



# API Research Notes

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## NEW RESEARCH BODY TURNING GLOBAL FOCUS ON DRIVERS OF EXTREMISM IN AFRICA

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We are at the cusp of a major paradigm shift in our response to the rising tide of violent extremism across the world.

Propelling this shift is the realization that military action alone cannot defeat the type of jihadist ideologies that resulted in the terrorist attacks on America on September 11, 2001. The number of terrorist attacks worldwide between 2006 and 2014 totaled to over 103,500 or an average of 11,500 attacks per year. The number of violent extremist groups has also grown exponentially. By January 2016, 59 terrorist groups appeared in the list of America's designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO), with only 12 others delisted.

The failure of the hard power or security-based approach to stem the escalation of radicalization and terrorist activities has, inexorably, led to the collapse of hitherto dominant grand narrative of "clash of civilizations" that underpinned the American-led 'global war on terror'.

This, in turn, has increased the potential for genuine global dialogue or "collaboration of civilizations" on systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups and to strengthen the resilience of communities to jihadism.

Although we have witnessed a renewed focus on the structural drivers of extremism such as poverty, unemployment, lack good governance, lack of democratic institutions, history of human rights abuses, gender discriminations, there is no research evidence connecting terrorism and these issues.

Research is also needed to deepen our understanding of the agendas and strategies of jihadist groups and to shed light on the interplay between terrorism and different types of identities, including ethnicity, religion, age, gender and geographical grouping

Last year, a new global research network known as Researching Solutions to Violent Extremism (or simply RESOLVE) was formed. The Network signifies this quest for the new technologies of soft power such as collaborative research, training and dialogue to build the resilience of communities to violent extremism.

To be sure, the idea of Resolve came out of the White House meeting on Violent Extremism in held in February 2015, which pressed the need to enhance understanding of the dynamics of violent extremism, particularly at the community level.

A series of high-level regional conferences on Violent Extremism held Nairobi, Sydney among other cities also reinforced the need for empirical research to drive evidence-based response to countering violent extremism.

Eventually, the network was launched in September last year during a conference on “Expanding the CVE Knowledge Base” held in New York.

Against this backdrop, Resolve held its first stakeholders forum co-hosted by its Secretariat and the Geneva Center for Security Policy (GCSP) in Geneva, Switzerland on February 24-26, 2016. Among the think tanks invited to the meeting were the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), the Geneva Center

for Security Policy (GCSP), the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI), Africa Policy Institute (API) and Hedayah.

In a nutshell, the stakeholders' forum defined the role of Resolve as to enhance the resilience of communities affected by violent extremism through research, analysis and knowledge sharing to inform policy and practice.

One can only hope that Resolve will follow a genuinely bottom-up approach to countering violent extremism.

In many ways, the Resolve Network signifies the emerging wisdom and policy orientation of our age on how to combat extremism.

This becomes clear from the new United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism that Secretary General Ban Ki-moon launched in January 2016. Since then, the UN Security Council has passed Resolution 2178 requiring member states to develop National plans of Action to counter violent extremism.

Significantly, the Plan of Action has prioritized seven potential 'local drivers' of extremism, including dialogue and conflict prevention; governance; human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; gender equality and empowerment of women; education, skills development and employment facilitation; and strategic communication through the internet and social media.

But the UN Plan of Action on CVE has elicited some criticism from across the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which is relevant to positioning new global organizations such as the Resolve Network.

Conceptually, the criticism of the UN Plan is launched on the wider canvas of what the famous Palestinian author, Edward Said, dubbed as 'orientalism'—a

reference to a patronizing attitude that depicts the Western culture as developed, rational, flexible, and superior to non-Western cultures and societies.

In its gist, criticism of the UN report is hoisted on three planks. First, critics felt that the Plan lacked a deep and broader look into the root causes of radicalization. In this regard, Arab states led by Saudi Arabia have highlighted the need to refocus attention on such factors as historical injustices of colonialism, foreign occupation and denial of self-determination as the root causes of terrorism.

Second, critics felt that the new paradigm has a bias on ‘local drivers of extremism’ while giving little focus to the international trends or the global ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors facilitating terrorism.

In this regard, India felt that the plan is very tall on prescription of what member states should do but extremely short on what the UN and the international community should do to help member states.

New Delhi is also concerned that the UN has no single institutional contact along the lines of UNEP (Environment), UNICEF (Children) or UNDP (Development) dedicated to helping the member states on Violent Extremism.

Addressing the challenge of jihadism may be the primary responsibility of member states. But violent extremism is a shared global challenge that requires international cooperation and action. This understanding of terrorism as a shared threat should guide all approaches to counter violent extremism, including building global research networks.

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