Waging Peace: UN Peace Operations Confronting Terrorism and Violent Extremism

ARTHUR BOUTELLIS AND NAUREEN CHOWDHURY FINK

IPI

INTERNATIONAL
PEACE
INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ARTHUR BOUTELLIS is Director of the International Peace Institute's Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations.

Email: boutellis@ipinst.org

NAUREEN CHOWDHURY FINK is a Senior Fellow at the Global Center on Cooperative Security. She previously worked as the Head of Research and Analysis at the Global Center and as a Senior Policy Analyst at the International Peace Institute.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GLOBAL CENTER
ON COOPERATIVE SECURITY

CONTENTS

Abbreviations

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
CT	Counterterrorism
CTED	UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
CTITF	UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DPA	UN Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
HIPPO	High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
MINUSMA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OROLSI	UN Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime

Executive Summary

Of the eleven countries most affected by terrorism globally, seven currently host UN peace operations. The deployment of peace operations in countries where there is not only little or no peace to keep, but where terrorism and violent extremism are part of the threat landscape, presents complex challenges to the UN system, member states, and national and local partners. If not already doing so, UN peace operations will be increasingly called upon to adapt their approaches without compromising their doctrinal foundations.

To date, discourse among experts and policymakers has narrowly focused on whether peacekeeping operations can undertake traditional kinetic counterterrorism (CT) operations. There has been comparatively little exploration of the broader political and practical challenges, opportunities, and risks facing UN peace operations in complex security environments. This has created a gap between the policy debate in New York and the realities confronting UN staff on the ground.

The three major UN peace and security reviews in 2015 all highlighted the need for UN peace operations to adapt to the changing nature of conflicts. They also emphasized the importance of political solutions for preventing and ending conflicts and sustaining peace. This emphasis on prevention was echoed in the secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. These underscored the limitations of securitized approaches, focused on symptoms rather than causes, and advocated for greater investment in preventive, multi-stakeholder approaches.

This paper examines the recent drive to integrate CT and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) into relevant activities of UN peace operations, as well as the associated challenges and opportunities. It seeks to expand the scope of the discussions beyond whether peace operations can "do CT" to how they can better support national governments and local communities in preventing terrorism and violent extremism.

Extensive conversations and interviews with UN officials, member state representatives, and practitioners elicited a number of key issues related to whether, where, when, and how CT and P/CVE could be integrated into peace operations, including:

- The lack of any specific mention of terrorism or violent extremism in mission mandates;
- Implications for the principle of impartiality and the resulting consequences for field operations and personnel;
- Challenges for the management of relationships with host countries;
- Impact on the safety and security of UN personnel, operations, and partners;
- Limited resources, capacities, and expertise in UN field missions;
- The pressing operational needs of missions confronting terrorist groups; and
- Fragmented policy development at UN headquarters and the resulting lack of clear guidance for field missions.

The report makes a number of recommendations for how peace operations can adopt more cohesive, strategic approaches to respond to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism.

Recommendations for a more supportive headquarters:

- **Improve analytical capacity:** The UN needs a more nuanced understanding not only of terrorist groups but also of the factors and grievances leading to radicalization and violence. A regional analytical framework may be appropriate in some contexts.

- **Enhance system-wide dialogue, coherence, and policy guidance:** Violent extremism is an issue that cuts across the three pillars of the UN. There is a need for more system-wide dialogue, including between peace operations teams and CT bodies, to achieve greater coherence and develop UN-wide policy guidance.

- **Prioritize objectives and capacities in mandates:** Although mandates are subject to interpretation, some see their lack of references to relevant resolutions on CT or mention of P/CVE as an obstacle to UN system-wide cooperation or to missions adopting preventive approaches and mobilizing resources to fund them.

Recommendations for more effective field missions:

- **Preserve (and expand) the space for dialogue**

with all parties: The Security Council should carefully consider the implications of imposing sanctions and listing individuals and groups as "terrorists." UN officials should also be cautious with the use of labels like "violent extremist" or "terrorist" when describing individuals, armed groups, and—most importantly—communities, particularly when they are not designated as such by the UN Security Council.

- **Enhance capacity for early warning and response:** UN peace operations can facilitate early warning by highlighting the risks of radicalization and mobilization to violence and by identifying local capacities for peace and resilience.

- **Integrate CT and P/CVE into compacts with host governments where relevant:** The development of "compacts" between the UN and host governments would be an opportunity for honest conversations about what the UN does not do to fight terrorism, what it could do to support countries in preventing violent extremism, and which national CT measures could be counterproductive.

- **Enhance mission engagement with civil society, women, and youth:** People-centric peace operations should aim to promote better governance, strengthen state-citizen relations, foster social inclusion and cohesion, and empower youth, families, women, and local leaders to address conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism.

- **Design integrated strategies to prevent terrorism and violent extremism:** Many UN projects may already be "P/CVE-relevant" and could, where and when useful, be made more "P/CVE-specific," particularly in the areas of rule of law and human rights. CT and P/CVE activities need to be mainstreamed in an integrated mission strategy for prevention and sustaining peace.

- **Promote partnerships between missions, country teams, and NGOs:** UN field missions are often not well equipped to carry out P/CVE projects. Other UN entities and NGOs may be better placed to carry out these projects. In addition to experience and expertise in P/CVE programming, these partners may better manage and follow up on projects and often bring longstanding relationships with government counterparts and local communities.

- **Improve capacity to monitor, evaluate, manage risk, and learn:** More empirical evidence is needed to fully understand the impact and potential of P/CVE initiatives. While efforts to integrate P/CVE into the UN's work will involve a process of trial and error, a risk management framework needs to be in place.

- **Employ caution in labeling programs as "P/CVE":** Even if P/CVE-relevant, projects should not be reflexively labeled "P/CVE" if they were not designed and developed as such. Just rebranding existing projects as "P/CVE" does not ensure they are PCVE-specific or even P/CVE-relevant. A "do no harm" approach is needed to avoid any unintended consequences.

- **Improve training and raise the awareness of mission staff:** UN peace operations in contexts where terrorism is a threat could use substantive advice on issues flagged in this report. As a first step, short-term experts could be deployed to offer guidance to missions requesting support. Contextually tailored trainings on CT and P/CVE for mission staff could also increase understanding of these issues and advance efforts to mainstream them in existing policy frameworks and programs.

The added value of the UN in confronting terrorism and violent extremism is not to deliver a decisive military response but to support and strengthen preventive, multi-stakeholder approaches. The debate on how the UN can adapt to this role provides it an opportunity to develop a more strategic approach to waging and sustaining peace by addressing the drivers of terrorism and violent extremism rather than managing their symptoms.

Introduction

The deployment of UN peace operations in countries where there is not only little or no peace to keep, but where terrorism and violent extremism are part of the threat landscape, presents complex challenges to the UN system, member states, and national and local partners. Of the eleven countries most affected by terrorism globally, seven currently host UN peace operations. These UN operations range from small political missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen to larger peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and Mali.[1] Some of these field missions operate in parallel to national or regional forces with a counterterrorism mandate.

To date, discourse among experts and high-level policymakers has narrowly focused on whether peacekeeping operations can undertake kinetic counterterrorism operations (i.e., traditional military and law enforcement approaches) and whether the Security Council will someday ask peacekeepers to fight terrorists.[2] However, a forward-looking report published in 2014 highlighted critical challenges UN field missions face in relation to transnational and unconventional threats such as terrorism. These include:

- The lack of real-time information and analysis;

- The complex political nature of transnational terrorist networks, particularly those ideologically opposed to the UN; and

- The lack of regional approaches to cross-border challenges, which hinders the UN's ability to adapt to these threat.[3]

Since this report, there has been little exploration of the broader political and practical challenges,

opportunities, and risks facing UN peace operations in complex security environments. Peace operations increasingly confront a mix of political armed groups and proxy militias in contexts where criminality, terrorism, and violent extremism are prevalent and host states face deep legitimacy crises.

In light of the emerging focus on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and evolving operational threats, the need to address these issues has gained urgency. As noted by UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous, "It cannot be denied that groups with extremist views are an emerging phenomenon," hence the need to "develop creative approaches to address these armed groups without compromising on the doctrinal foundations of our work."[4]

The three 2015 reviews of the UN's work on peace and security (peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and women, peace, and security), the subsequent high-level debate on peace and security hosted by the president of the General Assembly in May 2016,[5] and the review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in June 2016[6] all highlighted the need for the UN to adapt to these evolving conflict scenarios and to invest more heavily in preventive approaches. Similarly, the growing interest of many states in exploring preventive approaches to terrorism and violent extremism reflects the need to adapt to an evolving terrorist threat that is increasingly transnational, unpredictable, and intertwined with ongoing conflicts.

This threat requires a response that addresses not just the symptoms but also the root causes and drivers of extremism. As US General David Petraeus noted, "From Afghanistan before 9/11 to

---

1 Seth G. Jones, *A Persistent Threat: The Evolution of al Qa'ida and Other Salafi Jihadists*, RAND Corporation, 2014, available at www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR637.html .

2 See, for instance, Richard Gowan, "Can U.N. Peacekeepers Fight Terrorists?" Brookings Institution, June 30, 2015, available at www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/06/30/can-u-n-peacekeepers-fight-terrorists/ .

3 Mauricio Artiñano et al., "Adapting and Evolving: The Implications of Transnational Terrorism for UN Field Missions," Princeton University, April 2014, available at https://wws.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/content/docs/591c_Adapting_and_Evolving_The_Implications_of_Transnational_Terrorism.pdf .

4 Hervé Ladsous, statement to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, February 19, 2016.

5 UN General Assembly, "UN Must Become 'More Relevant, More Credible, More Legitimate and More Capable,' UN President Tells High Level Thematic Debate on Peace and Security," press release, May 10, 2016, available at www.un.org/pga/70/2016/05/10/press-release-un-must-become-more-relevant-more-credible-more-legitimate-and-more-capable-un-president-tells-high-level-thematic-debate-on-peace-and-security/ .

6 The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted unanimously by the General Assembly in Resolution 60/288, explicitly addresses prevention and foresees balanced implementation across all four of its pillars: (1) tackling conditions conducive to terrorism; (2) preventing and combating terrorism; (3) building countries' capacity to combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard; and (4) ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism. The secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, however, notes that, over the last decade, there has been a strong emphasis on the implementation of measures under Pillar II of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, while Pillars I and IV have often been overlooked. United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015.

Syria and Libya today, history shows that, once these groups are allowed to establish a haven, they will inevitably use it to project instability and violence."[7] There is increased recognition that fifteen years of heavily militarized and securitized approaches have focused on the symptoms rather than the causes and have done little to diminish the spread of terrorism. The outflow of nearly 30,000 foreign fighters from over 100 countries to join ISIS is testament to this.[8] As the UN secretary-general recently noted, "Many years of experience have proven that short-sighted policies, failed leadership, heavy-handed approaches, a single-minded focus only on security measures and an utter disregard for human rights have often made things worse."[9]

The president of the General Assembly's high-level debate also recommended members "to further reflect on tools and means for the Organization and the Secretariat to respond in meaningful ways to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism,… particularly where peace operations are deployed."[10] Indeed, the objectives of strengthening institutions, building capacity, and engaging communities to build resilience to extremism align with the objectives of many UN peace operations mandated to prevent instability, promote good governance, and sustain peace. Given that ongoing conflicts provide an enabling environment for the emergence and spread of violent extremist groups, these objectives of UN peace operations are particularly relevant.[11]

Reflecting this view, a host of non-kinetic preventive policies and programs has emerged in the past few years, referred to collectively as *countering violent extremism* (CVE). The CVE agenda has progressively moved upstream, from its initial focus on individuals already radicalized (i.e., symptoms) toward a more comprehensive focus on early intervention. Captured by the term *preventing violent extremism* (PVE), this approach addresses and intends to dismantle drivers believed to create an enabling environment for mobilization to violence. This paper uses "P/CVE" to encapsulate the range of preventive interventions embedded in both of these approaches, combining terminology currently used by different states and practitioners.[12] As UN peace operations are increasingly tasked with implementing mandates in complex threat environments where they may confront terrorism, it is critical to develop a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities and risks associated with the current drive to "integrate preventing violent extremism into relevant activities of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions in accordance with their mandates."[13]

While there have been numerous efforts to enhance UN capacity to address terrorism, gaps remain between the lessons learned and practices in the field—many of which have been developed in an ad hoc and disjointed manner—and the policies and guidance (or lack thereof) at UN headquarters in New York. Despite intense activity since 2001 and the development of a considerable architectural framework, the UN's counter-terrorism and P/CVE work evolved largely insulated from its broader peace and security work and, most notably, from UN peace operations. Hence, despite recent efforts in the General Assembly and Security Council to integrate P/CVE into some of the UN's work, these efforts remain contentious and are therefore limited. The push for an integrated approach (as reflected in the secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent

---

7   David Petraeus, "Anti-Muslim Bigotry Aids Islamist Terrorists," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2016, available at www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-petraeus-anti-muslim-bigotry-aids-islamist-terrorists/2016/05/12/5ab50740-16aa-11e6-924d-838753295f9a_story.html .

8   Eric Schmitt and Somini Sengupta, "Thousands Enter Syria to Join ISIS Despite Global Efforts," *New York Times*, September 26, 2015, available at www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/world/middleeast/thousands-enter-syria-to-join-isis-despite-global-efforts.html .

9   UN Secretary-General, remarks at General Assembly presentation of the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, January 15, 2016, available at www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=9388 .

10 UN General Assembly, "Conclusions and Observations by the President of the Seventieth Session of the UN General Assembly," May 20, 2016, available at www.un.org/pga/70/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2015/08/Thematic-Debate-on-UN-Peace-and-Security-Conclusions-Observations-20-May-2016-1.compressed.pdf .

11 International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State," March 14, 2016, available at www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state .

12 Despite the move toward preventive approaches, some practitioners continue to argue for a narrow approach, focusing on disengagement and disruption of recruitment. See, for instance, J. M. Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption," International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, May 2016, available at http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/J.-M.-Berger-Making-CVE-Work-A-Focused-Approach-Based-on-Process-Disruption-.pdf .

13 United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015, par. 58 (b).

Violent Extremism) has also triggered concerns at the tactical and strategic levels about how such an approach might affect the way the UN undertakes peace operations in the future and how this might impact the populations it is mandated to protect. At the same time, others have recognized the potential opportunities this approach presents.

This report is intended to contribute to this ongoing debate. It reflects on the intersection between peace operations and counterterrorism efforts, with a focus on P/CVE initiatives, and highlights the need for a more strategic and cohesive approach at the UN Secretariat and among member states. At the headquarters level, development of a system-wide UN policy is critical to ensuring that peace operations are sufficiently resourced and empowered to meet the demands of their mandate and to address operational realities. A system-wide policy would also offer greater clarity on the limits of multilateral activity in this area. At the field level, this report recommends a number of ways to improve how missions analyze and plan operations, support host-government institutions and communities, carry out mediation and good offices work, use early-warning and early-response systems, monitor human rights, facilitate or support P/CVE interventions, manage risk, and develop exit strategies.

While many of the recommendations this reports puts forward make sense in general (not necessarily only to prevent violent extremism), there is a need to consider if—and how—peace operations can contribute to national and international efforts to address terrorism and violent extremism in order to ensure they are more "fit for purpose" when confronting contemporary transnational challenges.

The Gap between Policy and Practice

The terms *counterterrorism* (CT) and *countering violent extremism* (CVE) have often been used interchangeably, resulting in a lack of distinction between the two approaches. Consequently,

discourse on the positive and negative aspects of each has been convoluted and largely unproductive.

The term *counterterrorism* is associated with traditional law enforcement or military responses that focus on reactive measures intended to contain, suppress, or neutralize the threat. Comparatively, the term *countering violent extremism* (CVE) is associated with a broader spectrum of policies, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals, communities, or armed groups from engaging in violence related to radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies. In recent years, the CVE agenda has underscored the need for non-securitized preventive approaches that focus more on the factors that lead individuals and groups toward violence.[14] For some policymakers and practitioners, CVE is just one component of broader counterterrorism efforts; for others, it is a burgeoning stand-alone effort to integrate lessons learned and experiences from addressing contemporary transnational terrorism into a range of fields, including development, peacebuilding, and strategic communications.

AN EVOLVING THREAT

The current drive to "integrate preventing violent extremism into relevant activities of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions in accordance with their mandates" is premised on the belief that contemporary terrorism poses a qualitatively new challenge to the United Nations and member states—a belief not necessarily shared by all UN personnel and government representatives. This report argues that the threat posed by terrorist groups today is indeed distinct from that posed by "traditional" conflicts.

First, terrorist groups have a "transnational" dimension, with groups like al-Qaida and ISIS not constrained by political boundaries. They can recruit, fundraise, and perpetrate attacks in places as different as Baghdad, Beirut, Dhaka, Munich, Nice, and Ouagadougou.

Second, these groups are increasingly decentralized and can leverage the actions of "self-starter" or

---

14 The recent joint US State Department and USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism defines CVE as "proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence. This includes both disrupting the tactics used by violent extremists to attract new recruits to violence and building specific alternatives, narratives, capabilities, and resiliencies in targeted communities and populations to reduce the risk of radicalization and recruitment to violence. CVE can be a targeted component of larger efforts to promote good governance and the rule of law, respect for human rights, and sustainable, inclusive development." US Department of State and US Agency for International Development, *Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism*, May 2016, available at www.state.gov/documents/organization/257913.pdf .

"lone-wolf" actors without a clear chain of command or connection to a centralized authority in the group.

Third, the ideological motivations of groups like al-Qaida, ISIS, and their affiliates put them at odds with the multilateral system. Millenarian religious ideology is a significant element of their recruitment narrative, even if the extent to which it motivates their actions is debated. This ideology is directly at odds with the values and principles embodied by the UN and enshrined in its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. A policy working group convened in 2002 by then Secretary-General Kofi Annan recognized this, saying, "Terrorism is, and is intended to be, an assault on the principles of law, order, human rights and peaceful settlement of disputes on which the world body was founded."[15] Groups like Boko Haram, al-Qaida, and ISIS are driven by ideologies that reject the international system and its values as embodied by the United Nations, making it challenging to find common ground for negotiations or for applying traditional multilateral instruments.

These characteristics—transnational, decentralized, and ideologically motivated—pose a challenge to the UN system, whose legal, political, and operational frameworks are premised on a state-centric order. In order to address contemporary threats to international peace and security, the UN needs to develop the capacity to navigate these complexities.

ADAPTIVE RESPONSES

The new focus on prevention has expanded the policy and programming toolkit to include a wide spectrum of interventions under the rubric of P/CVE. These include upstream efforts intended to improve structural conditions such as human rights, rule of law, education, employment, governance, and community resilience. Such initia-

tives are aimed at broader audiences and often seek to strengthen the capacity of institutions and communities to challenge the narratives and recruitment methods of terrorist groups. More targeted interventions focus on individuals or specific communities and can include research, strategic communications, community-based initiatives, and peer-to-peer or individual engagement.

Another set of P/CVE-related initiatives focuses on supporting the demobilization, disengagement, rehabilitation, or reintegration of "violent extremist offenders."[16] This is an area where response and prevention intersect and where P/CVE efforts can be used to prevent recidivism or further radicalization or to inform rehabilitation efforts.[17] Consequently, while the term "CVE" is commonly associated with law enforcement efforts, there is great variety in the kinds of activities that can be labeled "P/CVE."[18] This range of interventions is summarized in Figure 1. These efforts often target specific drivers, individuals, or groups before an act of violence is committed, at which point military, law enforcement, or criminal justice processes take over. In most cases, these activities are indirect; instead of directly engaging perpetrators of violence, they engage their potential targets.

In some instances, programs that support the objectives of P/CVE may already be in place, such as those focused on development, livelihood, and education. These can be considered "P/CVE-relevant" programs insofar as they address some of the more structural "push" factors of radicalization, even though this may not be their primary (or originally intended) objective. Programs can be considered "P/CVE-specific" if they have been intentionally developed to address particular factors or vulnerabilities related to P/CVE (i.e., "pull" factors). These P/CVE-specific programs are more likely to be limited in their duration, geographic

---

15 United Nations, *Report of the Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism*, annex to *Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism: Identical Letters Dated 1 August 2002 From the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the General Assembly and President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. A/57/273-S/2002/875, August 6, 2002. For a lengthier discussion on the need for the UN to develop a stronger "master narrative" to challenge terrorist groups, see Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Jack Barclay, "Mastering the Narrative: Counterterrorism Strategic Communications and the United Nations," Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation, 2013, available at http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Feb2013_CT_StratComm.pdf .

16 Global Counterterrorism Forum, *Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders*, June 2012.

17 Naureen Chowdhury Fink, "The Blue Flag in Grey Zones: Exploring the Relationships between Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) in UN Field Operations," in *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*, edited by James Cockayne and Siobhan O'Neil (New York: United Nations University, 2015).

18 For a discussion on operationalizing a range of CVE efforts in the US context, see Eric Rosand, "Investing in Prevention: An Ounce of CVE or a Pound of Counterterrorism?" Brookings Institution, May 6, 2016, available at www.brookings.edu/2016/05/06/investing-in-prevention-an-ounce-of-cve-or-a-pound-of-counterterrorism/ .

Figure 1. Spectrum of P/CVE interventions

Figure 1. Spectrum of P/CVE interventions
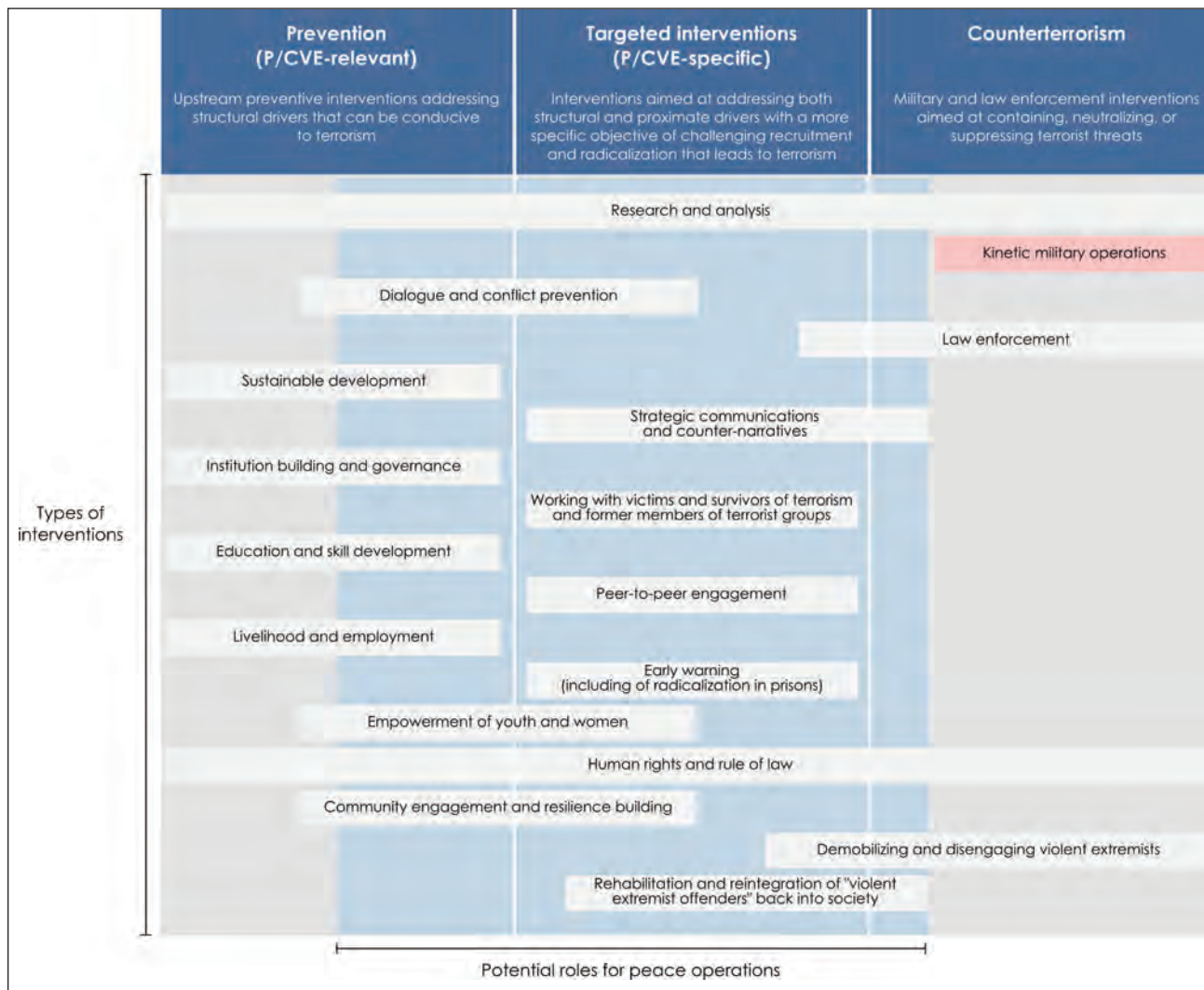
reach, and target objective. However, even P/CVE-specific programs may not be labeled as such.

This lack of clear distinction between P/CVE-specific and P/CVE-relevant programming has created considerable overlap among the many efforts currently being undertaken by the UN and international partners. It has also created confusion about which programming can be categorized as P/CVE, leading many in the field to call for a greater focus on P/CVE-specific rather than P/CVE-relevant programs.

POLICY INERTIA

The 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), which conducted the first comprehensive review of UN peace operations since the 2000 "Brahimi report," noted that "changes in conflict may be outpacing the ability of UN peace operations to respond." It also highlighted the significance of "the spread of violent extremism."[19] However, to date, discourse has been narrowly framed, focusing on the question of whether or not UN peacekeepers can undertake kinetic counterterrorism (i.e., use military force).

Responding to this question, both the HIPPO report and the secretary-general's follow-up report concluded that UN peace operations "are not the appropriate tool for military counterterrorism

---

19 United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace—Politics, Partnership, and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, June 16, 2015, p. vii.

operations."[20] This view is widely shared by experts and practitioners, many of whom have voiced concern over the UN's limited capacity, the security and safety of its personnel and operations, and the potential impact of counterterrorism operations on perceptions of its impartiality, particularly in relation to its good offices, mediation, and human rights work. In other words, the UN's ability to undertake military counter-terrorism tasks is restricted by the divergence between its capacities and principles and those of a military.[21]

However, neither report addressed the strategic question of how peacekeeping operations and special political missions might operate in an environment where they confront violent extremism. As a result, a gap has emerged between the policy debate and the operational needs and realities confronting many UN staff on the ground. Moreover, the UN has not integrated policies on CT and P/CVE into strategic policies and guidance on peace operations and related programming. There has been little discussion of whether, when, where, and how UN peace operations should engage in CT and P/CVE and, if they should not, what options are available to them when confronted with these threats.

Despite this gap in the policy debate, the secretary-general recommended in his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism that member states integrate PVE into relevant activities of UN peace operations in accordance with their mandates. Moreover, the president of the General Assembly's high-level debate on peace and security underscored the need "to further reflect on tools and means for the Organization and the Secretariat to respond in meaningful ways to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism in various contexts where the UN is confronted with this increasingly complex phenomenon, particularly where peace operations are deployed."[22] This is especially relevant given the greater focus on

prevention reflected across the three major peace and security reviews of 2015.[23]

Peace operations can play a fundamental part in fueling or mitigating grievances and narratives exploited by terrorist groups—particularly through their role in preventing and resolving violent conflict and supporting the development of institutions to manage conflict, grievances, and state-society relations. Whether in response to the requests of host governments or to operational needs and realities on the ground, field personnel may be forced to tackle such issues. They cannot sidestep this responsibility simply because policy is not yet in place.[24]

A more granular discussion about practical and policy implications of both CT and P/CVE in these contexts is therefore critical. Furthermore, it is important that the UN develops strategic guidelines for its missions. These might include guidelines on ensuring staff and civilian safety and security in such contexts, identifying and analyzing the threat, and assessing implications for missions and their mandates, as well as political implications. It is also important to consider how the role and mandate of missions relate to the drivers of radicalization and mobilization to violence and where missions can play a direct or indirect role in addressing these drivers, in partnership with national, regional, or other multilateral actors.

As terrorism climbs higher on the international security agenda, it is likely that there will be calls for the UN to move in two different directions—to increase engagement with issues related to terrorism (particularly through its field missions), on the one hand, and to further insulate itself from them, on the other. This report, while seeking to offer a range of perspectives, argues that, despite understandable concerns and reservations, there is a need for greater policy and operational clarity on rules of engagement for the UN when confronted with terrorism and violent extremism. It also calls for more strategic thinking on P/CVE and peace

---

20 United Nations Secretary-General, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/357–S/2015/682, September 2, 2015.

21 Interviews with senior UN peacekeeping officials, New York, January–February 2016; Roundtable discussion, International Peace Institute, New York, February 11, 2016; Artiñano et al, "Adapting and Evolving: The Implications of Transnational Terrorism for UN Field Missions."

22 UN General Assembly, "Conclusions and Observations by the President of the Seventieth Session of the UN General Assembly."

23 For an analysis of the three 2015 reviews, see Arthur Boutellis and Andrea Ó Súilleabháin, "Working Together for Peace: Synergies and Connectors for Implementing the 2015 UN Reviews," International Peace Institute, May 6, 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/2016/05/synergies-2015-un-reviews .

24 Discussions with UN field personnel and Secretariat staff, New York, spring 2016.

operations. This could help ensure missions are relevant and effective in complex environments that include terrorist actors while remaining committed to the core objectives of UN peace operations—to advance political solutions, protect people, and contribute to sustainable peace.

Evolution of CT and P/CVE at the UN

Over the past fifteen years, a dense institutional architecture on counterterrorism has evolved at the United Nations, and both the Security Council and General Assembly have established entities to further the norms and mandates developed.[25] The first wave of efforts (exemplified by the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1373 in 2001) emphasized law enforcement and legislative responses and imposed sweeping counterterrorism obligations under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. A second wave emerged in 2006 when the General Assembly adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which called for a balanced approach that included addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism ("Pillar 1") and promoting and protecting human rights ("Pillar 4").

This laid the groundwork for what may be seen as the third wave, with an increasing focus on P/CVE. This was exemplified by the secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the emphasis on prevention throughout the UN's peace and security work. Security Council resolutions have also illustrated the growing focus on CVE through presidential statements (in November 2014 and May 2015) and, most notably, through Security Council Resolution 2250, which:

> Encourages Member States to engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in developing strategies to counter the violent extremist narrative that can incite terrorist acts, address the

conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, including by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural and education leaders, and all other concerned groups of civil society and adopt tailored approaches to countering recruitment to this kind of violent extremism and promoting social inclusion and cohesion.[26]

This focus on CVE was also reflected in Resolution 2178, which:

> Emphasizes...the importance of Member States' efforts to develop non-violent alternative avenues for conflict prevention and resolution by affected individuals and local communities to decrease the risk of radicalization to terrorism, and of efforts to promote peaceful alternatives to violent narratives espoused by foreign terrorist fighters, and underscores the role education can play in countering terrorist narratives.[27]

Resolutions 2242 and 2250 also underscore the gender and youth dimensions of CVE and reflect the expansion of stakeholders recognized as critical to effectively addressing contemporary terrorism.

While observers often bemoan the slow pace of change at the UN, the evolution of the counter-terrorism architecture in just over a decade is testament to a collective interest in addressing transnational terrorism and violent extremism. The five permanent members of the Security Council have been central to this process, and a number of elected council members have actively contributed to shaping the agenda on CT. However, much of this CT activity was—and remains—insulated from the broader peace and security architecture. Despite the rhetorical emphasis on integrated responses in complex environments, the result has been limited engagement between UN bodies dealing with counter-terrorism and peace operations for much of the past decade.

Consequently, for some time, observers have

---

25 The Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) was established to advance implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (adopted by the General Assembly in 2006). It is made up of over thirty-five UN entities, including DPKO and the CTITF Office established in DPA, and is underwritten by the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre as a mechanism to enhance coordination and coherence of the UN's counterterrorism efforts and to support capacity-building activities. Each entity makes contributions consistent with its mandate. As an expert body established to inform the work of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) has focused on developing country and thematic assessments based on implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1624, 1373, and, most recently, 2178 and on facilitating the delivery of technical assistance to address any gaps identified. The evolution of these entities reflects a growing shift in focus from norm development to capacity building and programmatic activity in support of member states' requests.

26 UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (December 9, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2250, par. 16.

27 UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (September 24, 2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2178, par. 19. It should be noted that the secretary-general's first report to explicitly mention CVE was the *Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the United Nations to Help States and Subregional and Regional Entities in Africa in Fighting Terrorism*, UN Doc. S/2014/9, January 9, 2014.

noted the gaps between policy development at headquarters and implementation and impact assessment in the field. In 2014, the secretary-general mentioned the importance of bridging this gap in his report on implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: "Terrorism is increasingly a factor in areas of conflict and awareness of the Strategy and an understanding of terrorism are especially important for peacekeeping, special political and other United Nations support missions in conflict and post-conflict environments where terrorism and terrorist tactics remain evident." To address this, he requested "Member States, when reviewing the Strategy, to consider how they might provide expert assistance as part of their contribution to United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions."[28]

Two years later, the secretary-general again underscored this point in his report on the *Future of UN Peace Operations*, noting that "conflicts rarely comply with categories.… An effective peace operation must be able to look ahead and constantly adjust its response using all United Nations instruments."[29] The secretary-general's efforts to advance a holistic approach to preventing violent extremism creates an important opening for considering the roles of peace operations in relation to P/CVE efforts, particularly in unconventional contexts and asymmetric threat environments.[30] Although the outcome resolution of the 2016 review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy does not focus on peacekeeping,[31] the secretary-general highlighted the need to enhance CT capacity in missions in his report on implementation of the strategy. He noted that:

> In recent years, United Nations special political missions and peacekeeping operations have increasingly been deployed in areas beset by violent extremism and terrorism. Impermissible security environments and the unpredictability and hostility of terrorist actors have negatively affected the ability of United Nations missions to deliver on their

mandates. There is a need to integrate prevention of violent extremism and countering terrorism into the Organization's broader conflict prevention and conflict management efforts, especially through its field missions.[32]

More recently, the increase in attention paid to the question of how the UN can address terrorism, not only from a policy perspective but also in terms of operations and programs, reflects this observation. While there remains disagreement about the way forward, as this paper highlights, efforts are underway to deepen understanding through research and analysis and to equip field personnel with greater knowledge and resources to address terrorism and violent extremism.

Key Issues for UN Peace Operations

Several UN peace operations operate in environments where terrorist groups are present or recruit and find support, but these operations differ in terms of their mandate, their resources, the size of their in-country field presence, and their civilian and uniformed capacities. These differences may lead them to approach CT and P/CVE differently. For the purposes of this study, UN peace operations currently operating in complex security environments and discussed in this report can be put into four broad categories:

1. **Small special political missions:** These include special envoys and small in-country political offices, such as those in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Their presence in the country—security conditions permitting—is limited to the capital and is focused almost exclusively on supporting political processes or negotiations, with no uniformed presence or programmatic activities.

2. **Medium-size special political missions:** These missions have field offices outside of the capital that carry out or support limited programmatic activities, including in the areas of rule of law,

28   United Nations, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN Doc. A/68/841, April 14, 2014, paras. 21 and 116.

29   United Nations Secretary-General, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/357–S/2015/682, September 2, 2015.

30   United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015, para. 58B.

31   UN General Assembly Resolution 70/291 (July 1, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/291.

32   United Nations, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN Doc. A/70/826, April 12, 2016, para. 51.

security, human rights, and local reconciliation. Examples are the operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia. For protection purposes, they use small UN guard units. The operations in Afghanistan and Somalia also operate alongside parallel non-UN international military forces (NATO and the African Union, respectively).

3. **Small UN peacekeeping missions:** These missions have a limited number of uniformed military personnel, such as the operations in the Golan Heights, Kosovo, and Western Sahara.

4. **Large UN peacekeeping missions:** These are missions like the stabilization operation in Mali, which includes over 10,000 uniformed military and police personnel and over 700 international civilian staff. The mission in Mali employs about the same number of local staff all over the country and is mandated to support the political process and the extension of state authority, carry out a number of security-related stabilization tasks, monitor human rights, and oversee various capacity-building and programmatic activities. In Mali, a non-UN French counter-terrorism military force has also been operating in parallel to the UN mission.

Extensive conversations and interviews with UN officials involved in each of these categories of peace operations, as well as with member state representatives and practitioners, have elicited a number of key issues that shape responses to the questions of whether, where, when, and how CT and P/CVE could be integrated into peace operations.

MANDATES

Security Council resolutions set out a mission's mandate and tasks, which are the central reference point for mission leaders. A number of intervie-wees noted that the absence of any mention of terrorism or violent extremism in mission mandates limits initiative and interdepartmental cooperation in these areas. Although the issue of terrorism prevention is not new to the Security Council agenda, only one mission mandate

mentions terrorism prevention, and that is in the context of curtailing the spread of weapons in the Sahel (Security Council Resolution 2017 on Libya).[33] Even in Mali and Somalia, where the host governments have made countering designated terrorist groups a key priority and called on the UN for support, missions have no explicit provision to address these challenges, either directly or by supporting host-government capacities and efforts.[34]

Other interviewees, however, argued that mandates could be interpreted so that a number of P/CVE-relevant activities fall under regular mission activities. Some P/CVE-specific activities could still fall under the broader rubrics of stabilization and violence reduction or institutional support and capacity development but may specif-ically target P/CVE objectives. Some also expressed concern that simply adding CT or P/CVE to already burdensome "Christmas tree" mandates would impede the ability of missions to effectively perform their mandated tasks, would unnecessarily divert limited resources, and could have unintended consequences, such as putting mission staff and communities at greater risk.

Many also fear that integrating a focus on CT and P/CVE into mission mandates could "suck the oxygen out of" strategies guiding the work of the mission, which should remain first and foremost political. There are also fears that, as a result of such explicit CT and P/CVE mandates, host govern-ments and member state partners might expect the mission to take these on as primary functions in place of national authorities. Others expressed concern that, absent a more expansive evidence base for the efficacy of P/CVE programming,[35] any such activity on the part of missions would remain experimental, with risks that could outweigh the benefits.[36]

IMPARTIALITY

Given the critical role of many UN peace operations in resolving violent conflict and advancing peace agreements, impartiality proved a

---

33 Naureen Chowdhury Fink, "Preventing Terrorism and Conflict in Libya: An Innovative Role for the United Nations?" *The Sentinel* 5, no. 2 (2012), available at www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CTCSentinel-Vol5Iss22.pdf .

34 Discussions with senior mission officials, New York, February 2016.

35 See, for instance, Peter Romaniuk, "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism," Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015, www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work_2015.pdf .

36 Discussions with senior peacekeeping officers, New York, summer 2015 and January–February 2016.

significant issue in discussions about CT and P/CVE. A number of interviewees expressed serious concern that close association of UN missions with CT and P/CVE—which inherently means to "take sides" in a conflict—would imperil the impartiality needed to conduct business, whether in the humanitarian, political, or security space. It was emphasized that anything that resembles counterterrorism could close the space for dialogue with armed actors, which is fundamental to the UN's core work on political resolutions and to the functions of UN good offices. For several officials both at headquarters and in the field, it was imperative that the UN retain the ability to "speak to everyone," including groups that the host government or key powers may label "terrorists." Indeed, this ability was pointed out as a core comparative advantage and key tool of the world body. A 2014 report also highlighted this challenge, noting that senior UN officials were discouraged from denouncing al-Shabaab in Somalia for fear of negatively impacting the space for humanitarian action by taking sides in the conflict.[37]

At the same time, it was noted that violent extremist groups' rejection of the international system and norms and their focus not on transforming the international system but replacing it with something different (particularly in the case of ISIS) make it particularly challenging for international actors to enter into dialogue with them.[38] A recent report from the US Institute of Peace noted that, while dialogue may serve as a valuable crisis mitigation tool, "The conditions for successful atrocity prevention through dialogue with [violent extremist groups] are rarely in place." It also noted the risks of engaging with such groups, which could manipulate the dialogue to buy time for planning attacks.[39]

It was clear from several conversations, however, that concerns about impartiality were in large part premised on a conflation of CT and P/CVE. A number of interlocutors suggested that the imposition of sanctions and the designation of groups as "terrorists" would automatically reduce options for dialogue and negotiation. But P/CVE work can be undertaken without directly engaging with such individuals or groups. Moreover, while listing groups as "terrorists" prohibits them from receiving financial and material support and bans their members from traveling, it does not prevent the UN from meeting with them, even if they are not at the negotiating table.

The perception of impartiality also depends on which angle of the UN's operations one considers. For missions focused on the immediate aftermath of conflict or on political negotiations for peace, discussion of terrorism and violent extremism could seriously compromise the impartiality they require. In the missions in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, many interviewees underscored the importance of finding a political solution to address the drivers and enabling factors that create a conducive environment for terrorism and were reluctant to endanger the perception of impartiality required to negotiate those outcomes.

On the other hand, for missions tasked with supporting the host government or a peace agreement, the UN is already perceived as biased toward one or more parties. Moreover, in advancing norms such as human rights, gender equality, pluralism, tolerance, and the principles captured in the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN has a clear agenda. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted at a meeting on human rights, the United Nations is "impartial but not neutral."[40]

HOST COUNTRY

The dependence of missions on host-country consent makes the priorities and interests of the host government key factors influencing whether or how the UN might undertake P/CVE activities in the context of peace operations. While managing the consent of the host government over time is a challenge for any UN peace operation, the presence of terrorist groups in the country creates additional hurdles.

The role of the state often figures prominently in

---

37 Artiñano et al., "Adapting and Evolving: The Implications of Transnational Terrorism for UN Field Missions," p. 25.

38 Ibid.

39 Sofía Sebastián and Jonas Claes, "Atrocity Prevention through Dialogue: Challenges in Dealing with Violent Extremist Organizations," US Institute of Peace, August 30, 2016, available at www.usip.org/publications/2016/08/30/atrocity-prevention-through-dialogue .

40 Clive Leviev-Sawyer, "'New Age of Responsibility' Against Human Rights Violations, UN Chief Says," *Sofia Echo*, May 6, 2011, available at http://sofiaecho.com/2011/05/06/1085646_new-age-of-responsibility-against-human-rights-violations-un-chief-says .

radicalization narratives, with human rights infractions and negative interactions with law enforcement or other state authorities often exacerbating grievances about governance, marginalization, or insecurity.[41] The UN has, in some cases, attempted to use its Human Rights Due Diligence Policy to prevent state and regional security forces from committing grave violations of international law in conducting counterterrorism operations. However, this policy only applies when the UN is supporting these security forces, so national counterterrorism operations often fall outside of this framework. Many host governments have welcomed capacity building in counterterrorism for their security forces and institutions. However, they may be less receptive to P/CVE activities that shine a light on governance shortcomings or human rights infractions perpetrated by their security forces in the name of counterterrorism.[42] Host governments may also not look favorably on the UN engaging in dialogue with groups they consider "terrorists" for fear this might legitimize them.

Some interviewees raised concerns that P/CVE stigmatizes communities as "at risk" or "vulnerable" to terrorism. In the absence of a clear definition of "violent extremism," it could then serve as a backdoor for host states to use coercive instruments against opponents.[43] Another concern raised was that UN actors' lack of capacity and resources hinders their ability to meet the expectations placed on them by host countries that are prioritizing CT and P/CVE efforts, such as Somalia. Some countries have already requested UN country teams to support them with P/CVE-related work, and missions will likely increasingly face such requests in settings where terrorist groups are active.[44]

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Related to concerns regarding the ability of the UN to carry out good offices or humanitarian negotiations is the concern about the safety and security of UN personnel and operations if missions are overtly associated with CT and P/CVE. Missions in contexts like Mali and Somalia have felt the impact of increased security risks to staff, including the "bunkerization" of missions, with staff forced to limit their movement to heavily fortified compounds. Such security risks, along with the resulting limited external engagement and inability to build strong community relationships, have reportedly reduced the appeal of such missions to qualified staff.[45] On the contrary, one of the strengths of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)—the largest of the special political missions[46]—is that it has been largely considered impartial, including by the Taliban, which does not target the UN directly. This is in part because of UNAMA's humanitarian work and tracking of civilian casualties, which allows it to distance itself from the parallel NATO operation.

Should the UN be increasingly targeted because of its association with counterterrorism efforts, this would present an added challenge to the ability of missions to fulfill a "protection of civilians" mandate. Some interviewees argued that such mandates share many common objectives with P/CVE efforts by emphasizing dialogue and engagement, responsible military and police operations, and activities designed to build an environment conducive to protection.[47] As one official asked, "How can we be sure that, if the UN is seen as a counterterrorism actor, it won't become a threat to the very people it is supposed to protect?"[48]

---

41 See, for example, US Agency for International Development, *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*, February 2009, available at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadt978.pdf .

42 This challenge resurfaced in contentious discussions about the secretary-general's PVE plan of action during the 2016 review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. For more, see Naureen Chowdhury Fink and Alistair Millar, "Blue Sky III—Taking UN Counterterrorism Efforts in the Next Decade from Plans to Action," Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2016.

43 Yemen is a case in point. Shia Houthi rebels presented themselves as fighting al-Qaida affiliates, while the Saudi-led coalition has sometimes termed Houthi revels "Shiite Daesh." On the absence of a definition of "violent extremism," see, for instance, Naz K. Modirzadeh, "If It's Broke, Don't Make It Worse: A Critique of the U.N. Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism," Lawfare blog, January 23, 2016, available at www.lawfareblog.com/if-its-broke-dont-make-it-worse-critique-un-secretary-generals-plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism ; and Richard Atwood "The Dangers Lurking in the U.N.'s Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism," Reuters, February 8, 2016, available at http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2016/02/07/why-is-the-wolf-so-big-and-bad/ .

44 Discussions with UNDP officials, New York and Oslo, spring 2016.

45 Roundtable discussion, International Peace Institute, New York, February 11, 2016.

46 UNAMA was initially established by UN Security Council Resolution 1401 in March 2002. Resolution 2210 (2015) calls for UNAMA and its special representative of the secretary-general to promote more coherent support by the international community to the government of Afghanistan's development and governance priorities. UNAMA maintains a permanent field presence in twelve provinces across Afghanistan and liaison offices in Islamabad, Pakistan, and Tehran, Iran. In 2016, staff numbers are expected to stand at 376 international staff, 1,163 national staff, and 79 UN volunteers.

47 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, April 1, 2015, available at www.futurepeaceops.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/2015-07-Policy-on-PoC-in-Peacekeeping-Operations.pdf .

48 Discussion with senior UN official, New York, June 2015.

This risk is particularly high when local actors perceive the UN mission as "allied" to parallel non-UN international counterterrorism forces or national security forces they may not consider legitimate or welcome. Although some see P/CVE programs intended to curb recruitment and reduce support for violent extremism as "soft" measures, they can produce "hard" reactions from groups that see them as attempts to undercut their power or influence. As one interviewee noted, "It's not all soft and cuddly." It is therefore important for missions to consider how such programs are presented. At the same time, if P/CVE efforts are effective, they will raise the ire of terrorist groups irrespective of the terminology applied.

It is possible that some missions are not perceived as neutral—and are therefore targeted—due to their mandate to support the host government and their association with the United Nations. UN missions in Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, and other places have been targeted for some time by groups not traditionally thought of as violent extremists. This raises the question of whether certain parties have altogether foregone the idea of impartiality associated with the blue flag, or whether there are still some, even in the most extreme groups, who are willing to honor this idea in return for their humanitarian (or other) needs being addressed. Some such groups have reportedly started talking to the UN, at least on issues of humanitarian access and international humanitarian law (e.g., casualty reduction).

RESOURCES, CAPACITY, AND EXPERTISE

Smaller special political missions and small peacekeeping observer missions in particular face the challenge of limited resources and capacity, especially outside of the capital. While the primary focus of special political missions is on political support and good offices, small peacekeeping observer missions concentrate for the most part on cease-fire monitoring. There are concerns that expanding their mandate to include P/CVE could divert already limited resources to engagement in areas that may, for the reasons noted above, compromise the mission. Some UN officials have

already questioned whether missions can carry out their mandate when resources are redirected toward protecting staff who have to "stay and deliver" in dangerous environments.[49]

The stretched resources of most missions were seen to limit their analytical capacity to identify and assess the threat of terrorism and violent extremism. Considering the nature of conflict in places like Libya, Mali, and Somalia, a better understanding and situational analysis, particularly regarding the extent to which violent extremism is—or is becoming—a driver of conflict and insecurity will be key to ensuring the effectiveness of the mission. A number of interviewees raised the point that the political resolution of ongoing conflict is key to stemming the tide of terrorism and violent extremism, such as in Yemen and Somalia; ongoing protracted conflicts create fertile breeding ground for terrorist groups to exploit grievances and drum up support.[50]

Consequently, one of the challenges highlighted by several interlocutors was that to make a difference, P/CVE cannot be conceived in isolation from the rest of a mission's activities. It needs to be part of a comprehensive mission strategy that is guided by a clear theory of change and is resourced accordingly. Nor can it be conceived as a simple rebranding of existing projects—whether quick impact projects, civil-military projects, or development projects undertaken by the UN country team. But if a UN mission's existing stabilization plans are not leading to more stability (as one interviewee put it bluntly, "We are not winning" hearts and minds), the UN should also ask itself what it could do differently and whether thinking about P/CVE could help it become more strategic in its approach.

The question increasingly seems to be not whether but how to advise missions on factoring in CT and P/CVE. Such advising can be done from a distance (policy, legal, and practical guidance from headquarters), through in-mission experts, or through the adoption of a mainstreaming approach that sensitizes key sections and staff to the issue. The tendency, however, has been for the UN to create adviser positions within missions to address new problems (e.g., gender, women, child protec-

---

49 For instance, an estimated 40 percent of UNAMA's costs are security-related, and the budgets and design of peace operations have not been adjusted to reflect these additional safety and security considerations. Senior UN official, roundtable discussion, International Peace Institute, February 11, 2016.

50 Discussions with senior UN officials, New York, February–March 2016; International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State."

tion) or, in some cases, to create entire new sections. Adding layers to the bureaucracy in this way has not always guaranteed that issues are truly mainstreamed or prioritized within the mission. In fact, in some cases it appears that these measures simply serve to "tick the box."

An added challenge is that UN missions are currently not well equipped to carry out projects—particularly not P/CVE-sensitive ones—that require action based on early warning and analysis, close monitoring and evaluation, and, most importantly, local ownership. Missions are not designed to manage projects quickly and effectively, and UN

rules do not foster local ownership. UN procurement rules and procedures are long and burdensome, which often creates undue delays in implementation of projects, whether their funding comes from assessed contributions (as for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs), trust funds (through which donors make contributions), quick impact projects (small-scale, low-cost projects implemented by civil affairs sections to build confidence in the mission), or the Peacebuilding Fund. This issue has been pointed out time and again, including in the secretary-general's 2011 report on civilian capacity, which

---

Box 1. The UN role in P/CVE in Somalia

The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)[51] began working on a broad-ranging P/CVE strategy in 2015 and articulated a "comprehensive approach to al-Shabaab" that was echoed by the secretary-general at the seventieth session of the General Assembly. This highlighted the need to go beyond military operations carried out by the parallel African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and underscored the need for effective strategic communications and more investment in transparent and accountable local governance. It also drew attention to the need for more help to engage marginalized communities and offer "a path out of violence" for those ready to leave al-Shabaab, including through some rehabilitation and reintegration efforts supported by the UN and other partners.[52]

While hampered by the lack of dedicated resources for P/CVE, UNSOM has taken steps to move forward some of these elements, as well as to bolster its analytical capacity and to access P/CVE expertise—both to inform the mission's existing work and to facilitate cooperation with the government and partners. To that end, it has enhanced collaboration with the existing UN Somalia Risk Management Unit operated by the UN country team.[53] With growing pressure to prepare an AMISOM exit strategy in July 2016, the incoming special representative of the secretary-general, Michael Keating, laid out a "five-strand approach" to strengthening Somali security. CVE—including the need for a political strategy—figured prominently in this approach, alongside support to AMISOM, security sector reform (SSR), and extension of state authority.

There is likely to be increasing momentum for P/CVE approaches in Somalia as the government undertakes the development of its own National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism—the Tubta Toosan project.[54] The strategy, which is expected to be implemented in fall 2016, has drawn on inputs from a range of stakeholders, including various government ministries and entities, civil society actors, women's groups, the business community, and religious leaders. It could also provide an important platform for national and international partners, including the UN mission and country team, to support the government in advancing these efforts.

Ensuring that the mission is equipped to address issues relating to P/CVE is crucial when host governments—in this case Somalia—are focusing on these issues as a key part of their national peace and security strategies.

---

51 UNSOM was established by Security Council Resolution 2101 (2013) and launched on June 3, 2013. UNSOM is mandated to support the Federal Government of Somalia's agenda of peace, security, and nation building and to help create and galvanize the political and strategic environment in which stabilization and peacebuilding can proceed, including by leveraging other parts of the UN system and international partners.

52 The UN Peacebuilding Fund also provided funding amounting to $4.9 million to support compact priorities endorsed by the Federal Government of Somalia, which include the rehabilitation of high-risk prisoners in Baidoa. See www.unpbf.org/countries/somalia/ . There have been a number of criticisms of the transparency and human rights standards associated with some of the DDR/rehabilitation programs in Somalia, which highlight a critical need to consider how negative narratives regarding such efforts might fuel further marginalization or grievances and make a case for a more comprehensive approach to prevention and response. For example, see Vanda Felbab-Brown, "DDR—A Bridge Not Too Far: A Field Report from Somalia," in *UN DDR in an Era of Violent Extremism: Is It Fit for Purpose?*, edited by James Cockayne and Siobhan O'Neil (New York: United Nations University, 2015).

recommended that "United Nations procurement rules should be revised so that they prioritize national capacities and leverage local expertise and comparative advantage where possible."[55] This has yet to happen.

OPERATIONAL NEEDS AND REALITIES

As a result of a bottom-up confrontation with realities in the field, some UN entities need greater guidance, guidelines, or support on deciding whether, when, where, and how to address terrorism and violent extremism. Top-down policy debates have yet to offer field personnel a clear set of rules of (dis)engagement when confronted with a need to address the question of terrorism or violent extremism from an operational perspective. This has been most clearly articulated in the cases of Somalia and Mali, where disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) practitioners have questioned if or how they should manage violent extremist offenders any differently than other armed combatants (see Boxes 1 and 3).

Consequently, the components of UN missions most exposed to the issue of violent extremism in the field may be those of the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI), which have been most proactive in integrating the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy into their field-based activities.[56] OROLSI started working on CT issues following Security Council Resolution 2195 in December 2014, which:

> Calls on relevant entities of the United Nations and other relevant international and regional organizations to support the development and strengthening of the capacities of national and regional institutions to address terrorism benefitting from transnational organized crime, in particular law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies, and in this regard notes the advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission, in accordance with its mandate.[57]

OROLSI, in consultation with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), tried to create a space for itself as a provider of CT capacity building in the areas of police, justice, corrections, DDR, SSR/border management, and mine action. These are all areas in which host governments such as Mali have been requesting support from the UN and that the UN considers to fall under existing mission mandates. A shift toward a more preventive approach to violent extremism may be taking place not only through capacity-building efforts but also through the broadening of OROLSI's focus from traditional peacekeeping missions to missions in places like Guinea-Bissau, where it will be conducting an assessment mission with CTITF in late 2016. The fact that OROLSI is developing a dedicated CT and P/CVE capacity at headquarters is a clear indication of the strategic importance of the issue. It is also in the process of developing a departmental policy.[58]

Where UN entities have had to develop tactical responses to pressing realities, there has been improvisation at the field level—a sort of trial by fire—as practitioners develop creative and innovative means of addressing immediate needs. For a traditionally risk-averse organization with a risk-averse membership, this has highlighted the value of developing greater tolerance for innovation and adaptability and the need for honest and candid lessons-learned exercises, which can help enhance future activity.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Ten years after the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted, it is clear that counter-terrorism issues are garnering greater attention within the Department of Political Affairs (DPA)

---

53   The Risk Management Unit is located in the office of the deputy special representative of the secretary-general/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator and supports all UN entities working in Somalia, as well as partners and donors. It has made considerable progress in advancing the risk management agenda for the UN country team in Somalia

54   On the Tubta Toosan initiative, see, for example, "The Right Path (Tubta Toosan) Initiative: Somalia Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Have a Huge Role to Prevent or Countering Violent Extremism in Somalia," press release, *Mogadishu Times*, July 10, 2016, available at http://mogtimes.com/articles/6396/PRESS-RELEASE-The-Right-Path-Tubta-Toosan-Initiative-Somalia-Civil-Society-Organizations-CSOs-have-a-huge-role-to-Prevent-or-Countering-Violent-Extremism-in-Somalia ; and "Somalia Women's Involvement in Preventing & Countering Violent Extremism Is Fundamental: 'Let Us Hear the Voices of Somali Women,'" press release, *Qaranimo Online*, April 27, 2016, available at www.qaranimo.com/news/2016/04/27/the-right-path-tubta-toosan-initiative-somalia/ .

55   United Nations, *Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict: Independent Report of the Senior Advisory Group*, UN Doc. A/65/747-S/2011/85, February 22, 2011, p. 39.

56   OROLSI was established in 2007 by General Assembly Resolution 61/279 to provide a holistic approach to reestablishing systems of justice and to reinforce security through DDR and by helping deal with minefields and unexploded ordnance that remain following armed struggles. While OROLSI is formally part of DPKO, it also backstops a number of special political missions.

57   Security Council Resolution 2195 (UN Doc. S/RES/2195), December 19, 2014, para. 16.

58   OROLSI is in the process of developing specific modules and operational tools and guidance on violent extremism, which will be released later in 2016.

and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

In DPA, the under-secretary-general chairs the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), which was institutionalized within DPA to advance more integrated approaches. DPA has been given specific responsibility for setting the agenda on CT and P/CVE through the work of the CTITF and took the lead in supporting the development of the secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.[59] Moreover, DPA's focus on conflict prevention provides an entry point for considering terrorism and violent extremism as part of these efforts.[60] With increased focus on revitalizing DPA to bring conflict prevention and mediation to the forefront of its activities (drawing on the three major reviews undertaken in 2015), there is good cause to integrate a P/CVE dimension into this work to ensure that all aspects

of conflict dynamics are accounted for. Nonetheless, it is clear that terrorism and violent extremism have not yet been fully mainstreamed within the special political missions, as there is no explicit focus on these issues—in part due to some of the unresolved tradeoffs highlighted above.

In DPKO, despite a decade of UN activity on counterterrorism, these is a consensus around the framework advanced by the HIPPO report. This report clearly concluded that "United Nations peace operations are not the appropriate tool for military counter-terrorism operations" and that "where a parallel force is engaged in offensive combat operations it is important for UN peacekeeping operations to maintain a clear division of labor and distinction of roles." It also stated that "where asymmetric threats are present in the operating environment," a UN peacekeeping mission should be able "to protect itself and deliver

---

Box 2. Toward a unified approach to preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism in DPKO

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) holds that peacekeeping is not the right tool for military or security counterterrorism operations. Nonetheless, DPKO's Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions (OROLSI) and Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training have jointly identified the following actions peacekeeping operations can take to help prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism:

1. **Better understand violent extremism and its impact** in UN-specific peacekeeping situations, its strategic risks, and gaps in existing policy and guidance. The objective is to define peacekeeping principles for engaging in P/CVE and to develop policy guidance.

2. **Adapt the presence and activities of peacekeeping missions** with the aim of equipping them to counter asymmetric threats and tactics (e.g., through better access to intelligence, technology, and programs to mitigate the threat of improvised explosive devices) while improving their resilience (e.g., through greater mobility and medical-support capacity). DPKO and OROLSI are also conducting a project to develop guidance for DDR personnel in the field on disengaging violent extremist elements. They are also seeking support from the Group of Friends of Corrections in Peace Operations and other NGO partners to compile international best practices on P/CVE in prisons.

3. **Build national CT and P/CVE capacity**, in particular in the areas of rule of law and security, where they have the mandate and comparative advantage to do so. In this respect, in 2015 DPKO identified MINUSMA as a pilot mission for CT and P/CVE national capacity building in the areas of rule of law and security. In coordination with CTED, CTITF, and other partners, activities include training and supporting national security forces in first response, investigation, forensics analysis, and aspects of efforts to counter improved explosive devices (IEDs). MINUSMA is also supporting Mali's Specialized Counter-Terrorism Judicial Unit and the Malian government's efforts to develop a national border security strategy aimed at preventing the movement of foreign terrorist fighters and the proliferation of arms.

---

59 Interview with senior UN expert, New York, March 2016.
60 Interview with senior UN official, New York, May 2016.

its mandate, including through a preventive and preemptive posture and willingness to use force to protect civilians and UN personnel."[61]

In light of the deployment of NATO troops in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), some observers have suggested that, while the use of military force should always respond to a political strategy, "it can contribute to the implementation of an effective strategy [for containing or mitigating violent extremism] by providing a credible security presence to deter and respond to violent challengers."[62] But the deployment of more robust military assets to peacekeeping missions (such as Apache attack helicopters, special forces, and tools for intelligence collection and analysis) has not deterred asymmetric attacks on "softer" targets. It has also failed to prevent the "bunkerization" of missions, which many consider not to be properly equipped or configured to operate effectively in such asymmetric threat environments.

In response, MINUSMA's latest mandate, from June 2016, authorizes the mission to "take robust and active steps to counter asymmetric attacks against civilians or United Nations personnel, to ensure prompt and effective responses to threats of violence against civilians and to prevent a return of armed elements to those areas, engaging in direct operations pursuant only to serious and credible threats."[63] Nonetheless, this proactive or preemptive use of force by UN peacekeepers against groups using asymmetric tactics remains untested.

As missions face increasing pressure to demonstrate responsiveness to the challenges posed by terrorist groups, not least in settings like Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia, there is movement toward developing a common approach across the various parts of both DPKO and DPA. For example, DPKO initiated a policy development project to better understand the context and impact of violent extremism in specific mission settings. This project aimed to identify the gaps in existing policy and guidance and to elicit a set of principles to frame the UN's engagement on P/CVE (see Box 2).

Nonetheless, many in DPKO are cautious due to concerns about framing core activities as "P/CVE." This would risk securitizing civilian efforts, compromising the safety of personnel and missions, and adding to already overstretched mandates that, in many instances, have not been matched by resources and capacity.[64] Given the absence of greater clarity on what activities fall under P/CVE, some UN practitioners and observers are concerned that the whole spectrum of multilateral work on development, humanitarian action, human rights, and peace and security will be seen as P/CVE-specific rather than P/CVE-relevant. As one interviewee put it, "I don't think we should mainstream CVE into human rights but mainstream human rights into CVE."[65]

---

61 United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace—Politics, Partnership, and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, June 16, 2015, para. 117.

62 Richard Gowan, "European Military Contributions to UN Peace Operations in Africa: Maximizing Strategic Impact," Center on International Cooperation, December 2015, available at http://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/european_military_contributions_gowan_dec_2015.pdf .

63 Security Council Resolution 2295 (UN Doc. S/RES/2295), June 29, 2016.

64 Interview with senior UN officials, February 2016.

65 Interview with UN human rights official, Geneva, February 2016.

Box 3. MINUSMA and P/CVE[66]

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which was authorized in April 2013, followed the French military's Operation Serval, which was launched in January 2013. Along with the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA), this operation helped rid northern Mali of various armed forces, including jihadist groups.[67] Many of these groups suffered grave losses and either vanished or retreated to the extreme north of the country. An interim peace agreement was rapidly brokered in Ouagadougou and signed on June 18, 2013, between two rebel groups in northern Mali and the interim government in Bamako. As a result, presidential elections were held and constitutional order returned, with MINUSMA undertaking a somewhat traditional peacekeeping mandate of support to the political process and to the extension of state authority. Following clashes between government forces and rebel groups in Kidal in May 2014, the government forces were defeated and retreated from most of northern Mali.

UN peacekeepers increasingly became the target of terrorist attacks. This may in part have resulted from MINUSMA having become the largest force in northern Mali (France deployed a smaller parallel counter-terrorism force) and from terrorist groups reorganizing in the Sahel all the way to Libya. But it has also raised a number of questions regarding the relevance and adequacy of MINUSMA's mandate, capabilities, and approach in an operational environment that had significantly changed since the mission was first authorized.[68] In his latest report of May 31, 2016, the secretary-general noted "a doubling in the number of attacks perpetrated by violent extremist groups in northern Mali" and stated that "attacks have spread to the center of the country, particularly the Mopti region" of central Mali, in the context of the slow implementation of the peace agreement signed a year before.[69]

Resurgence of the Terrorist Threat in Mali

The issue of terrorism remains central in Mali and the Sahel. In addition to attacks on peacekeepers, a series of terrorist attacks in the capital Bamako (on a nightclub in March 2015 and on a hotel in November 2015) and the central regions of Mopti and Ségou (including on a hotel in Sévaré in August 2015) were claimed by various jihadist groups, including al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front, with reported links to Ansar Dine. In addition, terrorist attacks in neighboring Burkina Faso (on the Hotel Splendid in Ouagadougou in January 2016) and Côte d'Ivoire (on the Grand-Bassam beach resort in March 2016) were carried out by Malian nationals.[70] The Malian army has also been the target of attacks, the most recent in Nampala, where the deaths of seventeen soldiers were claimed by two different groups—the Macina Liberation Front and another group calling itself the National Alliance for the Protection of the Peul Identity and the Restoration of Justice.[71]

A number of reports have emerged on recruitment among the Peul ethnic group (also known as the Fulani) by both self-defense militias and radical groups like the Macina Liberation Front.[72] Such groups exploit "not only their poverty, but also their longstanding grievances with the government," which fails "to protect them from banditry." Government forces frequently resort to "torture and mistreatment" of individuals arrested in these areas during military operations, which has also contributed to stigmatization of the Peul

---

66 Based on a series of interviews carried out in Mali in March 2016 and in New York in spring 2016.

67 "Jihadist" is a term such groups self-identify with. See International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State."

68 See Arthur Boutellis, "Can the UN Stabilize Mali? Towards a UN Stabilization Doctrine?" *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015), available at www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.fz/ .

69 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali*, UN Doc. S/2016/498, May 31, 2016, para. 43.

70 See Human Rights Watch, "Mali: Abuses Spread South," February 19, 2016, available at www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/19/mali-abuses-spread-south . Although there were concerns about the prospects of rising violent extremism in Burkina Faso, much of that was attributed to the potential spillover from the violence in Mali, and while initial assessments indicated the need for only some measured caution, these attacks underscored the potential for regionalization of the threat. For an earlier discussion on violent extremism in Burkina Faso see Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk, "Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience amid Regional Insecurity," Global Center on Cooperative Security, June 2014, available at www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/BF-Assessment-Eng-with-logos-low-res.pdf .

71 Baba Ahmed, "17 Soldiers Killed, 35 Wounded in Attack on Mali Army Base," Associated Press, July 19, 2016, available at http://bigstory.ap.org/article/09c34ac834244370be7573ac1ac43a8f/10-soldiers-killed-38-wounded-attack-mali-army-base .

72 See International Crisis Group, "Mali central: La fabrique d'une insurrection?" July 6, 2016, available at https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/238-central-mali-an-uprising-in-the-making-french.pdf .

community.[73] Meanwhile, state administration, justice, police/gendarmerie, and basic services (notably health and education) are largely absent from the region—even more so since the deterioration of the security situation. Violence has also festered due to longstanding intercommunity tensions between nomadic Peul and sedentary groups. Some Peul see jihad as an instrument for self-defense and dispute resolution, as evidenced during the 2012 occupation of northern Mali when many joined the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa.[74]

P/CVE Experiences in Mali to Date

A number of donors and embassies in Mali have for some time encouraged their international and local NGO partners to carry out a range of activities that could be considered P/CVE-relevant, including job creation, women and youth empowerment, cultural activities, intercommunity dialogue, local conflict prevention and resolution, and community security projects.[75] Some P/CVE-specific projects, such as amplification of the voice of "moderate" imams, intra-religious dialogue, radio counter-narratives, school books in Arabic, and cash handouts, are also being trialed in an attempt to curb recruitment by armed groups of all kinds and to advance the broader objective of peace and reconciliation. P/CVE-specific activities were not more extensive in part due to diverging views over whether to address radicalization itself or only violence and over which push and pull factors these projects can credibly influence (i.e., whether members of jihadist groups in Mali are joining for socioeconomic, self-defense, or ideological motives).

Some donors wanting concrete outcomes have expressed frustration over what they describe as risk-averse and slow implementing partners (international and local NGOs). The latter argue that better and more detailed micro-level analysis of the forces driving individuals or groups to violent extremism and better theories of change are needed prior to implementing programs. Some also insist that local populations should define their own problems and solutions rather than have imposed on them practices that are still largely perceived as having been developed through an "external" P/CVE lens. Indeed, the issue of religious radicalization remains taboo in Mali, and Malians do not diagnose their conflicts in terms of violent extremism.[76] Some international NGOs have nonetheless already started introducing these concepts into their peacebuilding and reconciliation work.[77] These NGOs insist that they are still in the process of creating their own definition of P/CVE and are careful to "do no harm" to beneficiaries or themselves by adopting such new approaches. Others have cynically noted that P/CVE presents NGOs with important new funding opportunities.

Some donors also cited the absence of a Malian government P/CVE strategy as limiting their ability to engage with local authorities on these issues. A national strategy is now in the process of being developed with support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP), US Agency for International Development (USAID), and African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD).[78]

MINUSMA's Latest Mandate

In his latest report to the Security Council on the situation in Mali, the secretary-general included some strong language emphasizing that "human rights violations committed in the name of countering violent extremism will give terrorists their best recruitment tools." He also emphasized the need "to fight impunity and address long-standing grievances of local communities, including regarding the inclusiveness of the peace process," such as through enhanced participation by women and youth. He called upon the Malian

---

73 Corinne Dufka, "Confronting Mali's New Jihadist Threat," *New York Times*, May 9, 2016.

74 Boukary Sangare, "Le centre du Mali: Epicentre du djihadisme?" Groupe de Recherche et d'Information sur la Paix et la Sécurité, May 20, 2016, available at www.grip.org/sites/grip.org/files/NOTES_ANALYSE/2016/NA_2016-05-20_FR_B-SANGARE.pdf .

75 A discussion on CVE and human security was also organized in Mali in April and May 2015 by the Human Security Collective, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), and Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). See www.hscollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Blog-Mali-final.pdf .

76 See Institute for Security Studies, "Jeunes 'djihadistes' au Mali: Guidés par la foi ou pas les circonstances?" August 2016, available at www.issafrica.org/uploads/policybrief89-fr.pdf .

77 For instance, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund. See www.gcerf.org/grants/ .

78 "Extrémisme violent et le terrorisme au Mali: Une stratégie nationale en cours d'élaboration pour éradiquer le fléau," *Le Républicain*, June 29, 2016.

government "to continue to work closely with MINUSMA and other partners to operationalize the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, whose structures in the regions should contribute to bringing justice and reconciliation closer to local communities." While he welcomed the government's "endorsement of the five priorities under the Integrated Assistance for Countering Terrorism Initiative for Mali," he also insisted that "the return of basic services and the establishment of income-generating activities remain critical to addressing continuing humanitarian concerns and unemployment, particularly among youth and former combatants who are vulnerable to radicalization,"[79] The term "violent extremism" appeared a number of times in the report.

Over time, MINUSMA has been able to progressively shift its attention from cease-fire monitoring to the implementation of the June 2015 peace agreement. But prior to this agreement, it was largely focused on the northern Mali regions of Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, as requested by the Security Council in Resolutions 2100 (2013), 2164 (2014), and 2227 (2015). Many of the mission's resources (intelligence, military, and analytical) have also been dedicated to its own security in the northern areas where it is most present, possibly to the detriment of developing a better understanding of the rise of extremist groups in the central part of the country. Due to their increased emphasis on prevention and counterterrorism, some Security Council members and the Malian government have encouraged MINUSMA to pilot P/CVE approaches.[80]

However, Resolution 2295 of June 2016 did not include any mention of the term "violent extremism," nor did it mandate MINUSMA to support the Malian government in preventing violent extremism. Instead, the Security Council decided that the "strategic priority of MINUSMA is to support the implementation by the Government, the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups, as well as by other relevant Malian stakeholders, of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in particular its provisions related to the gradual restoration and extension of State authority." It also authorized the mission to adopt a more "proactive and robust posture," including when protecting civilians against asymmetric threats, and added some 2,500 troops.[81] However, in his press statement following the unanimous adoption of the new resolution, Russia's representative denounced the fact that some delegations had tried to push ambiguous language and vague references to "asymmetric threats" to justify more flexibility in the use of force, which Russia feared could jeopardize both the reputation of the mission and Mali's sovereignty.[82]

Preventive Improvisation in the Field

Despite the Security Council preferring to emphasize a robust military posture in response to asymmetric threats, and despite the absence of an explicit mandate related to the prevention of violent extremism, a UN stabilization doctrine, or a UN P/CVE policy, various parts of MINUSMA have developed and experimented with approaches that could be considered P/CVE-relevant. The "stabilization section" of the mission focused on developing and implementing "regional stabilization and recovery plans" in northern Mali in consultation with regional authorities, donors, and the UN country team, based on security and conflict analysis conducted jointly with MINUSMA's All Sources Information Fusion Unit.[83] These plans identified priority zones but focused largely on the restoration of state authority, economic recovery, the provision of basic social services, and social cohesion, without a deliberate P/CVE focus.[84] Some of these projects were funded by a MINUSMA "peace dividends trust fund," the Peacebuilding Fund, and community violence reduction projects managed by the mission's DDR component. MINUSMA was also the first mission to have been mandated to protect cultural and historical sites, which had been repeatedly attacked and heavily damaged

---

79 United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali*, UN Doc. S/2016/498, May 31, 2016, paras. 84–88.

80 Discussions with Security Council officials and Malian government officials, April 2016.

81 Security Council Resolution 2295 (UN Doc. S/RES/2295), June 29, 2016.

82 United Nations, "Security Council Adopts Resolution 2295 (2016), Authorizing 'More Proactive and Robust' Mandate for United Nations Mission in Mali," press release, June 29, 2016, available at www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12426.doc.htm .

83 See Olga Abilova and Alexandra Novosseloff, "Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations: Toward an Organizational Doctrine," International Peace Institute, July 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/1608_Demystifying-Intelligence.pdf .

84 UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Mali*, UN Doc. S/2015/219, March 27, 2015, para. 48.

(particularly in Timbuktu and Gao) during the 2012 occupation of northern Mali by jihadist groups.[85]

MINUSMA's police component played a driving role in setting up a Task Force on Counter-Terrorism and Organized Crime in Mali chaired by UN Police in mid-2014. This task force—which includes the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNDP, and a number of MINUSMA sections—came up with an action plan designed mainly to support the Malian law enforcement agencies, as well as the judiciary and corrections sectors. Despite acknowledging the particular "terrorism" context, activities listed in the plan are similar to those the UN undertakes in other field missions. They do not have a P/CVE focus, with the exception of a few activities planned by the civil affairs section and the UN country team (including UN Women) to study the factors of radicalization and the possible development of programs of de-radicalization targeting "at risk" youth. UN Police also created a unit specifically dedicated to training and equipping Malian authorities for addressing terrorism and transnational organized crime, including a new Malian judicial division specializing in this area.

MINUSMA faces further issues related to CT as it begins building cantonment sites for former members of armed groups, as provided for in the 2015 peace agreement. The mission's SSR and DDR components have considered the likelihood of "extremist" or "ex-extremist" elements turning up at the cantonment sites (particularly former members of groups such as the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, Ansar Dine, and the Macina Liberation Front). However, MINUSMA has no guidance or protocol on how to handle this situation. Nor does it have the knowledge to successfully manage a related situation where French CT forces from Operation Barkhane or Malian security forces want to arrest members of the cantoned armed group. As one DDR officer put it, "We are not looking for violent extremists, but we need to do risk mitigation." The UN has faced similar challenges in Somalia, where the UN mission has had to rely on the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency to determine which candidates for reintegration from al-Shabaab are "low risk" and "disengaged combatants" versus which are "high risk" and need to be incarcerated. Some Peul associations in Mali have already claimed to have disengaged radicalized youth from extremist groups and have asked to process them through DDR programs, although some observers suspect that local elites are recruiting these youth into their own self-defense groups.[86]

During the first part of 2015, MINUSMA received two successive visits from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) (which includes OROLSI and UNODC). These visits had the objective of launching an initiative to map existing counterterrorism assistance in the country in order to identify gaps in and priorities for support under CTITF's Integrated Assistance on Countering Terrorism (I-ACT) project.[87] While CTITF negotiates the I-ACT initiative directly with the host government, the presence of a large peacekeeping mission in Mali led it to consider involving MINUSMA in some of its projects supporting national authorities. These include projects on border management and security and weapons control and on training police/gendarmerie, including training on how to counter IEDs and deter suicide bombers. However, these projects, while security-focused, do not have a P/CVE objective per se.

What Could the UN Be Doing Differently in Mali?

Despite the push in 2016 by certain Security Council members and the Malian government for MINUSMA to pilot P/CVE approaches, the Security Council did not explicitly include P/CVE in MINUSMA's mandate.

85   MINUSMA's Environment and Culture Unit has been supporting a program coordinated by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Mali's Ministry of Culture to rehabilitate the damaged heritage sites in the north of Mali and to resume cultural events in the northern regions of Mali, which contribute to the transmission of intangible heritage and social cohesion. As such, these activities could be considered P/CVE-relevant. In his January 2016 report on ISIS, the secretary-general urged the Security Council "to incorporate such protection of cultural heritage into UN humanitarian action; security strategies, including action to counter terrorism; and peacebuilding processes," given ISIS's continuing destruction and looting of cultural sites and artifacts. United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat*, UN Doc. S/2016/92, January 29, 2016.

86   "Mali: 200 jeunes 'déradicalisés' s'engagent à quitter les groupes 'jihadistes,'" *Jeune Afrique*, March 8, 2016.

87   I-ACT is a tool that aims at developing comprehensive and integrated counterterrorism responses to assist countries facing a terrorist threat in implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy through capacity-building projects. The projects are based on a mapping of activities undertaken by CTITF entities and partners in the recipient country and on the resulting assessment of gaps identified through that mapping exercise. Burkina Faso and Nigeria were the first partner countries to receive counterterrorism capacity-building assistance from CTITF entities.

This, however, does not prevent the mission from implementing its current political and security mandate in a more strategic manner, while remaining cautious. A more strategic approach could contribute to preventing violent extremism, particularly in central Mali, where "early warning messages and preventive actions can still stop the rise of extremist movements."[88] There are no easy answers, but while a cautious approach should be taken, the UN mission could explore a number of avenues:

1. **Enhance situational analyses:** MINUSMA could redirect its information collection and analysis capacities (including its All Sources Information Fusion Unit) toward areas of concern (such as central Mali). It could also focus on getting a better and more detailed analysis of all armed groups, both "compliant" and "terrorist"; of the complex socioeconomic, political, security, and religious factors that may be underpinning recruitment and support; and of existing local factors contributing to peace and resilience that communities, the Malian government, and the UN mission could build on to help prevent violence.

2. **Build national capacities to address terrorism:** MINUSMA could implement its mandate "to support the Government's efforts for the effective and gradual restoration and extension of State authority," including by supporting the establishment of interim administrations and by encouraging the government to return basic services, end the predatory behavior of its security forces, and generate "peace dividends." It could also encourage the government to promote improved decentralized/regionalized governance, as provided for in the peace agreement, and to emphasize the need for communities to regain confidence in the state in the medium run.

3. **Foster inclusive partnerships:** MINUSMA could expand the peace and political process beyond the armed groups of northern Mali to be more inclusive of "civil society, including women's organisations, as well as youth organisations," as stated in Security Council Resolution 2295 (2016). This process should also be more inclusive of the Peul of central Mali, who have been largely absent from the Algiers negotiations.[89] MINUSMA could expand the eligibility for DDR (or at least for community violence reduction projects) to central Mali.[90] And along with the government, MINUSMA could explore potential avenues for reaching out to Malian "extremist groups" that signal an interest in joining the process, while remaining mindful of the need to fight impunity.[91]

4. **Prioritize human rights:** MINUSMA could prioritize its human rights work and make the necessary security arrangements to be able to carry out such work safely. This could help address conditions that can be key drivers of support for or participation in violent groups (including terrorist organizations), which can also serve as lightning rods for grievances against the UN and its mission. This human rights work can include rapid investigations into alleged crimes and abuses by both jihadists and government forces, as well as rapid publication of MINUSMA's human rights reports. Moreover, the mission could encourage national authorities to hold their forces accountable, monitor places of detention, and support the professionalization of the security forces and judiciary.

5. **Raise awareness of UN field staff:** Relevant components of the mission (civil affairs, DDR, etc.,) and UN country team could be sensitized in how to make their programming more strategic and P/CVE-specific when and if relevant, including programming through the "peace dividends trust fund," Peacebuilding Fund, and the mission's DDR component. They could also be encouraged to build risk management and careful monitoring and evaluation into these projects and to favor partnerships with credible local actors, including from the private sector.

6. **Improve strategic communications:** MINUSMA could strengthen its capacity to provide positive narratives as alternatives to those disseminated by terrorist groups. "Strategic communication" is

---

88   International Crisis Group, "Mali central: La fabrique d'une insurrection?"

89   Security Council Resolution 2295 (UN Doc. S/RES/2295), June 29, 2016.

90   International Crisis Group, "Mali central: La fabrique d'une insurrection?"

91   During the March 2016 field research conducted by IPI, the issue of bringing back the leader of Ansar Dine, Iyad ag Ghali, into the peace process was raised again in various local news outlets. See, for instance, "Et si l'État optait pour négocier avec Iyad Ag Ghali!" Malijet, March 25, 2016, available at http://malijet.com/actualte_dans_les_regions_du_mali/rebellion_au_nord_du_mali/150977-et-si-l%E2%80%99etat-optait-pour-n%C3%A9gocier-avec-iyad-ag-ghali.html .

premised on communicating not only through words but also through concrete actions, such as programs carried out in conjunction with the Malian government or local authorities (e.g., "peace dividends" projects and local conflict resolution and reconciliation projects) without unwittingly financing the electoral campaigns of local elites. This strategic communication can be carried out by MINUSMA's radio station, as well as by community radio stations, which may have greater reach and legitimacy at the local level.

Member states have repeatedly reaffirmed that "the primary responsibility for preventing violent extremism rests with Member States" and that "as they develop their response, the United Nations can act as a natural partner."[92] As the government of Mali is in the process of developing its own national strategy, MINUSMA and the UN country team in Mali could consider some of these suggestions as part of a balanced political and security approach in support of the government. In order to be effective, such support will also require that the mission and the UN country team be more proactive and that, rather than "bunkerize," they "get out" to collaborate with local authorities, organizations, and communities, which should be at the forefront of prevention efforts.

Recommendations for the Way Forward

The high-level debate on peace and security hosted by the president of the General Assembly in May 2016 underscored the need for the UN and member states to adopt a more comprehensive and strategic approach to complex security challenges. A number of statements during the debate focused on the need for more cohesive strategic approaches that foster connectivity, political solutions, and a more responsive system adapted to interconnected threats. The conclusion of the high-level debate highlighted the need "to further reflect on tools and means" for UN peace operations to respond to terrorism and violent extremism.[93] To that end, this paper has sought to present in a nuanced manner the current state of efforts to integrate CT and P/CVE into peace operations, internal debates on these issues in the UN Secretariat and among member states, and potential challenges and opportunities for peace operations.

This is particularly relevant not only looking at the map of missions deployed today but also looking ahead to the likely conflict scenarios that may call for the UN to deploy additional missions equipped with the skills and knowledge to address violent extremism. As groups across a number of regions have sought to mirror the tactics and branding of ISIS, there have been increased attacks by "self-starter" groups, many of which have no formal affiliation with terrorist groups but are inspired by their perceived potency. It is also likely that armed groups will adopt such tactics in a bid to seek attention and support.

While no universal causal relationship between radicalization and factors like poverty and lack of education or employment has been found, these factors often create an environment that enables extremist groups to craft narratives that exploit the grievances of disenfranchised citizens and purport to offer effective answers. Violent conflict in particular creates a hospitable environment for the growth or expansion of extremist groups.[94] At the same time, such groups can fuel or exacerbate dynamics that negatively impact state-society relations or other sources of fragility and provoke reactions by states that risk doing the same. It is therefore critical that conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and development activities associated with mission mandates integrate P/CVE as appropriate to each context. The recommendations below offer a range of ideas for doing so.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE SUPPORTIVE HEADQUARTERS

UN headquarters and member states in New York hold a particular responsibility for fostering

---

92 United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015.

93 UN General Assembly, "Conclusions and Observations by the President of the Seventieth Session of the UN General Assembly."

94 International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State."

system-wide analysis and planning, providing consistent policy guidance, and crafting enabling but realistic mandates for peace operations in the field. UN peace operations are set up to fail unless they are planned on the basis of a nuanced analysis of the complex threats and drivers of conflict and violence. Ideally, this analysis must translate into context-specific political strategies, mandates, and missions. One of the recurrent challenges for the UN has been the limited analytical capacity that supports mission planning, which leads to most mandates and missions being designed from similar templates with little regard for the demands and priorities of specific contexts. The end result is that similar approaches are adopted for contexts such as Somalia and Mali, or Burundi and South Sudan.

The HIPPO recommended that the UN invest in strengthening the UN's underlying capacity for analysis, strategy, assessment, and planning and adopt a phased and sequenced approach to mandating. The secretary-general responded by establishing a small, centralized analysis and planning cell in his office, responsible for compiling information and analysis across the system to prepare strategic considerations and options for possible UN responses.[95] The UN Security Council agreed to "consider sequenced and phased mandates, where appropriate, when evaluating existing United Nations peace operations or establishing new United Nations peace operations."[96]

At the same time, discussions around the potential restructuring of the UN counterterrorism architecture, including by focusing on P/CVE, have also emphasized the need for a high-level coordinator supported by a stronger capacity for strategic planning. Together, these reforms could create a strong basis for a more coherent and coordinated approach across the UN and for developing more responsive and adaptable mechanisms for P/CVE. The forthcoming May 2017 report requested by member states during the review of the Global

Counter-Terrorism Strategy is widely expected to contain some options proposed by the Secretariat (and the new secretary-general) for consideration by member states.[97]

These are welcome developments and present an opportunity for more UN system-wide dialogue, coherence, and policy guidance on these issues. They also present an opportunity to factor terrorism and violent extremism into assessments, analysis, and mission planning, and possibly into mandates, with careful consideration of when is the right time for what type of P/CVE intervention, as detailed in the below recommendations.

Improve Analytical Capacity (Nuanced Analysis, Joint Assessments, Strategic Planning)

It is imperative for the UN to get a better and more nuanced understanding not only of terrorist groups themselves but also of the specific factors and grievances leading to radicalization and violence. Additionally, the UN needs a deeper and more context-specific understanding of the political and ideological motives of individuals and armed groups in order to factor this into its strategic planning. However, this should not be the starting point of a strategic assessment, which should remain part of the political process.

As the threat of violent extremism extends beyond borders, a regional analytical framework may be appropriate in some contexts. This would involve cooperation and information exchange among peace operations, regional offices, and any groups or panels of experts. An illustrative example of such an approach is the regional study on perceptions of radicalization, violence, and (in)security drivers in the Sahel, commissioned by UNDP, in consultation with CTED, and carried out by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue using a network of local researchers.[98] In the same way that UN peace operations are increasingly resorting to public perception surveys, UN regional offices— such as the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA)—could carry out or commission

---

95 United Nations Secretary-General, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, UN Doc. A/70/357–S/2015/682, September 2, 2015.

96 Security Council, *Statement by the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/PRST/2015/22, November 25, 2015.

97 See, for example, Independent Commission on Multilateralism, "Pulling Together: The Multilateral System and Its Future," International Peace Institute, September 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/2016/09/icm-final-report ; and Fink and Millar, "Blue Sky III—Taking UN Counterterrorism Efforts in the Next Decade from Plans to Action."

98 See www.hdcentre.org/en/our-work/mediation-support/current-activities/perceptions-of-radicalization-violence-and-insecurity-drivers-in-the-sahel/ .

studies of factors of radicalization and violent extremism to inform their strategies, with the support of UN peace operations and in partnership with any relevant subregional organizations and research institutes.[99] This would also help promote research and analysis by local networks of researchers and build endogenous analytical capacity in these countries, which is important for prevention.[100]

Beyond analysis, the UN needs to adopt a more institutionalized approach to assessments and strategic reviews, factoring in the parts of the UN system with P/CVE expertise. At the end of 2011, the UN carried out an assessment mission on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region.[101] The team comprised representatives of DPA, CTITF, CTED, DPKO, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Peacebuilding Support Office, UNDP, UNODC, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), UNOWA, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the African Union, and its assessment resulted in the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel.[102] However, when it came to implementing the strategy and planning the UN mission in Mali not long after, this all-of-UN approach seems to have faltered. It is therefore essential that joint assessments factor in analysis by counterterrorism actors, such as CTED and CTITF. CTED produces national and global assessments of the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1624, as well as of efforts to implement Security Council Resolution 2178, and the recommendations from these assessments should, where appropriate, inform broader mission planning processes.

As discussed in the below sections (on early warning and early action), assessments should be undertaken on an ongoing basis, as situations can often evolve quickly—as seen with the emergence of "new" groups in central Mali. It may also be useful for the UN to revive "horizon-scanning"

Security Council briefings and for DPA to make use of these briefings to create early awareness of the threat environment for impeding missions.

Enhance System-Wide Dialogue, Coherence, and Policy Guidance

While the above-mentioned ongoing efforts of DPKO (primarily its Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training and OROLSI) to develop policy in this area are encouraging, these should be broadened to other parts of the UN system concerned by these issues, such as the DPA Policy Planning Unit, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNODC, Office of Legal Affairs, CTED, and CTITF.

Beyond assessments and planning, a "whole of UN approach"—as called for by the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism—is needed. Violent extremism is an issue that cuts across the three pillars of the United Nations—peace and security, development, and human rights. Yet the UN's counterterrorism architecture remains disjointed. In addition, both the UN Secretariat and member states have traditionally looked at peace operations separately from terrorism and violent extremism, with different departments and experts operating in siloes.

There is therefore a need for greater coordination among peace operations teams and counterterrorism bodies to advance system-wide dialogue. Such dialogue could help build a shared understanding of the context, ongoing activities, and gaps related to CT and P/CVE and foster engagement with member states and key stakeholders. This dialogue, particularly with the Security Council, should include discussion of the risks and possible unintended consequences of asking peace operations to pursue CT and P/CVE activities. External partners can also facilitate dialogue by regularly bringing together UN officials, government representatives, and civil society actors to share lessons learned, good

---

99   For instance, International Crisis Group and the Institute for Security Studies have produced a number of relevant analyses on the Sahel and Somalia, respectively. See International Crisis Group, "Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?" March 2005; and Institute for Security Studies, "Radicalisation and al-Shabaab Recruitment in Somalia," September 2014.

100 See recommendations in International Peace Institute, "L'extrémisme violent: Vers une stratégie de prévention dans l'espace francophone," January 2016, available at www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/1601_Violent-Extremism.pdf .

101 Security Council, *Letter from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/2012/42, January 18, 2012.

102 Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Sahel Region*, UN Doc. S/2013/354, June 14, 2013.

practices, and risk assessments.[103] The CTITF, which includes DPA and DPKO as constituent members—or the above-mentioned high-level coordinator of counterterrorism efforts, if appointed—could create an interagency working group to offer a sustainable platform for these exchanges.

The shared understanding that would ideally emerge from such dialogue could lead to the development of UN-wide policy guidance (rather than policy guidance leading to shared understanding). Many UN staff in the field already require guidance in areas such as mediation, DDR, and stabilization and may urgently need advice on the legal implications of certain CT and P/CVE activities (e.g., in relation to the criminalization of certain types of support to "foreign terrorist fighters" as broadly defined in Resolution 2178). This guidance, with reinforcement by the Office of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, could support greater cooperation and collaboration between peace operations and UN country teams, particularly on P/CVE work. The proposed CTITF working group—including DPKO, DPA, UNDP, OHCHR, UNODC, and other actors—could bring together senior managers informally to coordinate activities that can benefit from synergies between missions and country teams on the ground, while also seeking to mitigate unintended risks that may arise from those activities.

The risk is that various parts of the UN system develop their own CT and P/CVE expertise and guidance for their own purposes in an uncoordinated manner. This would miss the bigger picture, and the resulting lack of interoperability among the different approaches might further divide the system. Moreover, it is critical to develop policy guidance that clarifies for personnel on the ground the red lines for UN action, making clear when

missions are, or are not, expected to act. Another risk is that UN policy would put a "straitjacket" on the issue and not allow for the nuanced approaches required by the considerably different causes of terrorism and violence in various situations.

Prioritize Objectives and Capacities in Mandates

Although mandates are subject to interpretation, some still see the absence of direct mention of P/CVE in mission mandates as an obstacle to integrating a preventive approach into relevant activities and mobilizing resources toward this approach. The Security Council could give the space and "cover" to missions and their leadership to determine whether to integrate CT and P/CVE strategies into some of their activities by simply referencing key relevant resolutions in the preamble of a resolution authorizing or renewing a peace operation (e.g., "Recalling its Resolutions 1373 (2001), 2178 (2014),[104] 1624 (2005),[105] 2253 (2015),[106] etc., and welcoming the support provided by CTED[107] and the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre").[108] This could also help institutionalize pathways for UN system-wide cooperation and assist in overcoming institutional siloes by providing support to the mission on the ground.

Including such a reference to these resolutions would be a starting point for the mission leadership to determine—based on its ongoing threat assessment and broader analysis, as well as the resources and capacities at its disposal—whether to consider integrating a P/CVE approach into some of its strategies or programming. This would be particularly helpful in supporting host governments that are obligated to implement these resolutions and encouraged by the secretary-general to develop their own national P/CVE strategy, and could help prioritize CT and P/CVE efforts in their plans. Moreover, where peace operations are involved in

---

103 External partners can also support such efforts, as exemplified by the February 11th roundtable hosted by IPI (see www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/1603_Peace-Ops-in-Asymmetric-Environments.pdf) and the series of roundtables hosted by the Global Center on Cooperative Security on CT and P/CVE at the UN.

104 In Resolution 2178, the council "decided that all States shall ensure that their legal systems provide for the prosecution, as serious criminal offences, of travel for terrorism or related training, as well as the financing or facilitation of such activities."

105 Resolution 1624 pertains to incitement to commit acts of terrorism and calls on UN member states to prohibit it by law, prevent such conduct, and deny safe haven to anyone "with respect to whom there is credible and relevant information giving serious reasons for considering that they have been guilty of such conduct."

106 Resolution 2253 expands the sanctions framework against al-Qaida to include ISIS.

107 On December 17, 2013, the Security Council extended the mandate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) through 2017. CTED, a member of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), is the expert body that assists the Counter-Terrorism Committee to monitor, promote, and facilitate the implementation by member states of Security Council Resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005).

108 The United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre was created in 2011 within the CTITF Office to assist in building the capacity of member states.

capacity building and institutional development, such as through OROLSI, the mandates set out by the Security Council resolutions and Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy are key to informing some of the functional capacities these institutions require.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE FIELD MISSIONS

The above headquarters-level recommendations—improving system-wide analysis, planning, and policy guidance on CT and P/CVE and ensuring Security Council mandates enable activities in these areas—will all be essential if UN peace operations are to contribute to preventing terrorism and violent extremism during the relatively short period of time they are deployed. These recommendations also come with relatively little additional risk of unintended consequences.

On the contrary, the below field-level recommendations for UN missions potentially come with serious unintended consequences and risks for staff on the ground and their local partners, which must be factored in when they are being considered. Nonetheless, a number of missions already face terrorism and violent extremism in the field, and the history of the UN teaches us that many policies have developed out of necessity and practice from the bottom up. Occasionally, innovative practices in the field become policies at headquarters. "Second-generation DDR" is a good example of how a set of evolving DDR-like "interim stabilization" practices were documented and presented as a contribution to the "New Horizon" process of engaging member states in a policy dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of peacekeeping.[109] Below is a list of possible entry points for the UN to start thinking of CT and P/CVE in the field.

Preserve (and Expand) the Space for Dialogue with All Parties

Echoing the recommendation of the HIPPO report and a host of Security Council resolutions (including 2178, 1325, and 2253), the first step to finding political solutions to violent extremism and conflicts in general is that the UN be able and willing to talk to all actors on the ground, provided they are open to engaging with the UN. These may include actors considered extremist groups or that may not at first seem amenable to negotiations, as well as traditional and faith-based leaders, civil society actors, women's groups, and youth.

Preserving this space for dialogue requires the Security Council to carefully consider the implications of imposing sanctions and listing individuals and groups as "terrorists," particularly given that it is very difficult to "de-list" them thereafter. It also requires that UN officials be cautious with the use of labels like "violent extremist" or "terrorist" when describing individuals, armed groups, and—most importantly—communities, particularly when they are not designated as such by the Security Council. As the International Crisis Group notes, "the label 'violent extremism'—much like that of 'terrorist,' risks pushing policy away from politics."[110]

Engaging with terrorist groups also requires the UN to acquire better CT and P/CVE expertise, including through its DPA-managed standby team of mediation experts, which currently has expertise in a wide range of issues (e.g., constitution making, gender issues, natural resources, power sharing, process design, security arrangements) but not in violent extremism or transnational organized crime.[111] Such expertise can be found in humanitarian organizations with experience engaging with a broad range of armed groups on humanitarian access and other issues (such as Geneva Call, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and the International Committee of the Red Cross).[112]

The principle of impartiality should not be confused with neutrality as the UN seeks to support host governments and reinforce core UN norms drawn from its charter and conventions, such as those on human rights. In places like Afghanistan, engagement in humanitarian work, protection of all victims of violations irrespective of their

---

109 See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, January 18, 2010, available at www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/2GDDR_ENG_WITH_COVER.pdf .

110 International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State."

111 DPA is developing a guidance note on political dialogue with non-state armed groups, particularly "proscribed" groups. Also see Louise Bosetti, James Cockayne, and John de Boer, "Crime-Proofing Conflict Prevention, Management, and Peacebuilding: A Review of Emerging Good Practice," UN University Centre for Policy Research, August 10, 2016, available at
http://cpr.unu.edu/crime-proofing-conflict-prevention-management-and-peacebuilding-a-review-of-emerging-good-practice.html .

112 See, for instance, www.genevacall.org/how-we-work/armed-non-state-actors/ , www.hdcentre.org/uploads/tx_news/34Engagingwitharmedgroups-MPS.pdf , and www.icrc.org/en/international-review/engaging-armed-groups .

allegiance, and civilian casualty tracking have contributed to the UN being seen as impartial. These activities can provide entry points to more political talks and could be considered in Somalia and Mali.[113]

The UN must also be better placed to identify and navigate "terrorist groups," their political, ideological, and religious motives, and the possible fragmentation that would make it easier to engage with moderate voices within them. This will require better information and analysis, as well as, most importantly, political leadership from the UN secretary-general and a strong commitment from member states to contribute to providing both the political space for the UN to carry out such work and the capacity and resources to do so.

Enhance Capacity for Early Warning and Response

Too often, UN missions are alerted to the threat of violent extremism only when there is an attack, often missing the opportunity to recognize signs of violent radicalization or mobilization they could have otherwise detected, discussed with local authorities and community leaders, used to generate preventive interventions, or highlighted in early warning reports.[114] UN peace operations staff (particularly human rights, civil affairs, and DDR officers) deployed in sub-offices and working alongside local authorities, populations, and armed groups in various settings can play an important role in early warning by highlighting risks of radicalization and mobilization to violence. They can also play a key role in identifying local capacities for peace and resilience within communities and states, which the UN mission could then support.

In order to play these roles, however, UN staff on the ground would need to have different profiles (anthropologists, for instance) or be sensitized to the issues of radicalization to violence. They would also need to know how to detect and report early

signs of radicalization and how to conduct peace and conflict assessments that factor in preventive capacities. Such early analysis, conducted in collaboration with host governments and populations, is essential for effective prevention work.

For peace operations, early action could also include helping with crime scene investigations (forensics), making prisons more secure (preventing escapes), securing weapons stockpiles from looting and preventing arms trafficking, assisting with the trials of high-profile terrorists, and preventing financing of terrorist groups by organized crime networks. These activities would require expertise that is not often readily available in missions (see the below recommendation on in-mission experts). They would also require activities related to collecting and analyzing information and intelligence (typically centralized in the Joint Mission Analysis Centre) to be tasked slightly differently. In monitoring armed groups, missions should pay particular attention to the financing, arms, and other support these groups could receive not only from organized crime networks, other groups, or states, but also from supporters and sympathizers. These could include youth who adhere to the groups' ideologies without having officially joined, as well as youth who could be tempted to join for reasons that are not ideological or religious.[115]

Integrate CT and P/CVE into Compacts with Host Governments when Relevant

State responses to terrorism and violent extremism have often been part of the problem, including in countries where UN peace operations are deployed. In this context, the idea of "compacts" between the UN and host governments presents an opportunity. These compacts could "ensure understanding of [missions'] mandates…and, as appropriate, support coordinated international engagement." They could also secure countries' strategic consent for the presence of a peace operation.[116] This idea of

---

113 Civilian casualty tracking of both terrorist attacks and counterterrorism responses is used as a basis for engagement with parties to conflict to positively influence their behavior. In Afghanistan, for instance, accurate, comprehensive, and well-verified data concretely led to policy changes in the modus operandi of parties to conflict, resulting in (1) reduced casualties inflicted by aerial operations, (2) shifts in the manner in which IEDs were used, and (3) relative improvement in conditions of conflict-related detainees. Continued advocacy with all parties to conflict, including the Taliban, contributes to better respect of international humanitarian law and reduced civilian casualties.

114 In 2015, the Global Center on Cooperative Security worked with the Economic Community of West African States' Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) to advance the integration of CVE into early-warning mechanisms in the region. For more on this work, see www.globalcenter.org/events/training-on-countering-violent-extremism-in-west-africa-and-the-sahel-strengthening-regional-prevention-capacities/ .

115 Abilova and Novosseloff, "Demystifying Intelligence in UN Peace Operations: Toward an Organizational Doctrine."

116 Initially suggested in the HIPPO report and taken up by the secretary-general in his follow-on report. United Nations Secretary-General, *The Future of United Nations Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*, para. 64.

compacts is currently being discussed in the context of the Central African Republic and Mali.

If the idea gains traction, consultations with host governments while developing compacts could be a good opportunity for honest conversations about what the UN does not do to fight terrorism and what it could do to support countries in preventing violent extremism. Moreover, it could allow space for dialogue on what national counterterrorism measures risk being counterproductive. Compacts could also present an opportunity to clarify what a mandate to support "the extension of state authority" means in practice, including what kind of commitment is needed from the host government itself. Extension of state authority should include support to the delivery of basic services, education, rule of law, human rights, governance, and interreligious and intercultural dialogue. This should be accompanied by a more balanced allocation of resources by the UN mission, UN country team, donors, and the government itself—signaling a shift away from traditional securitized approaches. Security Council members involved in discussing the compact with the host government not only would contribute to its development but should remain involved politically throughout its implementation.

Another idea would be for these compacts to be associated with CTED and CTITF where relevant. CTED has been helping a number of countries develop their national counterterrorism strategies, and CTITF has been developing Integrated Assistance on Countering Terrorism (I-ACT) projects in support of governments. However, they do not have a presence on the ground to ensure adequate follow-up. Moreover, when UN peace operations deploy, host countries usually "shop" around the UN and donors for training and equipping their security forces for CT purposes, but they may lose sight of other aspects of a comprehensive CT and P/CVE strategy. Closer coordination between CTED and CTITF—both of which provide guidance, project funds, and missions to build capacity and conduct monitoring—could therefore be mutually benefi-

cial. When supported by a compact with the host government, this coordination could help foster political will for implementing strategies to prevent terrorism and violent extremism, which is often missing. This should aim to put the government and communities on course by the time the UN mission departs, at which point the UN country team, CTED, and CTITF can continue working directly with the state.

Enhance Mission Engagement with Civil Society, Women, and Youth

The above-mentioned compacts should not lead us to overlook the fact that the key to preventing violent extremism is not the relationship between the UN and the host government, but the relationship of the host government with its citizens. The HIPPO report makes a strong case for "people-centric" UN missions, in contrast with traditionally state-centric peacekeeping. Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), adopted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (which makes it legally binding for all 193 member states), calls for missions to engage with relevant local communities and nongovernmental actors in developing strategies for CVE narratives. It also notes the need "to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism…, including by empowering youth, families, women, religious, cultural and education leaders, and all other concerned groups of civil society and adopt tailored approaches to countering recruitment to this kind of violent extremism and promoting social inclusion and cohesion."[117]

The global study on the implementation of Resolution 1325 specifically emphasized that the damaging impacts of violent extremism on the rights of women and girls "demands the attention" as part of the women, peace, and security agenda.[118] This led to the adoption of Resolution 2242 calling on member states to work toward greater integration of the women, peace, and security, CT, and CVE agendas.[119] In his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, the UN secretary-general also reaffirmed that women's empowerment is crucial to achieving sustainable peace and urged member

---

117 UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (September 24, 2014), UN Doc. S/RES/2178, para. 16.

118 UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, 2015, available at http://wps.unwomen.org/~/media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf .

119 Security Council Resolution 2242 (October 13, 2015), UN Doc. S/RES/2242, para. 11.

states to follow through on Resolution 2242 and to mainstream gender perspectives in efforts to prevent violent extremism.[120]

The risk is that the UN bureaucracy translates this concept into a few posts and projects that remain UN-centric, rather than improving public perceptions of the world body by truly enhancing community engagement and focusing projects on empowering civil society, youth, women, and cultural and educational leaders in general. People-centric peace operations would be better (re)defined as a rebalancing of mandate priorities from support to the host state toward support to community resilience, promotion of better governance, and strengthening of state-citizen relations.[121] Some states will claim this is an infringement of national sovereignty, but the crisis of state-society relations, ill-conceived and securitized approaches (which often lead to human rights violations), and government policies that exclude certain groups create fertile ground for terrorist recruitment.

One of the challenges is that UN missions tend to have more expertise and funding for law enforcement activities than for community-led programs. Civil affairs officers, human rights officers, and gender advisers in field missions could benefit not only from greater support and guidance but also from an increase in project funding (beyond the quick impact projects discussed below).

Design Integrated Strategies to Prevent Terrorism and Violent Extremism

There are many potential entry points for UN missions to start thinking about how existing activities and programs could better support host governments and communities in preventing terrorism and violent extremism. Such entry points are already being explored in the areas of rule of law and human rights through projects that may be "P/CVE-relevant" and, where and when useful, could be made more "P/CVE-specific."[122] For

instance, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) contributes to preventing and countering violent extremism through its work protecting and promoting human rights. OHCHR is also helping address grievances that might otherwise create a space for terrorism through its programs on reform of criminal justice law, access to justice, and economic and social rights, as well as its international commissions of inquiry and special human rights rapporteurs. The Human Rights Council recently discussed the human rights dimensions of preventing and countering violent extremism, and in his Plan of Action, the secretary-general stressed that full respect for human rights and accountability for wrongdoing are cornerstones to healing broken societies and to successfully countering the threat of violent extremism.[123]

P/CVE activities, however, cannot be designed and implemented in isolation from the UN's broader peace and security work and need to be part of an integrated mission strategy and approach. Missions are already overburdened with developing strategies that are not necessarily known, and even less owned, by the different components of the mission. Instead of creating additional strategies, missions should mainstream CT and P/CVE in their existing stabilization strategies, at least as an initial step. For example, mainstreaming CT and P/CVE in stabilization strategies developed by MINUSMA (see Box 3) could potentially make these strategies—and their many derivative projects—much more relevant. This would, however, require these strategies to be based on better threat analysis and assessments that are neither simple responses to local authorities' requests nor "blind" to local trends in radicalization and violent extremism. Mission-wide strategies for the protection of civilians would also be natural candidates for mainstreaming P/CVE, although this could risk politicizing international humanitarian law.[124] That said, Tier III of the

---

120 United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, UN Doc. A/70/674, December 24, 2015.

121 See Cedric de Coning, John Karlsrud, and Paul Troost, "Towards More People-Centric Peace Operations: From 'Extension of State Authority' to 'Strengthening Inclusive State-Society Relations,'" *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2015), p. 49.

122 For a detailed overview of the activities of UN entities, see United Nations, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN Doc. A/70/826, April 12, 2016; and Fink and Millar, "Blue Sky III—Taking UN Counterterrorism Efforts in the Next Decade from Plans to Action."

123 Human Rights Council, "Panel Discussion on the Human Rights Dimensions of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism," Geneva, March 17, 2016, available at www.ohchr.org/SP/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17249&LangID=E .

124 Each UN mission with a protection of civilians mandate is required to develop a unique strategy for achieving the common principles and aims of protecting civilians in conflict situations according to the unique setting in which it operates, in accordance with DPKO/Department of Field Support guidelines.

DPKO/Department of Field Support Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping lists a series of activities that could all potentially contribute to the prevention of violent extremism if well carried out.[125]

Promote Partnerships between Missions, Country Teams, and NGOs

UN field missions are currently not well equipped to carry out projects quickly and effectively, particularly not P/CVE-sensitive ones. These projects require action based on early warning and analysis, close monitoring and evaluation, and national ownership, which is difficult for missions given their relatively short lifetimes and militarized presence. Moreover, mission staff often lack the expertise necessary to design and manage such projects.

UN peace operations may therefore be better off enabling UN agencies, funds, and programs and partner NGOs to carry out P/CVE initiatives. These partners may have engaged in P/CVE-like projects before a UN mission was deployed and will likely remain involved after a mission leaves. In addition to experience and expertise in P/CVE programming, these partners may better manage and follow up on projects and sometimes bring a longstanding relationship with government counterparts and local communities, including youth and women's groups.[126] In return, the presence of a UN mission can sometimes allow UN agencies and NGOs to "go further into the field" by providing logistical and security support.

Improve Capacity to Monitor, Evaluate, Manage Risk, and Learn

P/CVE efforts cannot await ideal conditions—they may have to be undertaken while institutions are being built, communities are reconciling, or economies are developing. In fact, they can complement efforts to improve these conditions. But to do so, more empirical evidence is needed to fully understand their impact and potential.[127] Developing the capacity to learn lessons, assess impact, and adapt programming will therefore be critical. Although national governments have low tolerance for risk, a set of lessons from initial P/CVE efforts is beginning to emerge and being used to refine and adapt programs. UN efforts to integrate P/CVE into its work in some contexts—without necessarily labeling it P/CVE—will also have to involve a process of trial and error—of learning by doing.

If and when UN missions experiment with P/CVE-like programs and projects or enable UN country teams and NGOs to do so, they should have a clear risk management framework in place. The Risk Management Units established in Somalia and Afghanistan under the authority of the office of the deputy special representative of the secretary-general/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator could be a model for risk-management strategies in other missions, particularly if CTITF, the Peacebuilding Fund, or donors were to start funding specific P/CVE projects where peace operations are present.[128]

---

125 These activities include supporting the political process; disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating ex-combatants; strengthening the rule of law, including through the promotion and protection of human rights, justice, and safe, secure, and humane correctional facilities; fighting impunity and strengthening accountability to deter potential perpetrators; supporting security sector reform; managing stockpiles and disposing of mines, arms, and ammunitions; putting an end to the illicit exploitation of natural resources; contributing to creating the conditions conducive to the return, local integration, or resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons; supporting the participation of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding; helping establish security conditions to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance; supporting the host government in designing youth employment and other relevant economic development activities; and supporting compensation and rehabilitation of victims. UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping*, April 1, 2015, para. 30.

126 UNDP recently released a regional and multi-country project document that proposes activities in the following nine areas: (1) rule of law and security; (2) disengagement and reintegration; (3) socioeconomic factors; (4) media, technology, and public awareness; (5) community resilience in response to violent extremism; (6) national observatories to recognize violent extremism and provide policy advice; (7) gender-specific engagements; (8) research and analysis to support policies and programming; (9) and coordination and enabling of regional and subregional entities. UN Development Programme, *Preventing and Responding to Violent Extremism in Africa: A Development Approach*, 2015, available at www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Local%20Governance/UNDP_RBA_Preventing_and_Responding_to_Violent_Extremism_2016-19.pdf .

127 See, for example, Romaniuk, "Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism"; and Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption."

128 See http://so.one.un.org/content/unct/somalia/en/home/what-we-do/Risk%20Management%20Unit/ . The Peacebuilding Fund announced the launch of its first Youth Promotion Initiative in 2016, which explicitly states that consideration will be given to projects that attempt to try out new, creative interventions and approaches, including for young people's role in preventing violent extremism and terrorism (in line with Security Council Resolution 2250). See www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/05/first-youth-promotion-initiative-of-the-un-peacebuilding-fund/ .

Employ Caution in Labeling Programs as P/CVE

Projects should not be reflexively labeled "P/CVE" if they were not designed and developed as such, though they may still be P/CVE-relevant. While at the macro level it may be useful to put more emphasis on P/CVE in analysis, system-wide dialogue, and mandates, the situation may be quite different in the field. Indeed, just rebranding existing quick impact, Peacebuilding Fund, or UN country team projects as "P/CVE" does not ensure they are P/CVE-specific, or even P/CVE-relevant. It also renders monitoring and evaluation all the more challenging, because there is a tendency to assess the impact of P/CVE through projects that were not necessarily designed with that objective, distorting the understanding of what the intended or unintended effects may be.

Moreover, this rebranding could present many risks and carry the potential for unintended consequences. Missions should always take a careful "do no harm" approach, and reputational risks to missions and the communities they engage should always be factored into the initial risk analysis. Poor communications and interactions related to P/CVE can leave communities feeling stigmatized as "vulnerable" groups or "target communities" and perpetuate stereotypes of "at risk" groups as the problem. This diverts attention from other grievances and could create resentment about the allocation of resources to certain communities only because they are seen as "at risk" when other groups may be more in need. Some extremists could even see such "soft power" measures as threats to their influence and support.[129]

Some international actors have taken a broader development approach to tackling push factors, and these may not require any relabeling at all, particularly for external audiences. However, a number of practitioners have pushed for a narrower approach to projects that is focused on P/CVE-specific outcomes and only on those push and pull factors found to directly contribute to mobilization to violence.[130]

Rethinking projects in a more strategic and P/CVE-specific way can help empower communities and individuals to enhance resilience to extremist recruitment, challenge the narratives of extremist groups, and be more aware of the implications of supporting these groups. But such context-specific projects may not need to be given the label "P/CVE." Local politicians and communities rarely define their problems in terms of violent extremism, a lens that is still largely perceived as externally imposed and, as such, could even undermine the very purpose of the activities.

Improve Training and Raise the Awareness of Mission Staff

UN peace operations deployed in contexts where terrorism is a threat could use substantive advice on some of the above issues (e.g., how to engage or not to engage with terrorist groups; how to detect radicalization to violence; how to design early tactical P/CVE "interventions" and factor P/CVE into strategies, compacts, programs, and projects).[131] For example, to that end, the outgoing head of the UN mission in Somalia requested a CVE adviser in his office.[132]

One way to move forward without adding layers of bureaucracy could be to deploy short-term experts to offer guidance to those missions that request support (e.g., on analysis, political engagement with extremists, strategic communication, intercultural or interreligious dialogue, terrorism financing, transnational organized crime, crime scene investigation and forensics, arms trafficking, and disengagement and rehabilitation).[133] Such experts should be deployed based on requests from host governments and mission leadership to ensure

---

129 As noted in a report from the International Crisis Group, "While recognizing the diverse factors that can drive extremism and shifting resources toward efforts to tackle them is valuable, re-hatting efforts explicitly as CVE may be less so."

130 See, for example, Berger, "Making CVE Work: A Focused Approach Based on Process Disruption."

131 This recommendation was also raised in earlier reports. See, for example, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, Alistair Millar, and Jason Ipe, "Blue Sky II—Progress and Opportunities in Implementing the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," April 2014, available at www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Blue-Sky-II-Low-Res.pdf .

132 Interview with UN official, March 2016.

133 The secretary-general echoed this in his report: "The Secretary-General believes that his special representatives and envoys operating in such environments would benefit considerably if they were able to draw on the expertise of counter-terrorism advisers, in accordance with their mandates. Such advisers could assist in mainstreaming counter-terrorism into the mission's activities, where applicable, and catalyse the capacity-building efforts of host Governments and regional organizations in key areas, as prescribed by the Strategy's four pillars." United Nations, *Activities of the United Nations System in Implementing the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN Doc. A/70/826, April 12, 2016, para. 51.

they are used to support an assessment, mediation process, revision of the mission concept, or development or retooling of a project or stabilization strategy. Such experts could be based in the missions themselves or in DPA's regional offices, and they could be focal points and liaisons for CT entities deployed to specific operations on a temporary basis. This model could already be used to pilot new approaches and strategies in Somalia or Mali. Contextually tailored trainings on CT and P/CVE for mission staff, provided by the UN or external partners, could also help increase understanding of these issues within missions and advance efforts to mainstream them in existing policy frameworks and projects.

Conclusion

The three major UN peace and security reviews in 2015 all highlighted the need for UN peace operations to be more flexible and to adapt to the changing nature of conflict. They also reemphasized the importance of political solutions for preventing and ending conflicts and sustaining peace. This emphasis on prevention was echoed in the secretary-general's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and the fifth biennial review of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[134] Not only do ongoing conflicts provide an enabling environment for the emergence and appeal of terrorist groups and for the spread of violent extremism; terrorism and violent extremism can also fuel, exacerbate, and prolong conflicts and instability. If not already doing so, peace operations will be increasingly called upon to adapt their approaches without compromising their doctrinal foundations, to search for political solutions, and to contribute to sustaining peace.

This report has sought to expand the scope of the discussions beyond whether peace operations can "do CT" to how they can better support national governments and local communities in preventing terrorism and violent extremism beyond traditional law enforcement and military approaches. There is a gap between the policy processes at UN headquarters, where CT and P/CVE frameworks are being developed, refined, and advanced (though often in insulation from the UN's broader peace and security work) and the UN's peace operations on the ground. Closing the gap between policy at headquarters and practice in the field will require better understanding of the risks and potential unintended consequences of integrating PCVE strategies into relevant activities of UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions in accordance with their mandates. The recent discussions among member state on renewing the mandate of MINUSMA are testament to how divided the UN is as a whole. Despite recent advancements on the issue of violent extremism in the UN Secretariat and among member states, further discussions will be needed.

Considering that people and communities themselves rarely define their problems in terms of P/CVE, many criticize the term as simply another label externally imposed in the hope of attracting funding from governments whose anxiety levels have been raised by the threat of transnational terrorism. These criticisms are not without some merit. However, there has also been widespread recognition that purely military responses to groups such as al-Qaida, ISIS, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab will not diminish their appeal or curtail the threat they pose. For those who have rightly observed that military responses and draconian law enforcement regimes contribute to sustaining grievances and often sustain violence, P/CVE presents an opportunity to take a more comprehensive and balanced approach to addressing the threat—one that includes in its toolkit political, social, educational, communications, and capacity-building instruments.

UN field missions—if and when confronted with terrorism or violent extremism, and provided UN staff have the ability to effectively and safely operate outside of their camps—cannot remain indifferent to the changing nature of conflict and armed groups, at the risk of becoming irrelevant. Peace operations need to adapt in the way they analyze, strategize, plan, partner, and carry out good offices and other core mandated activities. The UN also needs to develop ways to support host governments and communities in contextually appropriate ways that minimize the possibility of harm.

---

134 UN General Assembly Resolution 70/291 (July 1, 2016), UN Doc. A/RES/70/291.

Many of the recommendations this reports puts forward make sense in general (not necessarily only to prevent violent extremism). But this debate on peace operations, terrorism, and violent extremism provides the UN an opportunity to think and act more strategically—to make peace operations more fit for the purpose of contributing to sustaining peace. Moreover, it provides the UN with the opportunity to explore strategies to prevent violence by addressing some of the drivers of conflict and to identify and address conditions that are conducive to terrorism, rather than simply trying to manage symptoms such as asymmetric threats. The added value of the UN in confronting terrorism and violent extremism is not to deliver a decisive military response but to support and strengthen preventive, multi-stakeholder approaches to waging and sustaining peace.
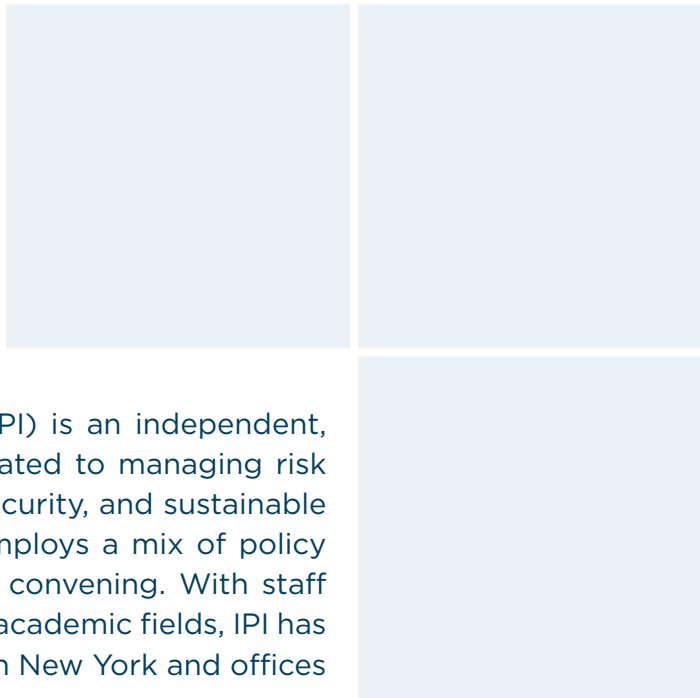
The **INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE** (IPI) is an independent, international not-for-profit think tank dedicated to managing risk and building resilience to promote peace, security, and sustainable development. To achieve its purpose, IPI employs a mix of policy research, strategic analysis, publishing, and convening. With staff from around the world and a broad range of academic fields, IPI has offices facing United Nations headquarters in New York and offices in Vienna and Manama.

www.ipinst.org   **www.theglobalobservatory.org**