

**UP CIDS**Center for Integrative and  
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# POLICY BRIEF

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## PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (PCVE) RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM COMMUNICATION, COMMUNITY BUILDING TO INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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In the academic realm, there is no consensus as to the definition of violent extremism. Oftentimes, violent extremism is usually perceived as synonymous with radicalization and terrorism. However, these terms are distinct from one another. Terrorism is just a subset of violent extremism (George Washington University n.d.). On the other hand, radicalization, as defined by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) (2018), “is the process by which individuals are introduced to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views.” According to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations (2018), violent extremism means “encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals. Meanwhile, the U.S. Agency for International Development describes it as “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic, or political objectives” (George Washington University n.d.). From a policy perspective, it is important to understand first violent extremism before crafting policy. With this, the following common questions emerge: What are the drivers of violent extremism? Who are the possible targets? What actions can be taken in order to prevent and/or counter violent extremism?

Early ideas of security based on territorial sovereignty and hard power have, particularly in the thirty or so years following the end of the Cold War, been supplemented by concepts such as human security, soft power, and ontological security, among others. These developments in theory—far

from being abstract and confined to ivory tower debates—are informed by changing realities brought about by the proliferation of diverse worldviews and global processes.

In the following section, the idea that 21st century skills (used primarily in education) as a foundation for civil-military relations in the context of violent extremism in the Philippines will be forwarded. The idea of 21st century or transversal skills hopes to address the multifarious challenges of today’s world by enhancing key areas of learning. This involves two frameworks and broad skills, the first being collaborative problem solving, and the second, learning in digital networks (Griffin et al. 2010). The social skills that are developed through this approach are participation and perspective-taking, while the cognitive skills include knowledge building (learning how to learn) and task regulation. Learning in social networks places emphasis upon being a consumer and producer in social networks and creating social and intellectual capital in networks. These can be applied when approaching three critical areas for civil-military engagement in the Philippine context, namely in the fields of communication, community-building, and intercultural competence.

Each of these aspects must be taken into consideration both in the context of globalization and existing frameworks of public administration. While globalization has opened a wealth of opportunities, not only for learning, it has also brought various pitfalls in virtual communication, including the optimal use of the internet as a platform, including the catering of messages to the intended public. The self-presentation of the Armed Forces

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of the Philippines (AFP) demands greater efforts at transparency and nuancing that cater to the diverse composition of civil society, particularly those who are more discerning of the role of the military, such as members of the academe and think tanks, to engage more comprehensively with civil society. Secondly, the inability to evaluate information provided by various sources is a key weakness of public education that various radical groups exploit. The posting of strategically and creatively-developed counter-narratives on various digital platforms is necessary in order to provide various perspectives of current events. The ideal civil engagement with critical websites and personalities involves a balanced approach to critics, with tactfulness and facts versus vitriolic and often emotionally-laden speech found on the internet. Lastly, proper consumption and production of social media content—an extension of soft skills—is crucial in a rapidly digitizing 21st century. The fact that the Internet is a complex platform that appeals to the youth requires increasing standards of digital literacy, communication and technical expertise which all agencies, including the military, must develop. What is required is a reflexive, engaging, up-to-date and strategic approach to social media that preserves the professionalism, dignity, service-oriented mission and trustworthiness of an institution in the eyes of the public, thus accruing social capital.

Community-building cannot be fully separated from issues of communication. The creation of social capital in the 'real' world is one of the keys to community-building in the seminal book *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2000), exploring the decrease of socio-civic participation in the United States. Putnam (2000) pins the major cause of community collapse on the increasing isolation created by technology and pleads for strategies to revive the vitality of political and social cohesion. The creation/ imagination of a community that is pluralistic, which also entails understanding and being critical of political dimensions of transnational radicalism (Desker 2003) and the role of both state and non-state actors to instigate conflicts by linking their own local political problems to those experienced globally. This is particularly crucial in the attractiveness of violent extremist rhetoric in a Southeast Asian context.

It may thus be the task of local government units, non-governmental organizations and the military to provide safe spaces and sustainable community projects that aim towards building long-term trust among those of different social classes and religions, such as cleaning, building homes and houses, educational sharing, DIY projects, etc. Regular town hall meetings and gatherings to determine the general atmosphere and feedback with regard to

peacebuilding initiatives and education, provided they are presumed to be held in neutral, safe spaces, with a seemingly less intimidating presence of armed personnel (perhaps with the inclusion of international watchdogs and other non-state actors to safeguard the neutrality and inclusivity of the meetings), ought to be held in coordination with known and trusted social workers and educators in the community.

Lastly, intercultural competence is defined by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as “having adequate relevant knowledge about particular cultures, as well as general knowledge about the sorts of issues arising when members of different cultures interact, holding receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contacts with diverse others, as well as having the skills required to draw upon both knowledge and attitudes when interacting with others from different cultures” (UNESCO 2013, 16). In the Philippines, as with other parts of the world, politicized and instrumentalized movements of ethno-nationalist armed groups, often with justifications based on shared religion and traditions, have come into conflict with states and civilians belonging to a dominant or majority group.

The inability to respect crucial elements of culture, religion or to alleviate issues and attitudes pertaining to social class have fostered grievances that may lead to a lack of cooperation, resentment, and in a worst-case scenario, attract a critical mass of people to armed rebellion and extremism due to a breakdown of trust in the government. While armed forces cannot fix all the structural and relational problems that may influence or even cause festering sentiments in a population, it can attempt to adapt attitudes supporting intercultural competence when approaching contacts and communities that are otherwise marginalized and acknowledge and thematize a history of exclusion (Biccum 2018). Biccum (2018) further argues that merely emphasizing what people can do as individuals does not address issues of structural inequality, colonial legacies and historical injustices. Examples of these are the various land ownership and inter-communal issues between northern Christian settlers, Lumads and Moros in Mindanao, a detailed description of which can be found in Curaming (2016). Rather, it is through approaching violent extremism through a decolonial lens, one that opposes deleterious effects of colonial-era practices of “power, knowledge and being” (Maldonado-Torres 2010, 115) (understood here as the ethnic and religious separation of peoples in the Philippines) that acknowledges, respects and presents various perspectives of history that allow a more self-critical, educational approach to preventing violent extremism.

The knowledge of cultures and their histories has further helped in understanding dynamics of conflict in a particular region. In Weiss' and Hassan's (2015) work on ISIS, they recount an anecdote given by a former US military official in Iraq about a Marine Corps captain. "He was a Sioux. He didn't know [...] about Anbar or Iraq. He got out there and understood it immediately. The Iraqis could see he knew what was going on and they loved him for it." (p. 50). His statement was in relation to the role of tribes and their pragmatic decision-making in the face of changing powers, rather than acting as a monolithic entity with fixed loyalties. Providing opportunities to understand cultural dynamics through the lens of conflict in cooperation with scholars, practitioners, and local community representatives is a constant and continuous process that should cohere with communication and community-building initiatives listed above to promote a holistic strategy.

The conflict in the Philippines is thus primarily rooted in ideological, political, socioeconomic, and religious causes. While it is acknowledged that there is no universal approach in dealing with violent extremism, Macnair and Frank (2017) gave the following CVE policy recommendations which could be possibly adapted in the Philippine setting:

- ***CVE policy should incorporate multiple voices and perspectives:*** It is important to consult with a variety of different social representatives and gatekeepers including local police, social workers, educators, religious leaders, families, and marginalized populations and, when possible, former members of extremist organizations, who will often have intimate and invaluable firsthand experiences to draw from [...] by including a diversity of opinions and perspectives, some of which have traditionally been ignored in the planning stage and by allowing community members of all stripes to share their insights and concerns in their own words, it is believed that CVE programs will be more robust in their design and more effective in their implementation.
  - ***CVE policy should acknowledge the role of social networks and positive outlets:*** It is important for CVE programs to be aware of this, and to offer more positive alternatives and outlets for these at-risk individuals. This can be done in two ways. The first is by providing these individuals with positive outlets where they may direct and voice their frustrations in productive ways e.g. arts, sports, etc. [...] Secondly, effective CVE policy must be aware of the importance that an individual's social network may play in the radicalization process. Because of this, CVE programs are encouraged to emphasize the importance of positive social networks that can guard an individual against extremist belief.
  - ***CVE policy should incorporate effective counter-narratives:*** Future CVE programs are encouraged to be even more specific with the content of their counter-narratives. Topical and demographic-specific counter-messaging should be a staple of any comprehensive CVE campaign, but of comparable importance is how these messages are being delivered, and more specifically, who is delivering them.
  - ***The importance of education and pedagogy:*** Featuring a selection of diverse messengers that are able to speak and relate more directly to specific demographics is important for ensuring that the messages are more likely to be treated seriously by those who are most in need of hearing them. Education, then, is an important component that should always be utilized in the fight against extremism.
  - ***CVE policy should be a proactive and long-term investment:*** If policymakers are committed to effectively addressing this problem, it is important to begin taking proactive actions that target the causes of violent extremism at its roots.
- ***The importance of community-based and micro-level approaches:*** By drafting a CVE program at the community level, it becomes possible to incorporate the perspectives of a local community members and leaders, while also taking into accounts the unique situational factors of specific communities.
  - ***CVE policy should be aware of different ideologies and individual trajectories:*** Effective CVE policy should rise above [this] myopic view and be well aware of the fact that extremist attitudes stem from a variety of ideological motivators [...] Extremists come from a wide range of religious, educational, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds which makes precise attempts at targeting based on these variables problematic.
  - ***There is no universal approach to CVE policy:*** There is no universal, one-size-fits-all approach to CVE policy. Many CVE programs have been created predominantly by law-enforcement/policy officials and implemented from the top-down at the national level [...] it is suggested that moving forward, future CVE programs should instead be drafted from the ground-up, paying close attention to the unique situational factors of different cities and geographic locales [...] therefore, it is suggested that CVE programs and policies remain open, flexible, and ready to adapt at the ground level.

Unfortunately, the social, cultural, and political circumstances that breed extremist thought and behavior are often deeply entrenched within a society, and because of this, there is likely no such thing as an immediate or overnight solution.

While we acknowledge that there are already pre-existing PCVE initiatives in the Philippines, we emphasize micro-level, bottom-up, and long-term approaches as key strategies in crafting a sustainable PCVE policy. With several policy recommendations pointing out to proper education as a vital tool in addressing the ongoing conflict in the Philippines, there is a great need of support of the education sector coming from the security sector. Meanwhile, the school which serves as the learning hub should also promote peace education as part of the curriculum. Thereby, training the students to be prepared when security issues related to violent extremism takes place in the eventuality.

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