



The concept and practices of CVE

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By Muhammad Amir Rana

Many nations are confronted with the challenge of violent and non-violent extremism, although with a varying degree, and have developed strategies to deal with it. Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) has become a popular term, which is regarded as a soft approach to countering terrorism. Many Western countries have evolved certain CVE programmes in their local perspectives.

Different states use different strategies in their CVE programmes which range from engagement to winning hearts and minds of the people. But the main objective of most of these strategies is related to neutralising the security threats. These programmes, which largely focus on Muslim immigrant communities, largely seek to improve inter-community harmony and cohesion.

Many of the CVE programmes also focus on the countries of origin of immigrant communities with an assumption that fixing extremism in immigrants' native lands will help prevent extremism in host societies. Western nations try to export their CVE models to Muslim countries and think these will be effective in Muslim majority countries as well. That is despite the fact that Western CVE programmes, which are regarded by many as having a narrow scope and context-specific attributes, have not yet achieved substantial successes and are in an experimental phase.

There is no doubt that nations learn from each other's experiences and practices but exporting unsuccessful models to other nations could prove counter-productive. Here is a review of major CVE programmes in practice in different Western countries. It may help understand different approaches. Muslim countries including Pakistan may find some useful elements in these programmes, which are suitable or adaptable to their contexts, and adopt them rather than implementing a Western model as it is.

The UK's Prevent Strategy

The UK is pioneer in crafting a CVE framework known as the Prevent Strategy. It was conceived in 2007 after 7/7 terrorist attacks to respond to the threat of terrorism and extremism. According to the information provided on the British Home Office webpage, "The strategy covers all forms of terrorism, including far-right extremism and some aspects of non-violent extremism."

Under the Prevent Strategy, the UK government has taken many initiatives ranging from community and youth engagement programmes to the ones focussed on vulnerable segments of the Muslim youth. The Channel and Think projects are two major components of the Prevent Strategy. The Channel Project targets the individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation with a purpose to prevent them from becoming terrorists. The Think Project was designed to offer disengaged young people the opportunity to take part

in a programme of workshops where the facts about race, religion, and migration are explored. These are community-focused programmes run by local authorities and controlled by a counter-terrorism centre in London. They also engage moderate religious scholars on national level to promote an environment which supports a moderate interpretation of Islamic precepts.

The UK's Prevent Strategy also contains an external component. It says: "we work closely with countries where those who support terrorism and promote extremism are most active. Our activity is concentrated on Pakistan, the Middle East and East Africa where radicalising activity can have a direct impact on communities in the UK."

The programme has achieved mixed results. Experts raised three major objections on the strategy. Some see it as a spying programme on Muslim communities, which they believe is counter-productive. Muslim communities also have concerns about it. Transparency is another major issue, and it is believed that local authorities misuse funds particularly for corrupting the local communities and building human intelligence networks.

Lack of evidence of the success is also an issue. Many critics say this is not a community cohesion strategy as it focuses on 'secularising' the Muslim communities. These initiatives, they argue, are stigmatising Muslim communities thus creating problems for their daily life interactions with other communities. In recent years, vulnerabilities among other communities were also exposed after some new converts to Islam joined Islamic State. Others say such measures are creating rightwing nationalist tendencies in British youth, and the government is not paying attention to this side.

The Prevent Strategy was conceived in a narrow security perspective, and its impact in terms of CVE is not measurable.

The US

US Homeland Security department has three major components of their CVE policy, which are understood violent extremism, supporting local communities and local law enforcement.

The focus of different CVE programmes in the US has been on making communities part of the solution through developing partnership with them, which allows division of labour between communities and law enforcement. Three pilot projects in three different cities of Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Boston focussed parents and teachers and their collaboration with the law enforcement. The findings suggested the need for developing new strategies for challenging violent extremism through community mobilisation, capacity building and targeted prevention and intervention activities to promote healthy communities. These programmes have also integrated mental health into their designs.

The major issue in the US CVE programmes is linked to the social legitimacy among the communities, which remain in a state of denial thus making the trust building a major

task. At the same time, unseen ideological and political spaces exist in the behaviours, which can trigger vulnerabilities. The US is still struggling to develop some comprehensive prevention strategies that go beyond the threat of terrorism.

Denmark

Denmark has developed a three-layered CVE program, which can be called Prevention Pyramid.

First layer of this pyramid is called ‘general’, which focuses on early prevention through capacity building of youth. Second layer, described as ‘specific’ undertakes prevention through intervention and is aimed at vulnerable individuals and groups. Third layer is ‘targeted’ at re-socialisation among individuals.

Under this prevention strategy, different ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have evolved exit programmes. The police have initiated social services programmes with parents, teachers.

Like other CVE programmes, the focus is on the Muslim communities without a thorough assessment of whether religion could be used as a curing element in these programmes or could prove counter-productive. These programmes stress on communities to think reasonably and do not evaluate political and ideological risks. The state thinks the communities should think like the majority and not link themselves with native cultures and countries.

France

France is new in CVE modelling and is still struggling to evolve a prevent strategy. The major problem is the lack of integration of the Muslim communities into the society, which are largely concentrated in suburban areas.

France had not taken the violent extremism seriously before the Charlie Hebdo incident in Paris as Muslims’ activism was driven by the Palestine–Israel issue and it had caused some serious terrorist attacks against the Jews in France. Experts believe that France’s participation in military campaigns in Libya and Northern Mali had triggered certain extremist tendencies and diversified the perspective.

The CVE strategy is in its inception in France. This is different from strategies employed in other Western countries because of its focus on critical individuals and their rehabilitation. Rather than using counter-narratives and traditional counselling techniques, the French CVE strategy engages individuals in trust building process. It has three levels of engagement: first, identifying the vulnerable individuals and initiating trust building process; second, understanding individuals’ grievances, and religious and political views; and third, engaging them in the care process and deconstruct their views

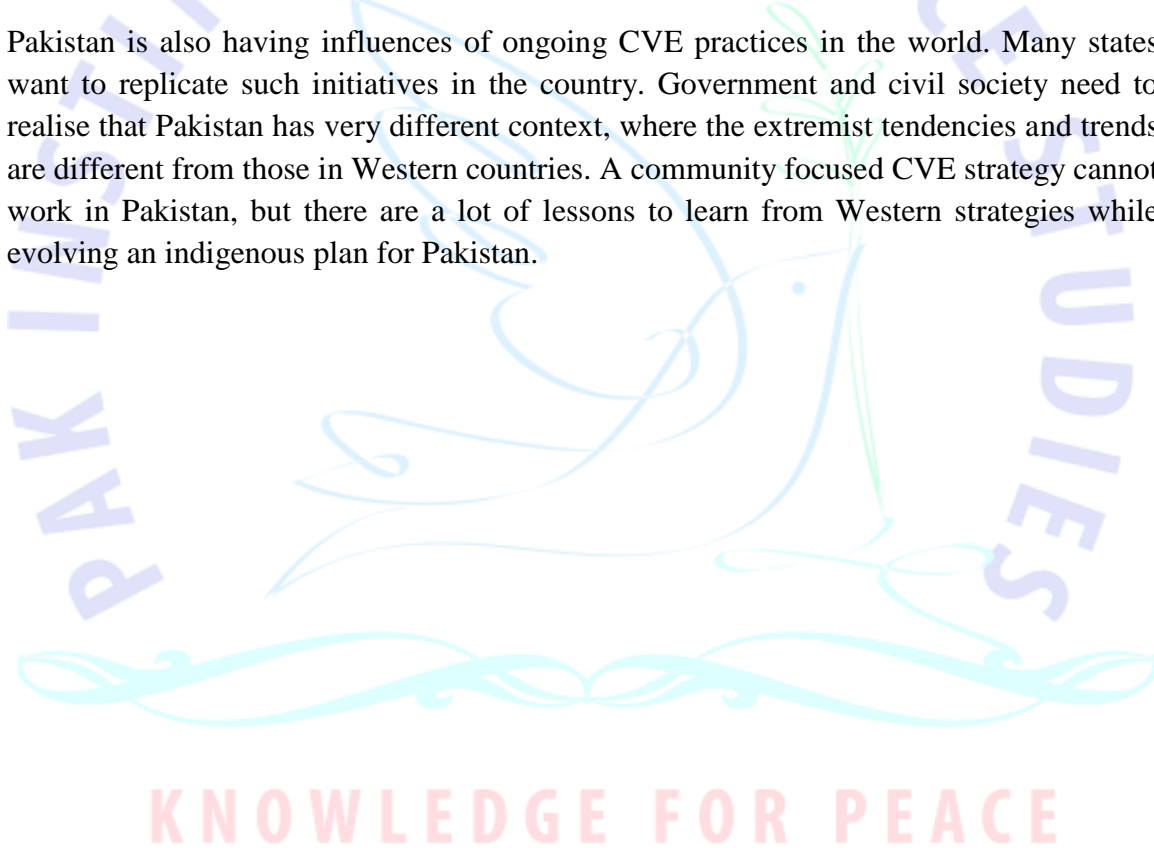
using media, art, theatre and other cultural expressions to built their confidence in life and surrounding.

The challenge the French authorities are facing is linked to evolving the criteria of identification and categorisation of vulnerable individuals. Though French authorities are optimistic about their strategy but it is still in the initial phase, and nothing concentrate has been achieved so far.

Belgium and Netherland have conceived their programmes in security perspective and appear largely inspired by the UK programme.

There is agreement among experts that all these CVE strategies need to identify timeframe, metrics, and indicators, drawing on other disciplines and allowing for flexibility. These initiatives can be made subjective through support from an empirical body of research and analysis.

Pakistan is also having influences of ongoing CVE practices in the world. Many states want to replicate such initiatives in the country. Government and civil society need to realise that Pakistan has very different context, where the extremist tendencies and trends are different from those in Western countries. A community focused CVE strategy cannot work in Pakistan, but there are a lot of lessons to learn from Western strategies while evolving an indigenous plan for Pakistan.



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