Plenary Session 5: Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

Format: Plenary session
                 Discussion groups

Objectives:

- Examine the relationships among terrorism, violent extremism, and insurgency
- Analyze the political, economic, social, and ideological drivers of terrorism and violent extremism
- Consider the implications and trends in terrorism and violent extremism in Africa
- Distinguish between preventing and countering violent extremism
- Evaluate the potential roles that security institutions play in either exacerbating or preventing/countering violent extremism

Background:

By nearly every measure, terrorism and violent extremism in Africa is on the rise. The present decade has experienced a remarkable increase in the number of attacks, casualties, zones affected, active groups, and so on. The challenge has come from groups across different regions, from Al-Shabaab in the Horn and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the Sahel to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin and the Islamic State in Libya in the Maghreb, with many splinter and rival groups in between. Small cell and lone actor terrorists operating at a distance from organizations and their leaders have exacerbated the challenge. Recently, first-time attacks have taken place in several countries, and recruitment into the Islamic State has extended into new areas. Environments and communities of support, sympathy, or tolerance for terrorism and violent extremism are making the problem more complex and intractable still.

The impact of these threats sparks a wide set of concerns. The growth and expansion of terrorism and violent extremism have unleashed rising levels of death, destruction, and disruption on the continent, such that terrorism is beginning to rival other major sources of insecurity on the continent. Today's terrorism and violent extremism is shaking the stability of some African governments, radicalizing vulnerable youths, exacerbating religious and communitarian tensions, fueling large-scale migration, undermining economic and development plans, affecting diplomatic commitments, and more. Responses therefore implicate a diverse set of policies and actors involved in security governance, from ministries of finance to civil society organizations working with young people.

Effective responses rely on accurate analyses, but understanding terrorism remains difficult. Debates persist around the term *terrorism* and its relation to terms like *violent extremism* and *insurgency*. Interactions among these concepts are inevitably mirrored by convoluted definitions of responses, which are compounded by their multiplicity. Anti-terrorism (AT), focused on target hardening and dissuasion against attack, is sometimes distinguished from the active pursuit of terrorists in *counterterrorism*; similarly, *preventing violent extremism* (PVE) or threats that may emerge tomorrow in an area, is sometimes distinguished from countering the violent extremist threats of today. These refinements add another layer of complexity to threat analysis and policy/strategy formulation.

Countering terrorist groups often requires kinetic capabilities, intelligence assets, and correctional facilities, whereas countering violent extremism might demand new legal codes, public awareness campaigns, and strategic communications skills. Preventing new terrorist and violent extremist threats, meanwhile, could involve strategic investments in educational programs, infrastructure developments, and political reconciliation mechanisms. Defining the response shapes which state or non-state actors should lead and support in policy and programs, and can also determine such tasks as timelines, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation measures. De-conflicting responses to preventing/countering violent extremism from responses to terrorism is essential, since research indicates that government actions (e.g., excessive use of force by defense and security forces; ineffective judicial systems and poor prison conditions; corruption and impunity among officials, etc.) can ultimately become drivers of, rather than responses to, terrorism and violent extremism.

The rising tide of terrorism has gradually forced many African governments to address the problem with multiple tools of national power – such as, military, intelligence, diplomacy, law enforcement, economics, and development. African countries have responded at the local, national, and regional level, including through African peace support operations. Thinking through effective and legitimate security governance is critical to ensure defense and security professionals and their allies can achieve citizen security and overcome terrorism and violent extremism threats.

Discussion Questions:

- How does preventing violent extremism differ from countering violent extremism?
- What are the major drivers of terrorism and violent extremism in your country and/or (sub) region?

- How can African nations develop national strategies, determining *ends*, *ways*, and *means* (especially through effective resource management), in order to respond to terrorism and violent extremism?
- How do government communications and public affairs shape the information environment and affect violent extremism in your country and/or (sub) region?

Recommended Readings:

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

Mercy Corps, ""Motivations and Empty Promises": Voice of Former Boko Haram Combatant and Nigerian Youth," April 2016 https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Motivations%20and%20Empty%20Promises_Mercy%20Corps_Full%20Report_0.pdf

Abdisaid M. Ali, "Islamist Extremism in East Africa," *Africa Security Brief No. 32*, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, August 9, 2016. In English and French: http://africacenter.org/publication/islamist-extremism-east-africa/

UN Development Program (UNDP). *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives, and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, 2017. http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2017-english.pdf