, they struggle in their efforts to delink their operations and methodologies from the "security-oriented" or "defensive Islam" CVE/PVE approaches. Another example is the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies which started under the leadership of Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah in 2014. The Forum has attracted high-level Muslim leaders and is committed to promoting the peace idealist paradigm despite pressure from policy-makers and governments, who continuously push the CVE/PVE agenda.

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13 www.kaiciid.org has a list of over 150 statements by Muslim organisations denouncing violence in the name of religion and especially Islam.

14 Due to the sensitivity of this information, specific attribution of this type of statement cannot be made publicly.

15 http://moroccoonthemove.com/2016/05/19/moroccos-imam-academy-leading-way-combating-radical-islam-middle-east/#sthash.LdHT2a3o.dpbs

KAICIID serves as an international example. The International Dialogue Centre is the only IGO governed by a multi-religious institution, a Board of Directors representing Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Using dialogue as its methodology, the Centre builds its interreligious peace and reconciliation programmes on the assumptions that there is a gap between policy-makers and religious agencies and that religious actors have a positive role to play in contributing to solutions to challenges facing the world today.

4 A Peacebuilding Response to VE: An Alternative Approach for Bridging the Gap

The above-mentioned limitations to CVE/PVE approaches and public perception within Muslim communities in particular constitute serious challenges for peacebuilding practitioners and agencies.

For peacebuilding in general and interreligious peacebuilding in particular, there are certain challenges, limitations and implications to adopting CVE/PVE approaches, terminology, assumptions and methodology on a community level, as well as in larger social and political contexts of peace work.

Peacebuilding as a field emerges from the "Idealist" rather than the "Realist" power paradigm (power politics or *Realpolitik*) that dominates international diplomacy and international relations. Its values and methodologies in responding to conflicts are thus based on human relationships, justice, compassion, collaboration and cooperation, mutual recognition, nonviolence and emphasis on the role of non-state actors. A "Realist approach", by contrast, is based on the assumption that the world is anarchic and only a power balance establishes order and stability, that states and individuals' primary objectives are to pursue and preserve self-interest, state sovereignty, competition and force, and that states are the only legitimate entity for representation, etc. (Jervis 1999). CVE is based on the "Realist" paradigm. It sees security and order as the end outcome, is developed by the state to serve the state's interests and pays little attention to justice, cooperation, nonviolence, etc.

> **Idealism:** " [the] plan of the liberal democratic state is based on a formula that seems to beg for application in the international sphere. Might not nations enter into a social contract just as individuals supposedly once did? Why should domestic governments alone be founded on nonviolent principles? Why stop at national borders? Shouldn't a system of cooperative power, the key to resolving disputes without violence, be extended to the limits of the earth? Thought glides smoothly and easily to this conclusion."
> (Schell 2003, 265-266.)

Thus, when peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue practitioners uncritically adopt CVE/PVE language and methodology, they, by default, operate against their own "idealist" paradigm. Realism's pragmatic approach does not change the hearts and minds of people and communities; rather, it aims to restore the asymmetric situation present prior to the violence. The framework of such interventions does not include conflict analysis or nonviolence peace mapping, which require identification of the drivers of violence: governance, corruption, foreign intervention, North-South dynamics and possible nonviolent community-based responses. The language of relationship building, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation are not part of the design, leaving out the "human" aspect so integral to community ownership of such programmes. Such values are an integral part of intervention programmes even when the focus is on development, relief or capacity building for local stakeholders.

Another dilemma with CVE programmes for interreligious peacebuilding is the lack of spirituality or faith. Interfaith dialogue, when carried out by the "Idealist" paradigm, is rooted in faith and spiritual values of the community and participants. While many CVE/PVE interventions focus on the mechanics of peacebuilding and interreligious dialogue, the language of faith is absent from these meetings, and the space constructed by the practitioner or the agency is often framed as a place for learning technical skills and for the individual to become an agent of change who works and protects the state and its government agencies.

These secular, security-driven CVE/PVE solutions have proved antagonistic to religion and religious identity in part by reflecting the assumption that VE groups and their communities are self-defined as theologically-based. Moreover, when there has been engagement with religious leaders, it has often been problematic, like the above-mentioned instrumentalisation of religious leaders, meant to show community engagement, but still excluding religious leaders from decision-making processes. This reality is not lost on community members and religious adherents, who often look to their religious leaders for guidance and answers.

> Asking Muslim leaders for a blessing or to issue a fatwa in support of a policy and not including them in policy- making is **not** community engagement.

To bridge the gap between the secular and the religious and to increase the likelihood of finding solutions that will work, there is a mutual responsibility in which religious leaders and community actors must be genuinely involved in initiating alternative framing for the CVE/PVE approaches used in their communities, especially when they are externally imposed. Religious leaders and religious peacemakers not only have the well-earned trust of their communities, but they are also able to use their religious identity to positively shift perceptions along the conflict-peace continuum.

Some peacebuilders argue that it is possible to engage with CVE/PVE programmes and maintain, to some extent, the "Idealist" discourse of interreligious peacebuilding.[16] Many peacemakers involved in CVE/PVE programmes indicate that in general, the majority continue to do the same work and use the same framing; however, for purposes of funding and security approval, they began labelling their work as CVE/PVE.[17]

Principles used to guide peacebuilding practitioners in a Quranic school intervention in Chad and Niger:

≡ Assurance that Islam and religion in general have positive values, especially that the main message is peace and justice.
≡ The Islamic peace education framework is the only relevant way to engage the Madrassa system.
≡ Islam and Muslims are misperceived and misunderstood by non-Muslims.
≡ There is an intra-Muslim challenge which prevents or obstructs change.
≡ Building trust and rapport with the teachers is a necessary step that should not be compromised.
≡ Quranic school teachers are the experts in Quranic interpretations, not the external team of trainers.
≡ The trainers will not impose any change, but all the work will be done by the teachers themselves and any change will be made with the full agreement and consensus of the group.
≡ The intervention should include improvement of school infrastructure and conditions.
≡ Maintaining Quranic schools' framework and core curricula, while avoiding theological debates.

(Abu-Nimer et al. 2016).

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16 In an attempt to capture this process, 25 Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding International Peacemakers identified certain trends in "successful/high-impact" techniques. Many included existing techniques and framing, in addition to some new approaches. See the Peacemakers seminar July 2016 report, https://tanenbaum.org/
17 This was observed by many FBO participants in KAICIID meetings (2015-2017, especially in Nigeria) and by UNIATF.

When interreligious peacebuilding practitioners or organisations are engaged in CVE/PVE initiatives, there are various principles that can guide their work to ensure that the core values and assumptions are maintained without compromising their credibility.

For example, several principles were integral in implementing a programme by the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice in Chad and Niger to enhance the capacity of Quranic school teachers to integrate values of peace, diversity and nonviolence. The principles were derived taking into account the sensitive context: the participants are under continuous threat from Boko Haram, affiliated groups and other political and religious factions which oppose any foreign non-Muslim intervention in their context; participant schools are also marginalised and neglected by their governments, lack basic classroom amenities and are misperceived and labelled as hubs for terrorism and violent extremism. The teachers and their principals were highly suspicious of the programme's intentions and motivations so it was necessary to build trust.

It is obvious that these principles are not new to participatory development or effective peacebuilding practices. Nevertheless, they were implemented with a commitment to empower the Quranic school teachers and with respect for their faith, providing a dialogical space that allows transparency, honesty and critical thinking.

5 Conclusions and Implications for Peacebuilding and CVE/PVE

Policy-makers, donors and other communities of practice (development and humanitarian relief) have moved from denying and avoiding the inclusion of religious leaders and institutions to exploring the relevance and feasibility of engaging religious leaders in their operations.

CVE/PVE has also evolved to become one of the main avenues that religious leaders and interreligious peacebuilding practitioners are expected to engage with. In the context of the mounting pressure from states, international donors and IGOs, maintaining the core peacebuilding paradigm values and ethics (especially interreligious dialogue and peace) is a current challenge. Torn between further marginalisation due to lack of resources, changes of donors' agendas or loss of relevance among their constituencies, peacebuilding practitioners have to make hard choices in terms of their engagement with the CVE/PVE "industry".[18]

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from the experience of advocating for a greater engagement of religious leaders with both policy-makers and development and relief practitioners and ensuring their credibility and connectivity to communities.

1. **Follow the principle of inclusivity** in representation by insisting on multi-religious and multi-intra-faith group designs. In any given conflict that has a religious dimension, there are many religious entities and representations in each region which need to be included in the process.

2. **Keep it real:** When interfaith and faith-based representatives and policy-makers meet, they often like to emphasise a discourse of harmony based on the notion that there is or was strong and peaceful coexistence between religions in the context. This tendency to avoid discussion of controversial issues, especially those relating to national policies regarding religious freedom, self-determination, etc., can damage the authenticity of the programme for participants who are affected by the conflict on a daily basis.

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18   A term used by some peacebuilders, referring to the pressure they experience to incorporate CVE frameworks in framing their proposals to secure funding, as well as to the very high level of international and national spending on CVE/PVE programmes.

3. **Delve deeper** into analysing structures of violence, not only the symptoms. Insist on analysis of the root causes of the problem. Ensure that the participants are able to understand and explain their short- and long-term solutions. This also includes the deeper analysis of religious identity and its components as possible aspects of the structures of violence.

4. **Integrate a "culture of peace" discourse:**[19] The interreligious peacebuilding network is an integral part of the global movement and actions to achieve a culture of peace and challenge the Realist paradigm that assumes selfishness, competition and violence as a necessary part of human nature. Allocating a programmatic space for a "culture of peace" discourse injects optimism and human connectedness.

5. **Adopt a language of faith** as a way to capture the spirit of the initiative. Using mainly technical and mechanical or security approaches to peace and conflict resolution affects religious leaders' credibility. When interreligious peacebuilders avoid their own language of faith, derived from their spiritual and religious traditions, they lose part of their constituency.

6. **Adopt human security lenses:** When working in interreligious peacebuilding, use a human security framework instead of the narrow military and Realist security framework. Human security strategies and analytical frameworks can assist in preventing the silencing and manipulation of communities through the security-driven CVE/PVE agenda.

7. **Engage policy-makers** in interreligious peacebuilding designs: Currently there is a historic opening in many political systems to engage religious agencies and FBOs. This is an opportunity for mutual learning and exchanges that can break stereotypes, build trust and foster beneficial working relationships between the two worlds of religion and politics.

8. **De-Islamise interreligious peacebuilding** work by not only including other faith groups in the design and framing of the issue but also by seriously examining other drivers of conflicts in the given context.

9. **Develop practical interreligious peacebuilding tools** that can respond effectively to challenges when dealing with policy officers and programmers who lack basic religious literacy, causing them to be tense and apprehensive when asked to approach or engage religious agencies. Building tools and frameworks that reflect the uniqueness of interreligious peacebuilding, as mentioned earlier, can bridge this gap.

10. In addition to the obvious approaches to state-building, both institutional (governance, rule of law, education, etc.) and local (religious and cultural), **include methods based on peace, dialogue and forgiveness, which are necessary for CVE/PVE to become a transformative intervention**. We cannot address the deep-rooted, intractable and structural forms of violence in MENA and elsewhere without making serious attempts to build trust in the message and messengers.

The above features require interreligious peacebuilding practitioners to be equipped with specific tools to allow them to access religious communities and to facilitate their engagement with other partners. This will build peace and harmony within and among their diverse constituencies and enable them to cope with the pressure of imposing CVE/PVE frameworks on their communities.

Finally, it is essential to recognise the importance of recent mutual collaborations and outreach to interreligious and intra-religious agencies of peace and dialogue by policy-makers (reflected in the hundreds of conferences, training workshops, research projects being held or launched every month around the globe in concerted CVE/PVE efforts). This has genuine potential to bring about a historic shift in national and global strategies for responding to social, economic and political problems. This is especially true if interreligious peacebuilding agencies are capable of sustaining their efforts and engaging wider audiences among their followers while avoiding the pitfalls of many of the current CVE/PVE approaches.

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19 "Culture of peace" is a concept within peace studies and peacebuilding that aims to replace a "culture of violence". Structural changes are required to ensure that a culture of peace can become the guiding paradigm for human relations (see Boulding 2001 and the Introduction to this chapter).

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7 Abbreviations

CAIR	Council on American-Islamic Relations
CdM	Club de Madrid
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CONTEST	The United Kingdom's counter terrorism strategy
CTED	United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee
CTITF	Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force
CVE	Countering violent extremism
Daesh	also seen in the media as Islamic State, ISIS or ISIL
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EU	European Union
FBO(s)	Faith-based organisation(s)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH – German development agency
KAICIID	International Dialogue Centre
IO(s)	International organisation(s)
IGO(s)	Intergovernmental organisation(s)
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence Agency of Pakistan
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organisation(s)
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PDVI and PDVII	Peace through Development programming (USAID), phase I and II
PVE	Preventing violent extremism
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIATF	UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Work
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNOtPG	United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention
US / USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union)
VE	Violent extremism
WCC	World Council of Churches

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Abstract

This article critically examines the emerging CVE/PVE field and explores an alternative approach to address two core questions: how do various CVE/PVE approaches relate to current issues of violent extremism (VE) in Muslim communities, and what are the areas of intersection between interreligious peacebuilding and the various CVE/PVE approaches? In exploring the responses to these two dimensions, it is essential to analyse the assumptions and functions that CVE/PVE fulfil in the current crisis that faces many Muslim and non-Muslim governments around the world, especially in Europe and North America. Since "countering Islamic" terrorism and VE (based on the misperception and assumption that Muslims are disproportionately responsible for acts of violence) constitute the core of CVE/PVE approaches, it is necessary to explore whether this is the most effective method in confronting "Islamic threats".

The article explores several examples of Islamic peace approaches and models in building stronger resilience in Muslim communities and institutions to confront VE. The data is mainly derived from a review of current and relevant literature, including reports from various international agencies (UN, EU, global and national religious institutions and intergovernmental organisations), leading CVE/PVE campaigns and from the author's direct practice and work at the intersection between the interreligious peacebuilding field and CVE/PVE programmes. The article concludes with a few observations and recommendations for practitioners in the field of peacebuilding on the best ways to engage in CVE/PVE.