Across Systems: Preventing, Countering, and Defusing Violent Extremism—a Discussion of Strategy, Policy, Practice, and Theory

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Across Systems:
Preventing, Countering, and Defusing Violent Extremism—a Discussion of Strategy, Policy, Practice, and Theory

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“The student must, from time to time, glance introspectively into himself, sink back into himself, take himself carefully to task, form and test the fundamental principles of his life, run over, in his thoughts, the sum total of his knowledge, weigh his duties, reflect upon the content and aim of life, and so on…”

--Rudolf Steiner, Knowledge of the Higher Worlds, 1923

😊I would challenge him to have said their self not himself—but maybe we are😊
😊all just products of our times and being ok with that is an act of tenderness😊
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Student name: Keenan Nikolas Powers               Date: 11/12/2016
Acknowledgements, Dedications, Sources of Inspiration

I would like to humbly thank everything that has ever touched my life, it is all precious to me—but especially to my kindergarten teachers, Libby and Jim Haddock. Their decision to turn their home into the Cobb Meadow School which continues to be a safe, loving, and nature filled environment for children is perhaps my deepest personal source of hope for humanity!

If anybody ever feels so inclined please do not hesitate to contact me by email at keenan.n.powers@gmail.com or on my cell phone at +1 (603) 852-2658
Table of Contents:

1. Abstract..............................................................................................................4
2. List of Terms and Acronyms...........................................................................5
3. Opening Comments..........................................................................................6
4. Introduction.......................................................................................................13
5. Statement of Research Question......................................................................17
6. Conceptual Framework of Analysis
   a. A Social Systems Analysis Research Methodology.................................18
7. Discussion and Review of Literature...............................................................20
   7.1 Discussion and Review of PVE/CVE Strategic Literature.........................21
   7.2 Discussion of Guiding Sub-Questions.......................................................28
     7.2.1 Discussion of Guiding Sub-Question #1.............................................29
     7.2.2 Discussion of Guiding Sub-Questions #2 & #3...................................44
8. Discussion of Conclusion and Findings............................................................49
9. Practical Applicability.......................................................................................51
10. Recommendations for Further Research......................................................52
11. Concluding Comments...................................................................................53
12. Bibliography & Sources of Inspiration...........................................................56
13. Appendix A.....................................................................................................61
1. Abstract

This paper explores today’s landscape of violent conflict in the context of the now 15-year-old “War on Terror” and its defining trait of strengthened, nimble, and networked violent extremist non-state militant groups. Through an exploration of primarily United Nations and United States strategies, policies, and programming the concepts of Countering Violent Extremism and Preventing Violent Extremism are melded into a discussion of the shifting frameworks and broadening notions of what it takes to create human security. This paper is particularly concerned with how the traditionally at odds fields of Counter Terrorism, Military Security, Development Assistance, and Peacebuilding practice are co-thinking about how to create security in the world. Drawing on secondary research material from governments, intergovernmental agencies, and development assistance and peacebuilding practitioners and practitioner organizations, this paper endeavors to paint a picture of how sub-national, national, sub-regional, regional, and international state and civil society communities are all necessary to build peace in today’s multi-layered crisis and conflict social ecosystems. Keeping a social systems framework in mind this paper endeavors to describe the importance of confronting marginalization, fragility, loss of dignity and identity, and group and individual grievance. It also endeavors to describe sources of hope enmeshed within community resilience and ownership of security in an integrated social, economic, and political way. This paper contains a set of guiding questions to examine how non-state violent extremist groups are motivated and build power, but its overarching research question is more concerned with the possibility of negative dissonance between international frameworks of how to defuse (not to be confused with diffuse!) violent extremism more generally. This paper concludes that any dissonance is likely to be more political than programmatic but that this makes it no less important to pay attention to. Lastly, this paper tries to engage with the above concepts through the author’s own story and voice of growing up over the past 15 years and watching this “War on Terror” unfold in such terrifying ways. I do my best to make the case that we all, everyone one of us, need to own security in the ways we personally best can for the good of all life, human and otherwise, on Planet Earth.
2. List of Terms and Acronyms

AU—African Union
Conflict Ecosystem—all factors of conflict, crisis, and insecurity present within a Social Ecosystem.
CSO—Civil Society Organization
CT—Counter Terrorism
CVE—Countering Violent Extremism
ECOWAS—Economic Union of West African States
EU—European Union
MTD—Multi-Track Diplomacy
NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA—National Defense Authorization Act
NGO—Non-Governmental Organization
PVE—Preventing Violent Extremism
Social Ecosystem—social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological factors of life present within a localized environment and social reality.
USAID—United States Agency for International Development
VE—Violent Extremism or Violent Extremist
3. Opening Comments

I completed my SIT Graduate Institute Reflective Practice Practicum for my masters degree in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation as an intern with the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding (referred to from now on as Karuna). This internship turned into full time employment as a Program Associate where my responsibilities include supporting program management, research, reporting, logistics, budgeting, contracting, as well as organizational performance, development, and overall strategy building and implementation. Karuna, founded by SIT Graduate Institute professor emerita Dr. Paula Green, is a unique peacebuilding organization that has been building social and relational bridges between communities divided by identity, conflict, violence, and war for over 20 years. Karuna has worked in over 30 countries and while its work started out primarily within community structures to promote healing and reconciliation from violent conflict—an area of practice Karuna still maintains active programming within—its programming has also evolved into working with large intergovernmental bodies, national governments, civil society organizations, and development assistance actors on issues of complex conflict management systems and effective peacebuilding practice more generally.

Through both my internship and now employment I have been supporting the development of Karuna’s organizational understanding regarding the nascently conceptualized notion of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE). We, as an organization, prefer the term Defusing Violent Extremism—not to be confused with diffuse! Word choice matters in this conversation as it influences how we, as scholars and practitioners, create frameworks of discourse and practice
implementation. This emerging field and notion of PVE is synergistic with my studies at the SIT Graduate Institute, particularly my studies of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture with faculty member Dr. Tatsushi Arai, professor and practitioner of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. Through this CVE knowledge building process I have (re)discovered that thinking about violent extremism has been deeply at the core of my personal interests and experience most of my life. Continual and metastasizing violence in human society throughout my life has been a source of concern, fascination, depression, and motivation to me since September 11th, 2001 when I was 12 years old. The inadequate or ineffective—and therefore in my mind irresponsible—state responses to terrorism writ large that have exacerbated or at the best stagnated the grievances and myriad intersecting crisis ridden social ecosystems that may drive violent behavior in individuals and groups has consequently been of deep concern. I hope this paper is able to speak to a spectrum of more effective responses and strategies to many of today’s violent social ecosystems.

Citizens of the United States of America nearly universally all know the events of 9/11 as we continue to hold it in our collective memory as a national grievance. One can speculate that it may be the most salient single event guiding our foreign policy and military engagements ever since. I believe the rhetoric of President-elect Donald J Trump speaks resoundingly into how our collective societal traumas of 9/11 continue to inform many individual perceptions of the Muslim world and what strategies for national security should look like. As time has gone by the wars that have dominated our western headlines have raged on, died down, re-erupted, and metastasized in ways our leaders cannot seem to effectively defuse or predict. I argue that a theme to this past 15 years of
metastasizing Terrorism and Counter Terrorism is the strengthening of non-state, militarized actors with radicalized and motivating ideologies. I argue that these violent extremist groups, in fact, are the primary outcome of bad governance and worse military responses to perceived insecurity—all in fact making Planet Earth a much less secure place for everybody and everything.

Violent Extremist (VE) groups call upon the use of force, often on innocent civilian targets in their own communities, to carve out the existence and vision for the future that their ideology idealizes—but many would argue that most nation states, the US chief among them, do exactly the same thing. I will argue that it is the duty of the nation state and the international community to tackle both phenomenon: the reality of metastasizing Violent Extremism as well as the ineffectiveness of traditional state led military and counter terrorism dominated responses and strategies to create security.

I wrote a paper in 2005 in my high school US Government class making the argument that the US invasion of Iraq was exactly what Osama Bin Laden, then leader of the VE group Al-Qaeda which was largely operating out of the borderlands of Northern Afghanistan and Pakistan, (Bajoria, & Bruno, 2012) (Global Security) was hoping the western response to 9/11 would be. Reflecting on that, I now think Al-Qaeda was hoping the US would invade Afghanistan—our invasion of Iraq was a dream come true for them that they may not have even been considering a possibility. The argument for this is simple: violence is like a virus—it latches onto itself and gains momentum by being fed by the same violence it is trying to expand and inject into a social ecosystem, no matter the motivating ideologies or issues. If you feed that violence you get more, the way you feed it informs the way it expands, the more forcefully you feed it the more of an appetite
it has, the bigger its appetite the more harm and suffering is experienced by all and the more seemingly intractable a situation may appear. All of this will naturally spiral, grow, and metastasize just like a virus invading a life form—unless the right medicines are applied in the right dosages.

Violent Extremist organizations, like Al-Qaeda, that see violence as a tool, in my view, only become stronger by having access to social environments where sustained, prevalent use of violence is a part of the human experience. The same can be said of state militaries that invest immense amounts of time, energy, and capital into reviewing their actions, in violent conflicts as well as in training, to learn from their mistakes, successes, and struggles. My point here is individuals and groups can very effectively learn by doing and this happens organically in their most salient work environment(s)—and can happen even more effectively by paying attention to that fact. If your work’s toolbox is a violence perpetrating toolbox that means you work environment is a war zone. In 2001 Al-Qaeda needed a more active war zone to grow its strength and realize its strategic ambitions—they got one in the NATO invasion of Afghanistan, and they got a second with the US led invasion of Iraq.

We can play the blame game and say who is it that really has responsibility for the NATO invasion of Afghanistan, the US led invasion of Iraq, or how those wars have and continue to be engaged with by the US and others. That conversation takes up a lot of time and energy and, I feel, is unlikely to generate much in the way of useful strategies and approaches to, well, anything really. What I, after writing that paper in 2005, continued to think about was what is really going on, why is it going on, how might it continue if not defused effectively, and now lately I have been wondering about what can
we effectively do to inspire that defusing—not just in Iraq and Afghanistan by the way. I’m talking about basically everywhere, that is just what my attitude is, how my mind works, and, in reality, what the reality is: violent extremist groups, whether it is Al-Qaeda, ISIS, the myriad other VE groups across the world, or transnational criminal networks, are clearly now global in a more strengthened fashion than they were 15 years ago.

This is not a paper about Iraq, Afghanistan, or transnational crime—or everywhere on Planet Earth for that matter—and I do not intend to give a play by play of events that are not salient to the research and learning I have been engaging in. That being said, I strongly feel the two ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provide a very salient contextual story to why I am thinking about what I am thinking about—so I have to spend some time articulating my experience and interpretation of the past 15 years and this “war on terror.”

I am not predisposed to or ideologically in relationship with non-violence and anti-war political sentiment, but I am certainly not a proponent of using force for absolutely anything but the most desperate of situations. I look at things like legal gun ownership, personal and political consent, civic engagement, community engagement, responsible parenting, protecting the rights of and providing systems of care for the most marginalized and vulnerable in our societies, and being a generally nice, curious, and respectful person towards everybody—even those who do not reciprocate—as issues of paramount responsibility to active citizens in an ethically sound, values oriented democratic system. I personally endeavor to treat these responsibilities I am trying to articulate by valuing them. I try and give them value by considering and engaging in
strategic thinking, analysis, reflection, inclusion, and morally, ethically human rights informed, values-driven personal character development. I try and honor that character development by making personal decisions and conducting my personal behavior in ways that feel both positive to myself as well as to anyone else my decision or behavior may impact or affect. I want to see everybody and everything in my social ecosystem thrive at no ones or no things expense—a successful system to me is a positive, co-created, organically sustainable, life sustaining, and holistically supportive and care based one.

Having said all that let me be the first to say that not only have I not always successfully manifested these attitudes towards responsibility I’ve attempted describe, I have most certainly made mistakes in regards to that responsibility that have ended with causing harm to myself as well as others—something I have since found is also inherently harm to myself. It would be foolish and strategically unsound to state, with any sense of surety or absolutism, that I will not make any more mistakes as I continue to journey through life—all I can do is try to do my best moving forward to live up to the attitude and responsibility I articulated above while endeavoring to do my best to continually reflect upon and learn everything I can from my mistakes. There is a quote from Rumi that deeply informs my attitude about all this: “The wound is the place where the light enters you.” (Rumi, Coleman Barks translation) As a citizen of the United States of America, I often feel a bit let down by our leaders who do not feel compelled to engage in a similarly reflective attitude and responsibility towards strategy building, decision making, and learning. What my paper about the Iraq war in 2005 was responding to was what I saw as the natural aftermath of an ill-fated military excursion that did not have these attitudes towards reflective responsibility—I now find myself
writing this paper 11 years later and, while this is hopefully a hopeful paper, I basically feel things have only gotten worse.

The US led invasion of Iraq manifested in massive harm to our shared human system on planet earth by diffusing hardened and experienced extremist fighters and groups across a myriad of already complexly fragile regions. How did this happen?

The US invades Iraq and disbands the Iraqi military. The Iraqi military, arguably one of the most functional organizational systems in the country, is completely disempowered from being a part of the reconstruction process—it was never surprising to me and many actual analysts and experts that violence would continue to erupt given only this disempowerment. What my paper in 2005 was arguing further was that violence would expand faster and more powerfully as ideologically radicalized, Al-Qaeda inspired individuals took up arms and went to war against the US and Coalition forces now present in Iraq—a neighborhood where so many individuals and groups were already ripe for radicalization for a whole slew of reasons, some of which I will get into in my findings regarding the push and pull factors of being radicalized towards violent extremism.

Of course this is just a part of the story of the past 15 years of war in the Middle East and this war on terror, but this element regarding the migration of radicalized individuals to a created and sustained violent social system such as the Iraq war, and how these individuals then experientially learn about how to conduct their behavior most effectively to realize their ambitions—and then how groups re form, form anew, and splinter—is, to me, a key element to the story surrounding the emergence of ISIS, the continued strength of the Taliban, and the proliferation of VE groups across the Sahel and
North Africa. It is also this story’s intersection with so many marginalized and aggrieved folks that has manifested in so called lone wolf attacks perpetrated across the world by individuals inspired and radicalized by the ideologies and grievances motivating so many VE groups—one of the most recent events in the US being the attack by Omar Mateen on a nightclub in Orlando, FL (BBC, 2016). This all exemplifies how violent extremism operates in general. This pattern of migration towards violence then bumps into many other social systems of human society and experience, all different depending on the specific context under inquiry, and through examining this bumping I feel we can start to get a sense of what I personally refer to as the ongoing World War III—the ill fated war on terror that can be traced to 9/11 in its current iteration. In my view, however, this is actually more a story of all human history trying to deal with the constancy of trauma, violence, broken communities, and the difficulty of having love, compassion, and empathy across difference and pain…but that is a longer story than this paper can convey.

The reality of emboldened and empowered non-state VE groups is that they have been able to exploit a myriad of unmanaged conflict and crisis spaces around the globe, and things have been coming to a head lately. The social, largely non-violent uprisings across the Arab world dubbed the “Arab Spring” appear to have been, among many other things, another layer of chaos easily exploited by these quickly learning and adapting militarized VE networks.

The proliferation of violent extremism is a complex, interconnected story that we all, as humans on Planet Earth trying to raise families, put food on the table, and get to Mars, have responsibility towards playing the parts we can in owning and co-creating a
different and positive trajectory. We must not become discouraged by the seemingly constant failure demonstrated by the ongoing and metastasizing violence that is so often targeted against innocent civilians. We must hold a deep breath and collectively, complicatedly, nimbly take aim at our failures, build on our strengths, and shoot a bulls eye for peace—the children of humanity are counting on us.

The following paper is an attempt to make sense of how we might constructively, positively approach thinking about how people feel at home in a violent organization, how they feel valued, and how those violent organizations then behave in the context of why they are collectively motivated to be doing what they do. Part of this story is human desperation to fulfill basic human needs, but I believe another equally important factor is how people feel vital and co-create value. This paper searches for existing human resiliency to positively and constructively engage with complex systems of intersecting social crisis in regards to environment, security, and identity. To do this effectively it will be necessary to ground my thoughts and research within not only my own life story and work, but within the specific contextual discourse and process of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism as a strategy, practice, and theory.

4. Introduction

My employer, Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, is sub-contracted on one Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) relevant and one CVE specific engagement. Both are through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the CVE relevant one being an engagement with the Economic Union of West African States’ (ECOWAS) Commission for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (CPAPS) and the CVE specific one being regionally focused in West Africa but preliminarily first active in Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso. The CVE specific program, entitled Partnerships for
Peace by USAID, is supporting the manifestation of integrated, multi-sectoral, effective, and regionally to sub-regionally to nationally to sub-nationally to locally relevant and inclusive national strategies for CVE. The basic idea is that you need everybody to build peace, so how do we build strategies to get everybody to have buy-in to such a process in a way that not only brings individual and collective strengths to bear, but works on weaknesses and vulnerabilities at the same time. Consequently, what does a Whole of Society approach and process look like, and how is it created responsibly for maximum effectiveness and performance, is one of Karuna’s guiding sentiments to our engagement in this work.

Both of these programs are long-term, multi-year engagements working at regional, organizational, institutional, and systems levels where assessment of capacity and lack thereof, contextualizing analysis, organizational development, and dialogue are being both valued and explored thoroughly. Partnerships for Peace (referred to as P4P) is structured in such a way that it is being implemented in partnership between USAID and three NGO’s: Creative Associates International (referred to as Creative), Search for Common Ground (referred to as Search), and the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding (referred to as Karuna). Creative and Search already or will soon have offices and staff on the ground in each of the target countries, while Karuna is playing a role of assessment, coordination, reflection, and program design. Please refer to Appendix A on page 63 for an excerpt from the Request for Task Order Proposals (RFTOP) from USAID that briefly lays out the context and scope of this program. It is an innovative RFTOP in the sense that it did not call for submitting a work plan to address the issues it highlights—it instead called for a rigorous assessment of regional and national government and civil
society knowledge and capacity to engage in Countering Violent Extremism. Furthermore, it called for not only rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, but pause and reflect sessions throughout its 5-year implementation. Karuna’s responsibilities to P4P are specifically to conduct and produce the assessment, which we are in the midst of doing at the time of this writing, as well as facilitate the pause and reflect sessions throughout the course of P4P’s 5-year implementation.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) is an emerging field of theory and practice which is convening a multitude of actors in a cross-cutting, systems oriented manner. PVE/CVE is at the forefront of policy and practice engaging with metastasizing violence in regions where VE groups are present and is actively being explored by the likes of Counter Terrorism (CT) actors, military planners, intergovernmental organizations, national governments, civil society, media, and advocacy groups, religious based organizations, and other peacebuilding, development assistance, and academic organizations and practitioners. CVE is continually referred to as a nascent concept but has some core roots within CT and military security actors as a variety of key military commanders and CT strategists have, over the past decade or more, articulated the ineffective nature of their military solutions to the types of violence and fragile security environments they are being asked to confront—some of whom will be brought into our conversation on page 41 of this paper.

As I have already alluded to, I feel it is important to recognize that today’s global landscape of violent conflict is, in many parts of our planet, no longer dominated by traditional military actors such as states, coalitions of states, revolutionary militias, and independence groups; it is instead full of nimble Violent Extremist groups with a variety
of political, social, economic, and ideological motivations driving their behavior and operation. The UN has come out with a PVE strategy that has challenged the fields of Counter Terrorism, military security, and therefore CVE to develop, empower, and engage with non-violent, conflict sensitive development initiatives in an effort to defuse violent extremist behavior in a broad spectrum of contexts—from ISIS & Al-Qaeda to Al-Shabob & Boko-Haram to the Sahel’s Al-Mourabitoun to El-Salvador/Los Angeles’ MS-13 & Calle-18 to the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan or racist right wing extremist groups in Europe and North America—not to mention all the organized racist groups across the world I don’t have space to list and/or am not aware of…the whole world is surprisingly racist in fact!

This movement away from military dominated security solutions discourse towards a more inclusive, rights and grievance focused security conversation has naturally brought in a different spectrum of non-military, governance, civil society, development, and peacebuilding actors—most of whom are very happy to be brought into the conversation. It is specifically this reality of bringing traditionally, historically at odds professional and internationalized communities of theory and practice together that is in and of itself a root cause of how difficult yet necessary and urgent this work is. CVE and PVE is, at its heart, a deep conversation about differing paradigms of how to approach and frame co-creating physical, emotional, and social human security, vitality, development, and sustainability.

In this paper I explore this urgency by examining United Nations Counter Terrorism (CT) and PVE strategic literature, US Government CVE/PVE strategic literature and policy, and practitioner research literature from the fields of peacebuilding
and development assistance. While this paper is firmly grounded in the PVE/CVE strategic, policy, and practitioner research literature, of equal relevance to me personally is the context of Karuna’s sub-contract to *Partnerships for Peace* described on page 15 and in Appendix A on page 63. As described, Karuna’s initial responsibility within this sub-contract is to conduct a program specific primary assessment of regional and national institutionalized capacity to engage as well as ability to provide knowledge, coordination, and leadership towards CVE efforts in West Africa. This paper, while not officially associated with Karuna’s assessment for *Partnerships for Peace*, has been written within the context of Karuna’s ongoing desk research for this program. Broadly speaking, this paper is an exercise in painting a picture of complexity and violence while searching for sources and havens of positive creativity, resilience, and vitality of theory and practice.

5. **Statement of Research Question and Guiding Sub-Questions:**

I have developed the following research question in an attempt to ground this study within the broader context of how Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism are manifesting both in practice and theory:

*Given how UN and European narratives prefer the term Preventing Violent Extremism and how the US based narratives prefer the term Countering Violent Extremism, is there a negative dissonance between the two frameworks as general Theories of Change coalesce in this nascent field?*

In an effort to ground the above broad question within the context of how Violent Extremist (VE) groups operate in conjunction with how CVE and PVE energies must consequently be informed and directed, I propose the three following Guiding Sub-Questions: (1) *What are the push and pull factors of radicalization towards making the decision to join VE groups?* (2) *What are the distinctions between CVE specific versus*
CVE relevant programming? And (3) what is the importance to the concept of CVE of deeply contextualizing & contextualized conflict sensitive analysis and preparation before strategy building, engagement, or intervention?

In my conclusion I bring my discussion of these guiding questions to bear on the broader research question with a lens of how different actors are attempting to frame the relevant discourse surrounding Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism—are we confronting threats or preventing violence, preventing threats or confronting violence?


The form of research I engaged with during this process of inquiry is possibly simply best left to the term *desk research*. My cultural environment of inquiry was literally, in fact, sitting at a desk with my computer and an Internet connection. I collected information and data in an online, open source way. Every one of my sources is either available online for free (links provided in the bibliography) or the book it comes from is available for purchase online.

My attitude and framework of analysis towards this process has been an ongoing exercise in systems thinking and analysis. Donella Meadows, author of *Thinking in Systems*, describes a system as “a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time.” (Meadows, 2008 p.2) Considering a process of radicalization towards making the decision to join a VE organization this definition of a system helps us identify the roots of relationship between social structure and behavior. Meadows goes on to say that a “system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the system’s response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and that response is seldom
simple in the real world.” (Meadows, 2008 p.2) As social systems are constantly under the influence of one another, this ‘buffeting’ and ‘response’ is the realm of conflict. Meadows defines social systems as “the external manifestations of cultural thinking patterns and of profound human needs, emotions, strengths, and weaknesses.” (Meadows, 2008 p.167) This framing has helped me to define violent social systems within larger social systems alongside considering systems approaches to inhibiting and defusing these violent social systems within more holistic societal social systems.

Another framework of analysis used in this inquiry has been a whole of society, systems approach and inquiry into how the CVE field is thinking about institutional capacity to engage in CVE specific and relevant efforts. Regarding institutional capacity to engage in CVE, it has been helpful to me to have a multi-track diplomacy (MTD) informed systems lens of governance and civic action.

MTD is relevant to CVE and a whole of society systems approach as it articulates an inclusive socio-political climate capable of engaging the multiplicity and diversity of human society to overcome contextual challenges to peace, security, governance, development, and societal and individual well being and care. MTD helps us grapple with the complexity of the concept of how do we get everybody involved in building peace by clearly delineating, in a holistic fashion, the sectors of professional, public, and private human society. MTD has been practiced in many political processes and strategies and has been thoroughly articulated and explored by John McDonald and Louise Diamond of the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy:
(McDonald, John & Diamond, Louise)

With an MTD informed systems approach we can not only begin to map out a spectrum of mitigating and enabling factors to Violent Extremism and where they might be manifesting within society, we can also begin to envision how regionally relevant national PVE/CVE strategies might look and act. We can place the spectrums of focus that PVE/CVE engagements might have within a series of lenses regarding who is present and how as each of the tracks represents an aspect of society as a whole. The idea here is that all the tracks should be brought to bear in a way that maximizes their potential to contribute towards the positive transformation of conflict. Using an MTD informed lens we can map out what track within diplomacy and society do the necessary conversations and activities have to take place in—as well as who can, is, and/or should be facilitating them and their manifestation. This provides space for all citizens to envision how they might contribute to building peace, from the local to the international level—which, to me, encapsulates the idea that it takes everybody to build peace.

7. Discussion and Review of Literature

The first section of this discussion and literature review shall draw from published UN CT and PVE/CVE strategies in an effort to highlight the policy context and discourse guiding the field of PVE/CVE. The purpose of this will be to ground the exploration of
PVE/CVE within the policy context of Human Rights (as defined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights) informed UN Counter Terrorism and PVE Strategies. The second section will be a review and discussion of relevant research and inquiry regarding the three Guiding Conceptual Sub-Questions stated on page 18.

7.1 Discussion and Review of PVE/CVE Strategic Literature
The UN Counter Terrorism (CT) strategy, adopted by the general assembly in 2006 and reviewed every two years, most recently in July 2016, articulates the complex nature of today’s security environments where VE groups are active. It offers four pillars to Counter Terrorism action and policy:

1. “Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism;
2. Measures to prevent and combat terrorism;
3. Measures to build states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard;
4. Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism.” (UN 2016)

These four pillars provide a broad, human rights based framework for approaching Counter Terrorism activity and goes on to explore each element in detail within the longer strategic document.

Within the broader document, the first pillar defines “conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism” (UN 2016) as including, but not limited to, “prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization, and lack of good governance, while recognizing that none of these conditions can excuse or justify acts of terrorism.” (UN 2016) This list of conducive conditions highlights many issues of political, social, and economic grievance within a population that may lead to individual radicalization towards joining VE groups. Many of the highlighted conditions such as
political exclusion, socio-economic marginalization, lack of good governance, and discrimination are human rights and governance issues inherently political, not military. The first pillar goes on to identify many peacebuilding and governance assistance measures necessary to positively engage with the changing of conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. This broadens the global security conversation around Counter Terrorism (CT) to a community of practice no longer dominated by military based security actors. Many of the grievances highlighted above as conditions contributing to how social environments may become conducive to the spread of terrorism are in the realm of how the push and pull factors of radicalization towards Violent Extremism (VE) work and will be explored more thoroughly starting on page 30.

The second pillar, “measures to prevent and combat terrorism,” (UN, 2016) calls on member states to not only reject the notion of terrorism and to not support such activities or groups, but also calls on them to coordinate efforts regionally around issues of CT. The pillar focuses on “denying terrorists access to the means to carry out their attacks” (UN 2016) through international and regional coordination and cooperation around both traditional military security and intelligence apparatuses along with the contextual, socio-political, and economic drivers of VE. The second pillar is more of the traditional, security-oriented pillar of the CT strategy and, while the military security based issues it highlights no longer monopolize the conversation, they are integral in nature to the conversation. Enabling drivers of VE such as cross border illicit trade and crime, dysfunctional prison and legal systems, poor intelligence sharing, and poorly coordinated responses, military and non-military, to VE groups are all highlighted as issues of necessary engagement and attention.
Responses to the issues highlighted in both the first two pillars are questions of institutional capacity to not only implement Counter Terrorism (CT) policy and action, but to also Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) through achieving the first pillar of the UN CT strategy on page 22. This is where the third pillar, “measures to build states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard” (UN, 2016) works as a bridge between the first two. The third pillar is the realm of institutional capacity to not only do the traditional CT functions outlined in pillar two and discussed above, but to also Prevent Violent Extremism by institutionally working at defusing the conducive conditions to radicalization towards VE present within societies. This means there is a necessity to have crosscutting conversations about Counter Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism between national, regional, and international military, peacebuilding, development, private enterprise, civil society, and governance capacity building actors—multi-track diplomacy informed strategy and engagement here is of paramount importance.

As outlined in the first pillar of the UN Counter Terrorism strategy on page 22, the UN believes that this discourse should be rooted in a rights and grievance based realm where good political, economic, and social governance are key goals. The UN views itself as integral to creating the conducive conditions to having this discourse take place, leaving us with the final fourth pillar and, possibly, in my view, the manifestation of the field of CVE/PVE.

The fourth pillar makes it clear that the “promotion and protection of human rights for all and the rule of law is essential to all components of the [UN CT] Strategy, recognizing that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights
are not conflicting goals, but complementary and mutually reinforcing.” (UN 2016) This affirms that the UN’s discourse around Counter Terrorism is one of rights, not solely about military solutions or creating jobs—though both may be inherently necessary and important tools.

Following our discussion of the four pillars in the UN Counter Terrorism Strategy, let us examine the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism:

The above diagram is the outline for this eight page, extremely detailed framework and plan. Each term identified above is discussed in detail within this document. In specifically considering the security reality of social environments where Violent Extremist (VE) groups are active, this plan of action states that:

“Both the General Assembly and the Security Council have acknowledged that violent extremism has reached a level of threat and sophistication that requires concerted action beyond law enforcement, military or security measures to
address development, good governance, human rights and humanitarian concerns…[and that] Each Member State should consider developing a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist.” (UN, 2015)

This is an effort to contextualize PVE efforts in national and regional strategies. This means contextualizing these strategies in local conflict dynamics and environments, positioning them so they are capable of dynamically engaging with society in ways that manifest resilient, local, and sustainable inhibitors to radicalization towards VE. As we will see in the discussion of the push and pull factors of radicalization towards VE, these inhibitors are strongly linked to healthy communities and healthy parenting.

Noting that the larger UN Plan of Action to PVE states that the “analyses of local and national drivers of violent extremism form an important point of departure for developing national plans,” (UN, 2015) it specifies that national PVE strategies and plans should include the following seven elements (bolding emphasis my own):

1. **“National plans should be developed in a multidisciplinary manner,** to include countering and preventing violent extremism measures, with input from a wide range of government actors, such as law enforcement, social service providers and ministries of education, youth and religious affairs, as well as non-governmental actors, including youth; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; civil society organizations; the media; and the private sector.

2. National plans should **fortify the social compact against violent extremism** by promoting respect for the principle of equality before the law and equal protection under the law in all government-citizen relations, and developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, as well as ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making.

3. **National plans should address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters.**

4. National plans should **prevent violent extremist and terrorist groups from trading in oil and antiquities, hostage-taking, and receiving donations**

5. [National Plans should] align national development policies with the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (Goal 1); ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (Goal 4); achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Goal 5); promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8); reducing inequality within and among countries (Goal 10); making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11); and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and
inclusive institutions at all levels (Goal 16).

6. National plans should **dedicate funding for implementation** by government and non-governmental entities and **promote public-private partnerships**, where applicable.

7. [Noting that] **Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** for these plans are **essential** to ensuring that policies are having the desired impact.” (UN, 2015)

This 7-point framework above, not to be confused with the 7 Priority Action Areas outlined in the diagram on page 25, outlines national structures and strategies to PVE—but such national strategies would never happen in a regional vacuum. Every nation is in a neighborhood of others nations. Since many of the drivers and behaviors of VE groups are cross border and regional in nature, strategic responses must be regionally coordinated between governments. The Plan of Action states that “violent extremism does not respect borders, national and global action has to be complemented by enhanced regional cooperation” (UN, 2015) which is easily confirmed if we look at the operational activities and behaviors of nearly any Violent Extremist group: the Taliban operationally crisscrossing the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Beehner, 2006. Laub, 2013. Laub, 2014); ISIS straddling the border between Iraq and Syria (Laub, 2016); Boko Haram operating across the borders of Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, & Chad in the Lake Chad Basin Region (Sergie & Johnson, 2015); or Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) being operational across the Sahel Region. (Laub & Masters 2015)

To speak to the cross-border nature of these threats the UN Plan of Action to PVE goes on to highlight two elements regarding **regional CVE plans**:

1. **“Strengthen sub regional and regional organizations**, including by creating and maintaining regional contact lists of focal points, monitoring the trafficking of small arms and heavy weapons, and **facilitating intergovernmental communication and cooperation**. Establishing early warning centres for the exchange of information on violent extremist activities could render this interaction more predictable and could thus be of additional value;

2. Enable sub regional and regional organizations to provide **technical assistance to Member States** in the respective sub region or region in building capacity for preventing violent extremism and support effective cooperation, for example, on border management.” (UN 2015)
Given this focus on national, sub-regional, and regional coordination, there are tools to make this work relevant to families and communities which the UN Plan of Action to PVE articulates in its seven priority action areas also outlined in the diagram on page 25: (1) dialogue & conflict prevention; (2) strengthening good governance, human rights, and the rule of law; (3) engaging communities; (4) empowering youth; (5) gender equality and empowering women; (6) education, skill development, and employment facilitation; and (7) strategic communications, the internet, and social media. These seven priority action areas, each explored within the strategy document in detail to support their relevance to PVE, provide a practice-based framework for CVE strategy to be informed by. It forms the basis of my thinking regarding how to think about PVE/CVE relevant or specific programming, how to do assessments and analysis for such programming and engagement, and what to focus on and look for when looking for examples of success and failure regarding PVE/CVE in the world. I encourage all to read the document in full. It is 8 pages long. I would like to thank the UN, again, for its simplicity and creation.

The UN policy discourse presented above has given birth to a vibrant academic and practitioner discourse around what PVE/CVE is and might be. Official, academic, and practitioner forums such as the UN, specific UN agencies such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Food Programme (WFP); the US Government, particularly the US State Department, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG), and many other committed agencies and civil servants; the European Union; the African Union and subsidiary bodies like the Economic Union of West African States (ECOWAS); the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF); the US
institute for Peace (USIP); the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP); the International Crisis Group (ICG); the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); the Institute for Security Studies (ISS); Mercy Corps; the Global Center for Cooperative Security (GCCS); the Hedayah Institute for Excellence in CVE; and many other individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and government and intergovernmental actors are deeply engaged in this conversation.

7.2 Discussion of Guiding Sub-Questions
What I will now endeavor to do is begin a discussion about how violent extremism works and how PVE and CVE might work by, in a non-exhaustive fashion, examining what the above mentioned forums, organizations, practitioners, and scholars are discussing and grappling with. It is from my readings of their collective work that I have posed the following three guiding questions that will provide the context for my learning presented in this next section: (1) What are the push and pull factors of radicalization towards making the decision to join Violent Extremist groups? (2) What are the distinctions between CVE specific versus CVE relevant programming? And (3) what is the importance to the concept of CVE of deeply contextualizing & contextualized conflict sensitive analysis and preparation before strategy building, engagement, or intervention?

The Alliance for Peacebuilding, an organization whose membership is made up of leading organizations in the field of Peacebuilding and serves as a coalescing unit of cross-cutting communication and scholarly, practitioner focused convening, worked together with the Shift Network, a similar organization that endeavors to, in their own words, “share the very best in personal and societal transformation,” held an online CVE summit during the summer of 2016. The summit consisted of 12 40-minute interviews
with practitioners and policy makers from around the world across the field of peacebuilding in an effort to highlight the voices of leading thinkers in the realm of CVE. Listening in was my first concerted exposure to thinking about CVE as a specific field of theory and practice and it was from first listening in to this summit, and then reading many research reports and strategic documents, some of which are referenced in this paper, that I formed the three core questions above that guide our conversation and my learning in this section.

7.2.1 Discussion of Guiding Question #1: What are the push and pull factors of radicalization towards making the decision to join Violent Extremist groups?

This is a question of great complexity and often tends to get glossed over with sentiments like “they just need jobs” or “they just need physical security” or “they just need positive role models and a counter narrative” which is largely turning out to not paint a complete picture of how folks may be pushed or pulled towards joining VE groups. (Katz, 2016. Greenberg & Hume, 2016. Wolfe, 2016) First off, the answers to positively engaging with those three sentiments are massively complex already and may, depending on the context, be salient conversations to have—but they are unlikely to be the only conversations we need to have. What I will attempt to engage with now is the concept that societies do not just need jobs, or security, or even healthy role models and positive, transformative narratives—societies need justice, they need to be filled with humans who freely and easily have meaning in and ownership over the success and freedom of their lives and communities.

Societies need to be inclusive of all their citizens by targeting marginalization, discrimination, exclusion, and loneliness for individuals and groups as the highest form
of societal failure. Societies need to make it as easy as possible for parents to raise their kids in environments where there is ready access to positive channels for the energy of children and young people in ways that gets them engaged with the development of their communities and allows them to pursue their dreams. When I hear people talk of inhibitors to radicalization towards violent extremism, what I hear is a call for social systems where parents do not have to shield their children from violent influences because the most prevalent influences in a community are inherently positive. Those positive, enabling, freedom and success-based influences are the inhibitors to radicalization that I hear—and such inhibitors are fragile.

I want to make the point that this process of radicalization can take many forms and is not necessarily just about becoming a person with an extreme ideology, it is about engaging in behavior and decision making that creates harm and danger for oneself and those around you. It also may be about breaking through the fragility of the inhibitors described above. Let me tell you a story of my own, very white, relatively safe, and mostly non-violent process of radicalization to contextualize how fragile these inhibitors to dangerous behavior really are—it may give the reader an insight into how present this process is within U.S. communities as well as within societies across the world.

I grew up in an extremely loving and caring family. My parents are absolute sweethearts, as is the rest of my extended family. My parents are hardworking, built a small business the old-fashioned American way, and were just successful enough to put their three children into the best schools they could find for us. In my mind no one could ask for a more supportive, caring, loving, dedicated, and creative family.

When I was 16 I smoked marijuana for the first time with some friends at my high
school. Before this I was a rather extremely innocent kid, I mean, I didn’t even know conceptually what marijuana was at all until I smoked it. At the time I was attending a very wealthy and elite private boarding high school in Western Massachusetts. I lived just across the state line in New Hampshire and was a day student. I had just received my license and my parents, being thrilled that they wouldn’t have to keep driving me the half hour to school in the morning, had purchased a used vehicle for me. It was not the marijuana that drove me to dangerous behavior—it was the intersecting factors of my wealthy schoolmates, my mobility, my longing to be cool, to be useful, to be part of a school that everybody lived at but from which I went home every night, a family I could mostly hide it all from, and the illegality of drugs and under-age drinking that drove me and my friends to start buying and selling drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes for other people in my life.

My friends from the surrounding towns and myself were soon flush with cash from all the wealthy boarding students who would throw money at us to get them any kinds of alcohol and drugs we could find. This of course led to my friends and I drinking and doing drugs at a rather alarming rate and it was only my willful decision to basically run away to the quasi-military, drug testing Maine Maritime Academy for my undergraduate studies that partially rescued me from that spiral of dangerous behavior. I often reflect back on those times with my friends who lived through it with me (we do have a number of friends who have passed away, mostly from over doses), and we sometimes talk about how close we were to the edge. Perhaps if we had been in a more urban place, or if our families had been in more economically desperate situations, or if we had somehow felt the allure of harder drugs just a little more, we would have ended
up in organized crime of some sort, or addicted to any of the harder drugs—we might have really hurt people and hurt ourselves. And, I mean, we were good at what we did and we did cause harm to people. Not physical harm but we were not saints at all, we took advantage of anybody fool enough to trust us, even each other—we were just cut throat swindlers, modern day American teenage pirates. Every community in the United States of America is chocker-block full of kids just like my friends and I. If you don’t believe me, go try and buy drugs from a 17 year old, I’ll bet you 20 bucks it won’t take you too long if you don’t act like a cop.

There are so many ways my story could have happened differently, for bad or worse. I was on the periphery of violence. When I was 17 I walked into a room full of inebriated folks and an Uzi sub machine gun on the table. I’ve been robbed multiple times in the small town of Brattleboro, VT. I’ve been in a number of scuffles I’d rather not remember. But those are circumstantial factors, not structural: if I had not had a car, this story would have been very different. If drugs, especially marijuana, were legal this story would have been very different. Massachusetts just voted to legalize marijuana so I suppose I may get to explore what that difference may have looked like, good or bad. If the drinking age was lower this story may have been very different. If I had not been at a school where children of wealthy parents existed in a world of very little financial oversight, this story would have been very different. If my parents were not as super cool as they are they may have slapped all this behavior out of me, but I was very sneaky so maybe not as well. All of this was what I term as my “social ecosystem” during those times—it was my everyday life and it was what informed and enabled my daily behavior and my daily decisions.
The truth is I don’t regret a single moment of those times, I just know that it was dangerous and I’m lucky to have come out as unscathed as I am. But I’ve learned my lessons—I mean, drugs are still illegal in the United States; it can be dangerous to buy them. I still smoke marijuana on occasion, I just do my best to not let any aspect of doing that bring me near to dangerous situations…which is, of course, a coin toss in reality but I guess I have a lot of experience. In fact, many of those experiences have allowed me to navigate with an ease I am proud of countries, cultures, and social ecosystems deeply foreign to me and deeply infested with illicit and dangerous behavior—in fact, I’ve bought drugs in many of those countries, sometimes from sources as ridiculous as the local police. So, I guess it’s not that I have learned my lessons, it’s that I have learned lessons—making safe decisions I am later proud of and ok with is a constant navigation, as it is for anybody truly I feel, and the most important lesson I continue to navigate is the importance of being cognizant of how your decisions and behavior do or don’t affect the safety and security of others around you.

What I am trying to say here is that this process of engaging in dangerous decision-making and behavior is always a deeply personal and localized story. It is a story of both ones personal character and momentary psychology as well as the structures and relations of ones social environment—ones social ecosystem. Through my life I have come in contact with violent individuals and groups, small gangs and such, and when we are talking about larger Violent Extremist (VE) organizations we need to examine the same sorts of social ecosystem forces. We need to examine the root causes of how and why an individual’s environments may push folks to join those groups in parallel to the how and why of how these VE groups may use strategies to pull folks into their ranks—
we need to examine how social ecosystems are informing individual and group decisions and behaviors.

So, what are some of these drivers of decision-making and behavior in places where violent groups are present and highly active? Often it is in fact the drivers of violence, the root grievances that make it possible to justify violence in places where organized, non-state violent groups are operating that are being termed as the *push* and *pull* factors of radicalization toward violent extremism. In the Alliance for Peacebuilding CVE Summit talks a number of contributing factors to how specific individuals and/or groups may be pushed to join a violent extremist group were discussed. Between the presenters, who represented a spectrum of peacebuilding practitioners, development specialists, CVE experts, and academics, some common factors arose when asked about how individuals may be *pushed* to join violent groups and how violent groups may recruit, entice, or otherwise *pull* in individuals to their organizations.

Push factors were largely identified as issues of bad governance: human rights abuses; state and local corruption; political, economic, and social marginalization; discrimination; perceptions or senses of injustice; unmet expectations and unkept promises; isolation; and issues of physical abuse and trauma. (Katz, 2016. Greenburg & Hume, 2016) This non-exhaustive list captures a spectrum of social, political, and economic grievances that, when present within specific groups of people who feel oppressed by other groups of people, can push the oppressed to search for avenues of righting this perceived imbalance of justice, valid or not. If a violent group or organization is present in a social ecosystem, it is not hard to make the leap to assume certain individuals and groups would see violence as a means to realizing a more
dignified future for themselves and their groups—the examples in my personal story clearly highlight how, for example, the presence of groups bringing in illicit drugs into my communities partially enabled me to make decisions to engage with their products. All of this is in the realm of the first pillar of the UN Counter Terrorism strategy regarding deconstructing the conditions conducive to radicalization towards Violent Extremism.

The other side of this story is then how VE groups may endeavor to pull in recruits. Presenters in the Alliance for Peacebuilding’s CVE summit felt that VE groups offer a mixture of psychosocial, social, economic, and political attractions to those who are ripe for their particular messages and agendas. Different VE organizations offer different specific attractions, but broadly speaking it is the same sort of emotional and professional attraction that draws many people to their specific fields of practice—it is this search for a source of deeply longed for meaning in one’s life. People may join a VE group to join a larger cause that speaks into their hearts, speaks towards healing their wounds and most salient grievances with remedies that, in the moment, make sense to them—to realize a sense of purpose that is manifested in a sense that you are changing the world and shaping the future in a way that you believe in. Others may join VE groups as a simple byproduct of their social environment: they are recruited by people they trust—brothers, sisters, parents, uncles, friends, teachers, mentors etc—or because they have basic human needs that are not being met and a VE group can provide. (Katz, 2016. Greenburg & Hume, 2016) Relate this to my story of wanting to feel needed by my peers, a part of my school, financially solvent, and generally cool—it is no different in essence.

To be more specific and academically research normative I will back all these
above notions of push and pull factors up with some sources from the US Government CVE policy literature. Dara Katz, Co-Chair of the Violent Extremism and Insurgency Steering Committee and founding Deputy Director of the CVE Secretariat at USAID, was one of the interviewees in the Alliance for Peacebuilding online CVE summit referenced above. She described a process of internal deliberation at USAID producing a series of relevant policy documents: the February 2009 publication of USAID’s *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*; the October 2009 publication of USAID’s *Development Assistance and Counter-Extremism: A guide to Programming*; the September 2011 publication of *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*; and the most recent document jointly published by USAID and the US State Department in May 2016 entitled *The Department of State & USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism*. All of these documents engaged with the concept of *push* and *pull* factors in one fashion or another, but I feel the 2011 document most clearly outlines the drivers of radicalization towards joining VE groups as well as how rigorous, contextualizing assessments of social ecosystems and the inclusive toolbox of development assistance and peacebuilding are relevant to mitigating those drivers. The most recent Joint Strategy document seems to be particularly useful as a catalyst for putting preventative measure to CVE squarely in the center of the US and international community’s foreign policy discourse and programming.

USAID’s *Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency* document, as mentioned, clearly engages with the concept of *push* and *pull* factors relating to radicalization towards VE groups. The document lays out the following 5 specific factors that, if present within a social ecosystem, could *push* individual and/or groups to join VE
(1) “High levels of social marginalization and fragmentation”—particularly among first and second-generation rural-to-urban migrants—increases the appeal of violent extremist groups. Social isolation and disconnectedness from society, community, and family may trigger a personal search for identity, meaning, and purpose. In the absence of positive alternatives, membership in a cell or extremist network may help to fulfill those needs.

(2) Poorly governed or ungoverned areas may enable violent extremists to establish sanctuaries or safe havens. Poorly governed areas may create passive or active support for such groups by communities who feel marginalized or neglected by a lack of government reach. First, a lack of services can create opportunities for service provision by extremist groups. Second, a lack of security or rule of law can allow violent extremists to operate and possibly impose their own order, and may propel individuals to join armed groups as the perceived strongest actor.

(3) Government repression and human rights violations. Cruel, degrading treatment by police or security forces, or being closely connected to someone who suffered at their hands, for example, can be significant risk factors. They can lead to a desire for revenge. The harsher and more widespread the repression (especially if concentrated in common locales such as prisons), the greater the push to embrace violent extremism.

(4) Endemic corruption and elite impunity. The more corrupt the environment, the easier it is for violent extremists to establish themselves as a righteous alternative and lash out at “immoral” ruling elites. Endemic corruption can also provide such groups the enabling environment in which to establish geographic footholds and connections with organized crime.

(5) Cultural threat perceptions. This includes the often deeply held, existential perception of domination by another group, the West, or an oppressive international order. Cultural drivers also include more broadly perceived threats to related customs and values, including gender roles and education.” (USAID, 2011)

These 5 categories of push factors firmly ground the reality of radicalization towards VE in a conversation of individual and group grievances, perceived and/or real. Dara Katz, in her interview with the Alliance for Peacebuilding, articulated that these push factors are often where organizations like USAID’s toolbox of development assistance and peacebuilding can be effective. (Katz, 2016)

Dara also articulated that, in the field of PVE/CVE, there are deeper understandings of these push factors than there is of how VE groups and social ecosystems might pull people into the VE groups themselves. (Katz, 2016) The 2011 USAID strategy first states that the “pull factors are necessary for push factors to have a direct influence on individual level radicalization and recruitment.”(USAID, 2011) It
goes on to state that the concept of *pull* factors is concerned with group and “personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer.” (USAID, 2011) The strategy defines the mechanics of these rewards and, more generally, the *pull* factors of radicalization to VE in the following ways:

“[Rewards could provide] access to material resources, social status, and respect from peers; a sense of belonging, adventure, and self esteem or personal empowerment that individuals and groups that have long viewed themselves as victimized and marginalized can derive from the feeling that they are making history; and, the prospect of achieving glory and fame. Social networks comprised of relatives, friends, or neighbors can also draw others similarly affected by social marginalization or frustrated expectations into the orbit of violent extremist ideas and networks. Other pull factors include: the presence of radical institutions or venues, service provision by extremist groups, and extremist involvement in illegal economic activity.” (USAID, 2011)

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of digging deeper into the notion that individuals and groups may be *pushed* and/or *pulled* to join VE groups for purely monetary and material means—possibly because vocational training programs and development assistance aimed at mitigating joblessness has often had little effect regarding radicalization towards and recruitment by VE groups. This is pointedly demonstrated in a recent 2015 study by Mercy Corps, a diversified development programming, crisis management, conflict transformation, research, and solutions focused organization. They state, in their 2015 report entitled *Youth & Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence*, that “In some cases, economic inducements may compel someone to join an armed group, but upon further analysis, this appears to be rare. While unemployment is often emblematic of systemic sources of frustration and marginalization, employment status alone does not appear to determine whether a young person is likely to join an insurgency. Violence makes people poor, but poverty doesn’t appear to make them violent.” (Mercy Corps, 2015) This is evidence of a growing
recognition that much of the CT and development assistance strategies implemented in many parts of the world have not resulted in more peaceful societies.

USAID states very clearly, however, that “gaps remain in USAID’s understanding of violent extremism and insurgency,” (USAID, 2011) particularly in the realm of gender:

“Women may act as both a potential brake on as well as a driver of violent extremism. Some suggest that family ties, and women’s roles in families, create psychological barriers for husbands, sons, or other male relatives to join violent extremist groups. Others have asserted that women may serve as motivators for male family members to join. Understanding the role of gender at the local level is fundamental.” (USAID, 2011)

While this in one way is an admission of a lack of knowledge, I hear it really as a call for deep analysis of local realities and interpersonal dynamics and perceptions of a conflict ecosystem before intervention strategies are designed.

These discussions of push and pull factors start to define the space for how to engage with PVE/CVE. The last issue in 2016 of à propos, the KOFF peacebuilding magazine published by swisspeace, a practice-oriented peace research institute, is completely devoted to PVE discourse and practice—particularly with regards to the efforts of the Swiss Government who have been heavily involved in PVE practice and discourse for longer than most. They begin by saying “PVE is intended to address structural causes and aggravating factors that create grievances and thereby violent extremism.” (à propos, 2016) This is a direct statement addressing the myriad push and pull factors non-exhaustively articulated above and grounds the PVE field in a solutions oriented discourse. À propos goes on to say that the field of PVE “seeks to identify vulnerable individuals and groups, and early signs of radicalization and mitigate the risks through engagement, education and counter-narratives. The [PVE] approach assigns
greater emphasis to community engagement, the role of civil society organizations, partnerships between state and non-state actors and the call for context specific responses.” (à propos, 2016)

These words are massively important as they give voice to the power of the non-violent development and peacebuilding toolbox to transform violent conflict and build peace. The à propos issue states that there is a “growing consensus that ‘ideology cannot be defeated by guns but by better ideas” (à propos, 2016) and this sentiment is echoed by not only the fields of peacebuilding and development assistance, but by many military and CT actors. Retired Admiral Mike Mullen, former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, famously said in a House Armed Services Committee hearing in 2008 “We can’t kill our way to victory” (CNN, 2008) while discussing the ongoing NATO military intervention in Afghanistan.

On June 9th, 2016, retired US Admiral James K. Stavridis, former supreme allied commander of NATO and current dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and retired 4-Star US Marine Corp General John R. Allen, former commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, co-authored an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal entitled Expanding the US Military’s Smart-Power Toolbox. What they highlighted is possibly the beginning of a paradigm shift in regards to how the US Department of Defense might be looking at creating human security. I again encourage all to read it in full but I will quote the most salient parts in regards to our conversation:

“Last year the United States Africa Command, known as Africom, spotted an opportunity and took unusual action. It asked the Pentagon for approval to support a civilian government initiative that it believed would help counter the spread of violent extremist groups and keep American soldiers safer.
Africom had noticed that civilian programs led by the U.S. Agency for International Development in Agadez, Niger, were clearly reducing support for violent extremism there. Specifically, a combination of youth-development and conflict-mitigation programs were helping promote tolerance and reducing the allure of extremist violence among young people. Commanders asked to invest up to $5 million of the Pentagon's $1.3 billion 2015 Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund to scale up these USAID programs.

When Pentagon lawyers reviewed Africom's request, they determined that current law prevents the Defense Department from sharing the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund with USAID. The lawyers effectively said that the military didn't have the authority to deploy taxpayer dollars, already appropriated by Congress, in ways it assessed would reduce the risk to U.S. troops and make America safer.

Instead of strategically investing in a smart-power program showing promise toward reducing violent extremism, Africom purchased more military hardware for its African partners.

Sen. Tim Kaine (D., Va.) [also Hillary Clinton's 2016 Vice Presidential candidate] on Monday introduced an amendment to the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act. The concise amendment would create a pilot program granting the Pentagon the authority to share funds appropriated for Pentagon security cooperation activities with USAID. The funds could then be invested in community-led programming to reduce violent extremism.

It is essential to continue focused military campaigns against these [VE] groups, but their existence is a symptom of a greater problem: violent radicalization of thousands upon thousands of men and women living with little or no hope under corrupt regimes or in conflict-ridden states.

... the U.S. military needs the flexibility to use everything in the national-security toolbox—including those tools that are rightfully in the hands of other government agencies.

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 8, Gen. David Rodriguez, commander of Africom, argued that development programs that complement security force operations are essential to countering violent extremism and radicalism. "If efforts are to be successful," he explained, the Defense Department "must have the flexibility to transfer funds between agencies and collaborate on holistic responses to counter current and emerging threats."

We couldn't agree more. As former senior commanders who have seen, designed and budgeted for the fight against extremism, we urge Congress to adopt this common sense amendment when it takes up debate on the National Defense Authorization Act.

Our troops cannot win this battle on their own—and we should not be asking them to. Americans face greater risks and a deadlier fight if Congress does not adopt the Kaine amendment." (Stavridis & Allen, 2016)

These words obviously speak for themselves and are clear examples of how the most forward thinking military commanders see their role in the world—as warriors for peace, not warriors for war. Five days after this article was published, US Senator Tim
Kaine (D. Virginia) and 2016 Democratic Party Vice-Presidential Candidate issued a statement on the passage of the Senate version of the US Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The last point in this statement was the following:

“Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Senator Kaine offered an amendment to provide Combatant Commanders increased flexibility in addressing violent extremism by facilitating cooperation between DoD’s counterterrorism operations and USAID’s governance, justice and youth development efforts. The amendment was drafted with input from senior military commanders who believe that violent extremist organizations are far more agile and complex than the current DoD tools being used to defeat them.” (Kaine, 2016)

What Senator Kaine is referring to above, and what Ret. Adm. James Stavridis and Ret. Gen. John Allen were voicing their support for in their article, requires some specific and up to date details to solidify its significance but is all in US public record.

The US House of Representatives passed their FY2017 NDAA in May of 2016. The Senate passed theirs in June of 2016. At the time of this writing the differences between the two bills is still being resolved before it is sent to the President for approval. He has threatened to veto for many reasons not relevant to our conversation. The specific amendment that Tim Kaine has introduced to the senate’s version of the NDAA and the Admiral and General support is certainly not in my list of personal reasons why the NDAA is problematic.

Tim Kaine’s amendment, SA.4417 to S.2943 (the NDAA), co-sponsored by Sen. Cory Booker (D. NJ) and Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D. RI), specifically calls for a “Pilot program on Department of Defense and United States Agency for International Development Cooperation to Counter Violent Extremism.” (National Defense Authorization Act, 2016, pg. S3452) The purpose of this pilot is a “to assess the feasibility and advisability of cooperation between the Department of Defense and the United States Agency International Development in projects to prevent support for
violent extremism.” (National Defense Authorization Act, 2016, pg. S3452) As articulated in Ret. Adm. Stavridis’ and Ret. Gen. Allen’s article, Africom had requested to provide up to 5 million USD to USAID in support of their youth-development and conflict-mitigation programs in Agadez, Niger. SA.4417 specifies that “the amount of support provided by the Secretary under the pilot program in any fiscal year may not exceed $10,000,000” (National Defense Authorization Act, 2016, pg. S3452) and that “the authority to provide support under the pilot program shall expire on September 30, 2018.” (National Defense Authorization Act, 2016, pg. S3452)

For US defense policy this is a huge shift from traditional security frameworks dominated by militarization for the purpose of deterrence and military action. What the US Department of Defense is, I feel, hoping to find is that while 10 million USD may not be a huge amount of money in regards to how many drone strikes or military engagements of any kind it can support, 10 million USD can go quite a long way in terms of CVE/PVE specific and relevant programming to build sustainable peace in a conflict ecosystem.

While this may feel like a paradigm shift for traditional CT actors, the recent à propos issue summarizes how this paradigm shift in security and CT frameworks is not actually a paradigm shift so much as it is an exercise in systems integration of multi-sectoral approaches to building peace in complex, multi-layered, multi-actored conflict ecosystems: “PVE is not so much a paradigm shift in the fight against terrorism, but much more an adaptive response to evolving security threats and challenges of violent extremism that seeks to transcend the limitations of the traditional ‘securitized’ CT response.” (à propos, 2016)
This graphic from Mercy Corps’ *Youth & Consequences* report illustrates this integration of non-violent solutions to the push and pull factors of radicalization towards violent extremism—I feel the same image with the single approach being traditional military security and CT strategy would also be salient and poignant.

7.2.2 Discussion of Guiding Question #2 & #3: (2) What are the distinctions between CVE specific versus CVE relevant programming? And (3) what is the importance to the concept of CVE of deeply contextualizing & contextualized conflict sensitive analysis and preparation before strategy building, engagement, or intervention?

While the graphic above starts to get us thinking broadly about this, Dara Katz, in her interview with the Alliance for Peacebuilding referenced earlier, had the following to say when asked about the distinction between CVE specific and CVE relevant programming:

“When we (USAID & the US State Department) set out our policy (primarily the May 2016 *Department of State & USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism* and the 2011 *Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency*), what we wanted to do is help people understand what was the difference between, for instance, a civil society program in a country and a CVE program involving civil society capacity building in a country, and this is where the intentionality comes in. It means that a CVE program…consciously addresses violent extremism drivers. We do not retrofit the program to be a CVE program. We won’t say ‘this agricultural program in this area where there is a lot of recruitment [to a VE group] is suddenly a CVE program.’ We
would have to adjust that program, based on the research we’ve done that indicates, for instance, [that] the way agriculture is being done [in that region] is driving people [to join VE groups] or is making them more susceptible to violent extremist narratives—and so we would change the program based on that evidence.” (Katz, 2016)

Here she highlights the importance of evidence based approaches and the systemic creation of rigorous monitoring, evaluation, and learning elements to not just PVE and CVE programming, but all conflict sensitive development assistance and peacebuilding programming. This sentiment also clearly speaks to the value of contextualizing analysis. To be able to understand the mechanics of, say, how agriculture is being done in a certain place in a way that is or is not creating conducive conditions to radicalization towards VE clearly requires a deep understanding of a very localized reality. To understand how an intervention into how agriculture might be done to positively transform those conducive conditions requires this deep understanding of local dynamics.

So these two concepts of localizing analysis and PVE/CVE specific vs. relevant programming are deeply intertwined and will generate different processes and struggles in every separate context. This complexity begs the question of are there ways to frame how to go about this in a balanced generative versus non-prescriptive way? The Global Center on Cooperative Security (GCCS), an organization that “works with governments, international organizations, and civil society to develop and implement comprehensive and sustainable responses to complex international security challenges through collaborative policy research, context-sensitive programming, and capacity development,” (GCCS, 2016) produced in partnership with the Danish Government a report in 2013 entitled *Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Engagement in West Africa and the Sahel: An Action Agenda*. It was the product of an
April 2013 workshop on CVE organized by the GCCS and hosted by the Governments of Burkina Faso and Denmark in collaboration with the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), a multilateral CT forum whose membership includes 30 nations and many UN subsidiary bodies. This action agenda lays out a common set of strategic goals and achievements that were deemed at least regionally relevant to CVE in West Africa and the Sahel, if not more broadly. The Action Agenda specifies 4 themes in regards to CVE relevant and specific programming:

1. “Empower local community, government, and traditional leaders to work on conflict prevention and resolution in a region that has been plagued by several prolonged conflicts.
2. Strengthen law enforcement, criminal justice, and security sector actors through training and technical assistance focusing on community engagement, the rule of law, and human rights.
3. Actively engage and support civil society at the regional and international level.
4. Identify and prevent violent extremism by addressing its structural and ideological drivers.” (GCCS, 2013)

This Action Agenda addresses these themes with thoroughly explored Recommendations for Action by States in the Region, by Regional and International Bodies, and to Build the Capacity of Civil Society. The titles of the recommendation for states, international bodies, and to build the capacity of civil society, while all explored thoroughly in the agenda, read like a generalized task list for that I find useful when trying to frame what systems to local level CVE programming might look like:

**Recommendations for Action by States in the Region:**

1. Conduct national assessments of the drivers of insecurity and violent extremism.
2. Conduct CVE training and sensitization for frontline officials and practitioners.
   a. Develop and conduct a mentoring program for selected frontline justice and security sector officials.
   b. Conduct a feasibility study regarding the establishment of a comprehensive justice and security sector reform program in individual countries.
4. Work with experts to improve conditions and standards in prisons to determine the risk of radicalization and recruitment in prisons.
5. Develop rehabilitation programs for former fighters in West Africa and the Sahel.
a. Conduct a mutual evaluation program to assess current policing practices and training needs for community-oriented policing.

b. Conduct a pilot community-oriented policing program with an urban police force in a select Sahel country.

7. Engage local communities as part of cross-border management.
   a. Continue to build the capacity of customs and immigration officials.

8. Promote state and civil society partnerships through the creation of local security committees.

9. Develop civic engagement or educational programs that promote public service and volunteerism for course credit.

10. Ensure that the voices of victims of terrorism are heard.

**Recommendations for Action by Regional and International Bodies:**

11. Enhance implementation of the CVE elements of the ECOWAS counterterrorism strategy.
   a. Add a CVE dimension to the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network.
   b. Promote interreligious dialogue at the regional level.

**African Union Specific Recommendations:**

12. Share good practices across Africa and support sub regional organizations such as ECOWAS with expertise and experience from other regions of Africa.

13. Conduct a perception study to identify sources of insecurity and levels of trust between communities and local law enforcement and security personnel and the governments.

14. Bring regional religious leaders together to discuss the role of faith-based organizations in CVE efforts.

**European Union Specific Recommendations:**

15. Examine the role the nascent Sahel Security College could play in supporting justice and security sector reform across the region. (An organ nested within the Sahel G5, a networked intergovernmental security body between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad)

16. Revive or continue supporting the Northern Mali Network for Peace and Security and similar community-level forums on issues of peace, security, and development.

**United Nations Specific Recommendations:**

17. Conduct CVE awareness trainings among UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force members in the field in West Africa and the Sahel
   a. Adapt the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) multiagency Transnational Crime Unit cooperative model to the Sahel and pilot its use in Mali.
   b. Increase community-oriented policing initiatives as an integral part of the UN governance, peace, and security programming in the region.

**Recommendations for Actions to Build the Capacity of Civil Society and the Media:**

18. Conduct awareness raising and sensitization in the media.

19. States and civil society could work toward developing the idea of civic engagement and accompanying narratives.
   a. Support community-based and cultural organizations.

20. Build the capacity of civil society organizations working with youth and women.
   a. Work with women’s civil society organizations to build their capacity to access national, regional, and international support and become local partners.
   b. Work with civil society organizations to strengthen capacities to access and influence informal justice systems.

21. Create a regional assembly for youth in the region.

22. Provide training to youth civil society organizations on CVE issues, conflict prevention, and the role of youth in communities. (GCCS, 2013)
This agenda goes a long way towards defining a process for creating locally relevant, multi-sectoral strategies to CVE that will have integrated, grassroots informed support from national, regional, and international actors. Points 7, 14, and 17a also speak to the necessity for strong regional cooperation, integration, communication, and support. I feel it is important to note that each numbered point could not be implemented or realized through the actions of single actors. Furthermore, engaging with many of these action points could be met with resistance within any track of society—framed within the framework of Multi-Track Diplomacy—depending on the context. National drivers of extremism such as illicit trade networks from which state corruption feeds is one of the first likely impediments that comes to mind.

The above list is a huge list. It is a social systems, society based action agenda for informing national, regional, and international policy and engagement with grassroots relevant analysis and solutions oriented programming. We know that governments and intergovernmental organizations often move slowly to build and implement policy. We know that everyday life for people on the ground keeps going. We know that VE groups are nimble and operational, learning and doing every day. Consequently, action agenda checklists like the list above are only as good as their implementation. As one entity of many working on such implementation, USAID and the US State Department have slowly built their strategies that are now gaining traction and are developing into a portfolio of coordinated, strategic programming geared at effective and localized relevance. For USAID efforts in West Africa specifically they have developed some regionally contextualized approaches adopted from their broader strategies, well articulated in the *Countering Violent Extremism in West Africa* informational document.
that lays out 8 short programming principles I feel speak into the nuance of the above Action Agenda points:

“Focus on Regional and National African Partners”—Foster long-term solutions by building West African government and civil society capacity to counter VE.

Adapt to the Environment and the Threat—Be flexible in both geographic targeting and activity definition so that programming can meet emerging needs and seize opportunities.

Promote Innovation—Focus on testing ideas, learning and adapting to improve our understanding and effectiveness.

Foster Collaboration and Partnerships—Promote knowledge sharing and synergy by working closely with a broad spectrum of CVE actors, including U.S. Government agencies, donors, civil society organizations, universities, and inter-governmental bodies among others.

Balance Community Risks and Regional Dynamics—Focus on the communities at greatest risk, while not losing sight of the national and regional forces that shape the community context.

Nest CVE within a Broader Development Approach—Align traditional development programming with CVE initiatives, recognizing that reducing vulnerability to violent extremism in West Africa requires a holistic effort.

Be Gender Nuanced—Invest in women’s capacity to prevent VE in their communities and explore how concepts of masculinity can facilitate or inhibit VE.

Do No Harm—Ensure that interventions do not have harmful unintended consequences and that beneficiaries, partners and staff stay safe.” (USAID, 2016)

These eight programming principles firmly plant CVE within a humanizing security framework that cannot be dominated by tradition security, military, and CT actors or strategies. They focus on human resilience, ingenuity, and community ownership of security. They make people and communities a part of the solution, not just groups to be studied and saved by outside actors. They promote experimentation, reflection, creativity, and support based relationship building. In short, to me they instinctually feel like they could be a strong part of framing governance and development engagement in a way that is not about control or saving, it is about care.

8. Discussion of Conclusions and Findings

So let us come back to the primary research question I posed: Given how UN and European narratives prefer the term Preventing Violent Extremism and how the US
based narratives prefer the term **Countering** Violent Extremism, is there a negative dissonance between the two frameworks as general Theories of Change coalesce in this nascent field?

Chief among my thoughts as I built this question and endeavored to understand where and how it would lead my learning was the notion that we need everybody to build peace. It takes everybody and all their efforts. My second thought has been how much good effort is lost to the dysfunction of how people do and don’t work together. My feeling is that people do what they feel compelled to do by the story of their lives; judgment, mis or non-understanding, and conflict have so little language for positive transformation. It’s a societally human process that happens all the time—we have to talk about it all or we will never figure out how to work with one another.

As I’ve tried to build an understanding of what people mean when they say CVE or PVE I have not just been trying to answer “what is violent extremism and where did it come from, what drives it?” I also have not been trying to dissect particular violent groups and figure out how to positively engage with them. I feel like what I have been trying to do is figure out what practitioners and practitioner organizations are talking about when they say they are trying to positively transform social environments where violent, non-state actors are present. They are doing this because violence is spreading, we are fearful for humanity, the military solutions haven’t been working, and we cannot sustainably do the development work communities need in the presence of such multi-layered crisis—simple as that.

What I have ended up hearing through this searching, broadly, is the continuous echoing of two terms: **Preventing** Violent Extremism and **Countering** Violent Extremism.
After digging into these terms in the ways I have done in this paper, I am left feeling as if the two terms are both being used to encompass the same multi-sectoral toolbox for doing both Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism. I am left feeling as I started: Defusing Violent Extremism is a better term because it gets at the need for both preventing and countering radicalization towards VE as well as countering the ongoing operation and preventing the manifestation of VE groups. To me, after digging through all these strategies, I feel that the reality of the US Government and Washington-based development community being so tied to the term CVE is likely a byproduct of the Washington based peacebuilding and development assistance community working with language that the more traditional military security and Counter Terrorism actors generated, understand, and feel comfortable engaging with.

Unlike the US military and CT community, the UN and European community has already wedded their CT strategies to preventative efforts and I now feel that their adoption of the term PVE is an effort to call the US out for our military dominated strategies and get the US onboard with prevention and peacebuilding. This dissonance is what concerns me. It is not that the theories of change for countering versus preventing VE might be in negative dissonance, it is that those theories of change may be brought to bear within the context of the international community disagreeing about the broader frameworks of what they are trying to do. I see this as highly problematic as diplomats, government minsters, and those in civil society come together to try and work together for people they don’t even actually govern.

I am not sure my question originated with these thoughts but it is where it has led me. I am concerned that complex, multi-sectoral whole of society efforts to defuse
violent extremism’s ability to hinder human societal development may be stymied by an international community that cannot figure out how to work together while societies within national borders struggle to do the same.

9. Practical Applicability

The discussion and comments in this study may be of use to those working in the Military and Law Enforcement or in the fields of Peacebuilding, Conflict Transformation, Countering, Preventing, and Defusing Violent Extremism, Counter Terrorism, Development Assistance, and Human Security more broadly, but I am not one to toot my own horn—this paper was for me and my learning, if it is of any use to anyone else that is their problem, god bless them and good luck in their search for a deeper understanding of supporting the manifestation of genuine human security.

10. Recommendations for Further Research

I have a few recommendations for further research: We as peacebuilders, development practitioners, military actors, parents, and folks concerned with human security need to better understand the fragility of inhibitors to decisions making and behavior that can cause harm to folks within a social ecosystem. Families cannot be the sole bearers of responsibility as families do not exist within a social vacuum. Our societies need structure around laws and the functions of community in regards to creating stronger inhibitors to harmful happenings—which leads to my second recommendation for further research: We need to better understand what is good governance and how it can enable communities and families to have constant interaction with vibrant inhibitors to harmful decision making at the individual, local, community, regional, national, and global levels of human society.
Another way of saying this would be we need healthy human communities with functioning systems of physical and psychosocial health care and happiness, education, employment, ecological care, transportation, food production, waste management, energy production, and innovation.

To this end I would say that we—practitioners, scholars, and societies—need to understand better what it means to live in systems of positive governance. What I mean by this is I would like to better know how governments function in ways that enable their citizens to be the best, happiest, safest, healthiest people they can be. I feel that positive governance is about supporting citizens as a byproduct of how citizens are invested in that governance in a way that generates gratitude. This leaves us proud of and motivated by the effectiveness and moral character of human society(s).

I have the beginnings of a plan to personally engage with these recommendations: I am looking at a variety of PhD programs in positive psychologies and conflict management. I am looking for programs that are deeply concerned with not only how we form and strengthen our own positive identities, but how we can capitalize on our personal positive identities collectively, as groups and societies, to build and strengthen our ability to provide each other with positive leadership, positive development, and positive communities. I am drawn to mission driven, social justice oriented experiential learning educational institutions with radical approaches to doctoral programs similar to the SIT Graduate Institute—we shall see where it leads.

11. Concluding Comments
I feel strongly that each individual human’s story is the strength of humanity. I ask myself “What will I do?” I am concerned with this question, not just on an individual level, but in a human species way. What will I do, to me, is a question that I have found I
can only answer with something along the lines of “spend time supporting folks to make that decision freely for themselves in ways that speak into their hearts and motivate them to be the best they can be. Support people to define their own freedom and their own success.” So what will I do? This learning process has left me profoundly worried that many of us on this planet may not currently have the confidence to be the best we can be—for a multi-layered mash up of structural, psychosocial, psychological, and experiential reasons. There are so many sources of hurt in our human experience and it does so much to demotivate distract, and harm us as individuals and societies.

I started writing this paper speaking of 9/11 and our societal, war ridden, strategically unsound responses that have only ended up with more war and less security, for the US as a nation but even more so for societies around the world. This learning process, for me, started as an endeavor into understanding how strategies are being built to deal with the aftermath of the cold war, 9/11, 15 years of a globally messy state security to global violence, and our current state of human insecurity in relation to non-state violent groups of differing motivations—be they economic, ideological, social, and/or political. It has left me wondering how might we endeavor to build humanity’s health, wealth, confidence, positive identity, and happiness.

What I have written may not have much practical applicability broader than helping me make sense of complexity that has relevance to my professional efforts at this time in my life. That being said, I want to talk about attitude. I feel I have taken an attitude to this learning process that is, I hope, firmly embedded in the notion that the political is always personal. That private life always informs political behavior. That political behavior is an everyday action and choice and is not just something we do when
we vote, when we inform ourselves about how to vote, or when we post some opinion on Facebook or re-tweet some confirmation of our opinion. How we let our personal lives and stories mingle with the meaning making of life, of work, learning, and civic engagement is a political statement in and of itself, and if this paper inspires one single person to be just a little more confident of their ability to have a positive impact on the world I’ll count it as a success—even if that one person is just me.

To all of my friends, teachers (especially form SIT & CONTACT!!), and colleagues a deepest thanks and warmest gratitude!

All my family, my loving parents, and my dearest sisters: you are all the inspiration a wandering fool of a brother could ever wish for…😊
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Appendix A: Request for Task Order Proposal (RFTOP) No. SOL-624-16-000015 – Partnerships for Peace for USAID/West Africa

C.1 DESCRIPTION
This Statement of Work (SOW) outlines the requirements of the USAID Partnerships for Peace (P4P) project. USAID/West Africa’s Regional Peace and Government Office (RPGO) intends to acquire the services of a contractor to support the efforts of West Africans to improve their ability to counter violent extremism (CVE). This will be achieved by identifying regional, national, and sub-national organizations and governments with potential and political will to counter VE, and providing them with the organizational and technical skills to undertake proactive CVE programs capable of diminishing the vulnerability of at-risk populations. This project will foster the creation of networks that improve effectiveness of CVE programming but also create functional and operational connections among various organizations in the region. P4P may support organizations or governments in any country in West Africa; however, the project will focus on countries in the Sahel that have been most affected by recent VEO activities, specifically Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. In order to respond to ever-evolving VE threats, P4P must be flexible, adaptable and subject to almost constant review and assessment. An effective project will demonstrate the ability to modify its approach quickly as environments and dynamics change, as the understanding of the needs and capacities of organizations evolve, and in response to technical learning in the CVE sector. “Pause-and-reflect” events are necessary to help activities determine if they are on the right track or if course corrections are required to ensure that desired outcomes are pursued effectively. The purpose of P4P is to strengthen West African capacity to counter violent extremism by achieving the following sub-purposes:
- Greater understanding of VE and knowledge of CVE approaches in West Africa
- Increased government and civil society leadership of CVE efforts
- Improved regional coordination of CVE.

C.1.1 BACKGROUND
The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has long recognized the critical role of development in addressing social, economic, governance and other factors that can drive violent extremism or radicalization of individuals and communities. USAID defines CVE as: “Prevention of advocacy, engagement in, preparation for or otherwise support to ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic and political objectives.” Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is central to achieving the Agency’s mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our objectives of security and prosperity in developing countries. The violent-extremist landscape in West Africa has grown increasingly fractured and complex. As new groups enter the fray and existing movements evolve, the need for affected West African countries—and other WA countries vulnerable to future exposure to Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs)—to develop a robust capacity to counter violent extremism is now an urgent priority, and the countries are keenly aware of this need.

C.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

1 USAID: “Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency”, September 2011
West African countries vulnerable to VEOs currently have limited or no civilian organizational, technical or management capacity to deal with the threat of extremism. Otherwise stated, West African organizations are unable to translate threat information into practical actions that deter the appeal of VEOs to vulnerable people. The knowledge and skill base of organizations or institutions in West Africa capable of promoting and undertaking CVE programs is nascent. However, the field is fertile for capacity development: governments are recognizing this gap, but their interest is more oriented towards countering terrorism (CT) than countering violent extremism (CVE). CT typically involves the use of security infrastructure to roll back the threat, i.e., police or military action, which can diminish popular support for governments instead of garnering loyalty if done incorrectly. CVE involves the application of civilian expertise to lessen the appeal of VEOs. Furthermore, there is evidence that “local partners recognize the need to better coordinate, network and learn with counterparts in communities in other countries dealing with VE to re-enforce and improve upon their current CVE efforts.” For CVE to be effective in vulnerable zones, the countries must develop solid networks linking governments and organizations at the local, national and regional levels to assume responsibility for CVE efforts. Regional organizations must support countries to develop CVE approaches, boost moderate voices, reduce the pull of VEOs, and support knowledge management to increase knowledge of “what’s working”. However, currently networks across borders and within countries do not exist to strengthen interventions. Many times in-country actors do not even know of one another.

Community leaders and organizations are an important link to effective CVE programming. However, local civil-society, political, religious and traditional leaders in at-risk areas often lack the tools or support to engage, despite their eagerness to do so. The lack of identity and a sense of exclusion and marginalization have led to a lack of cohesion and anomie among youth and made them susceptible to virulent ideologies and violence. Youth groups and youth associations at the community level are common, and yet these groups often lack clout or representation at national or regional levels, contributing to a sense that their voices go unheard.

**C.3 THEORY OF CHANGE**

*If:*
- West Africa has regional institutions, national governments and civil society organizations with the organizational and technical capacity to undertake proactive, effective CVE programming, and
- West African regional institutions, national governments and civil society organizations collaborate to counter violent extremism.

*Then:*
- West African capacity to counter violent extremism will be strengthened.

*Thus, in conjunction with other concurrent USAID interventions*
- Vulnerability to violent extremism will be reduced.

**C.5 OBJECTIVE/PURPOSE**

The Partnerships for Peace (P4P) Project for capacity-building and networking will be in line with the strategic vision of USAID/West Africa (USAID/WA), specifically Objective 1 of the USAID/WA Regional Development Cooperation Strategy 2015-2019, entitled “Systems of Non-violent Conflict Management Strengthened in West Africa,” by supporting and strengthening mechanisms that address community concerns peacefully. The project will also be consistent with the U.S. Government’s Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) priority to support efforts to undermine and defeat violent extremist organizations (VEOs).
P4P will be nested within a larger framework for USAID interventions in the region currently known as the Sahel Development Initiative (SDI). SDI seeks to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism in the Sahel by: weakening the legitimacy of violent extremist organizations and ideology; enhancing government legitimacy; and increasing economic opportunities. Through SDI, USAID will seek to address the grievances that are the main drivers of violent extremist recruitment in the Sahel, which often stem from development issues: poor governance, lack of economic opportunity, and perceived exclusion from the benefits and services provided/facilitated by governments in the region. As a result, P4P interventions will be one of several lines of effort, and communication, coordination, and deliberate geographic alignment will be critical to the success of both the project and the overall Initiative.

The geographic focus of the project will initially include Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, and will have flexibility to modify its geographic targets as the incidents of VE arise elsewhere in the region, and to adapt and provide support to an expanding list of appropriate institutions and organizations identified with potential to manage CVE activities. Therefore, additional target countries could include any in West Africa that become vulnerable to VE and VEO recruitment efforts.