

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century International CVE Cooperation

## Gotta Go Local

BY ERIC ROSAND

The recent release by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development of a [joint strategy on countering violent extremism](#) (CVE) marks a significant step forward in the evolution in the response to the threat. Much like the [plan of action on preventing violent extremism](#) that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon rolled out in January, the new strategy calls for a “whole of society” approach to addressing violent extremism, one in which subnational actors—mayors, researchers, teachers, social and mental health workers, psychologists, and the religious, youth, and other communities, none of which are traditional national security actors—have essential roles to play. This approach is echoed in the [G-7’s latest action plan on the subject](#) and reflects widespread recognition that many of the drivers of violent radicalization and the interventions required to prevent its spread are intensely local. As such, local rather than national actors are more likely to be best positioned to prevent the spread of violent extremism within their communities, including by identifying early signs of radicalization and intervening before it leads to the kind of violence we continue to see far too often in cities around the globe.

Encouragement from capitals and multilateral bodies for greater involvement from these stakeholders is important but not sufficient for building and sustaining the “whole of society”

approach. Facilitating and ensuring collaboration and cooperation *among* these local actors so they can share experiences and learn from each other is also critical. This will require, among other things, an updating of the international architecture for addressing terrorism and violent extremism, which has been focused almost entirely on national governments. It has been strengthened over the past decade to facilitate deeper and broader practical cooperation among an array of national officials – border security guards, prosecutors, judges, and parliamentarians from countries from every region – and to mobilize resources to support strengthening the counterterrorism capacities of national institutions.

However, this architecture is dominated by multilateral bodies, such as the United Nations and Global Counterterrorism Forum, and regional organizations like the African Union and Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which are driven by the interests and needs of national governments and ill-suited to facilitate and sustain cooperation among local CVE actors. Although local officials, professionals, and community leaders are occasionally involved in the work of these intergovernmental fora, it is generally as second-class citizens. They are not treated as full partners. For example, they do not have a voice in determining the priorities, which can differ – often dramatically in the case of counterterrorism and CVE – whether one is

looking at the issue from a national or local perspective, or shaping the agendas. At the end of the day, for the multilayered approach embodied in the UN plan of action and a growing number of national strategies to thrive, the cities, communities, and civil society activists on the front-line of CVE efforts need more from the multilateral system.

For starters, the traditional fora can and should do more to engage local actors on an ongoing basis. They should promote the meaningful involvement of subnational stakeholders in national counterterrorism and now CVE discussions that have generally been limited to national officials. They should mobilize resources to support the strengthening of subnational capacities – whether municipal authorities or civil society. However, more is required.

Subnational stakeholders need their own platforms to facilitate networking at the local, national, regional, and global levels to allow them to learn from each other and collaborate without giving national governments or intergovernmental bodies control over a cooperation agenda that is no longer limited to national actors. These subnational platforms can press national governments to create the necessary legal and policy space, which is all too

often shrinking, to enable greater involvement of subnational actors in addressing the increasingly localized threat of violent extremism.

New platforms are being developed to facilitate the sharing of challenges, best practices, and information among subnational stakeholders. Over the past 12 months, new global and regional CVE networks focused on bringing [cities](#) and [local researchers](#) together and regional platforms to connect [youth, women, and other civil society players](#), including those working on rehabilitation and reintegration of former terrorist offenders and returning foreign fighters, have been launched.

These platforms need to be scaled up and sustained in order to ensure that the whole-of-society approach being championed receives the necessary oxygen to survive. Governments and intergovernmental bodies need to support and mobilize funding for them without micromanaging or undermining their independence or credibility. In addition, they need to promote the space for subnational actors and other nontraditional stakeholders within national counterterrorism strategies and the traditional, state-driven multilateral system, where many far too many states continue to view issues of national security as belonging exclusively to national security officials.

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