



Thinking Through Non-Kinetic Counterterrorism Tools

Robert Jenkins

**Assistant to the Administrator, Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization,
U.S. Agency for International Development**

Statement for the Record

**Strategy Session on Non-Kinetic Counterterrorism Tools
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy**

November 8, 2021

Violent conflict can threaten stability or hinder development in countries around the globe. USAID’s mission of promoting peaceful, prosperous societies and responding to humanitarian emergencies may be jeopardized unless we elevate our role in preventing violence and resolving conflicts. We know that foreign assistance dollars alone cannot resolve the complexity of violent conflict. By providing support to locally-driven solutions, USAID positions itself alongside the Department of State’s (DoS) diplomatic efforts and the Department of Defense’s (DoD) security-driven mission as a team to work with other countries and donors on shared objectives, while partnering with the private sector and non-governmental groups worldwide.

The USAID Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) was created to elevate the agency’s work in countries affected by conflict and violence. Agility is at the heart of CPS. We strive to move at the *speed of relevance and offer imperfect solutions to intractable problems*. CPS does this by providing rapid, flexible options and expertise in support of USAID objectives and U.S. national security priorities, including in fluid and dynamic environments.

Prevention is not a moment in time. It is a series of actions designed to interrupt the outbreak, escalation, or recurrence of violence and promote peace. We work on prevention in the middle of a conflict or upswing in violent extremism, or before it comes to a community or region. As a senior advisor in my bureau likes to tell me, Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) often feed off existing grievances already fueling conflict within a community. It is less about a religious ideology and more about governance and service delivery. USAID’s Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts prevent violence in two ways. First, we strengthen the resilience of local systems—the ways in which national and local governments, key leaders, communities, and the private sector interact—such that they themselves detect and deter violence. Second, we strive to reduce the risk of radicalization and recruitment to violence within communities.

We have learned a lot about what works—and what does not—when trying to prevent violence. For example, we found that by addressing the “push” factors alone, we improved individual and community circumstances, but did not necessarily reduce their propensity to support violence. By widening our aperture to target the dynamics through which VEOs mobilize those grievances and recruit support, we are starting to see more durable success in reducing support for violence. We have also learned how important it is to be able to adapt

quickly. We are taking advantage of changes in USAID's overall business model that allow us to pivot programming choices (even those managed through contracts) quickly. The key lesson here is that counterterrorism/countering violent extremism is not just about capacity-building or training in a classic sense. It is about meeting people in terror-affected venues as they are, in their daily lives, with support that matters in the short term *in addition to* working at institutional and transnational levels to make sure our national counterparts in government and in host security forces are not part of the problem, but contribute to a sustained solution.

How do we know we have succeeded? That is a hard question, and we are starting to better understand it and to tell the story. We measure changes in attitudes, behaviors, policies, and institutions. In development speak, institutions are more than buildings. They are the formal and informal rules that organize social, political, and economic relationships. Changing these "rules of the game" is not a short-term effort; it takes time—and requires the U.S. government to invest in prevention in the same ways it has invested in kinetic responses over the last two decades. Thankfully, it is a lot cheaper to prevent than respond. Here are a few examples of how USAID strengthens local systems and reduces risk at the community level.

- In Indonesia, USAID partnered with local government and civil society actors to address the reintegration of former terrorists and those returning from VEOs in the Middle East.
- In Kenya, USAID helped 41 county governments develop CVE local action plans that align with the country's National Action Plan and established a multi-stakeholder group called a Community Engagement Forum (CEF) to oversee plan implementation.
- We have supported local radio stations and social media outlets to improve access to authentic information in ways that counter increasingly sophisticated VEO-produced content in places like Niger, Ethiopia, Niger, and Nigeria.

We are learning from what we have done right and the challenges we have faced. The U.S. Congress passed the Global Fragility Act which, to the letter of the law, is telling us to coordinate better at preventing conflicts, curbing VEOs, and establishing a foothold before more dollars and lives need to be sacrificed. We know we have achieved success when the country we are working in is not in the news.

The major components of USAID's strategy, policies, and programs to address conflict and state collapse include: implementing the [US Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#) mandated by the Global Fragility Act in close concert with DoS and DoD; implementing Agency policy and programming to Counter Violent Extremism; implementing USAID's role in the U.S. Women Peace and Security Strategy; leading the interagency on non-security U.S. stabilization assistance; elevating USAID's contribution to all phases of atrocity prevention; and integrating conflict sensitive approaches into strategies to address climate change.

We have done and learned a lot, but we still have a lot of work to do to prevent conflict and counter violent extremism. We will continue to work with our U.S. Government counterparts and our partners to keep moving forward in this effort.