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EVIDENCE

# LINKING SECURITY OF WOMEN & SECURITY OF STATES

POLICYMAKER BLUEPRINT  
May 2017

**FUTURES**  
WITHOUT VIOLENCE®



OPEN SQUARE  
*all sides being equal™*

It's a long road. We have to stay on it. We don't have to accept such violence as a part of life. I am convinced now more than ever in the capacity of human beings to change. This violence does not have to be part of the human condition.

—Esta Soler | Founder & President, Futures Without Violence

Violence against women and extremism are frightening and heart wrenching and hate filled. They aren't issues that many people like to hear about or discuss. We are committed to discussing these issues. To talk openly about what is working and about what's not.

—Wynnette LaBrosse | Founder & President, Open Square

For the full publication *Linking Security Of Women & Security Of The States: Blueprint May 2017*, including the articles listed below, visit [FuturesWithoutViolence.com](http://FuturesWithoutViolence.com)

## **EVIDENCE: SECURITY OF WOMEN & SECURITY OF STATES**

**Valerie Hudson**, Professor and George H.W. Bush Chair at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University

## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

**Alexandra Arriaga**, Managing Partner at Strategy for Humanity, and Senior Consultant to Futures Without Violence

## **WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?**

Program on Extremism at George Washington University

## **CYBER CHARM: LURING WOMEN TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC)

## **WOMEN & VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

**Audrey Alexander**, Specialist and Researcher at the Program on Extremism at George Washington University

## **TIPPING POINT: REJECTING OR EMBRACING VIOLENCE**

**Christopher Dean**, Director of Identify Psychological Services Ltd and Senior Fellow at the Global Center on Cooperative Security

## **YOUTH, TRAUMA & RADICALIZATION**

**Leila Milani**, Senior International Policy Advocate, Futures Without Violence

## **BOKO HARAM'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST WOMEN**

**Hilary Matfess**, Visiting Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, the National Defense University, and Senior Program Officer at the Center for Democracy and Development in Abuja (Nigeria)

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# PREFACE

This report offers critical recommendations for policymakers and summarizes innovative research and influential studies that help us understand the relationship between violent extremism, gender-based violence, and trauma. Specifically, it explores the following:

- How extremists use gender-based violence and gender dynamics in their strategy and tactics
- How science-based understandings of the impact of trauma can improve interventions to counter violent extremism and enhance recovery and reintegration
- How gender factors in recruitment to violent extremism
- How youth are targeted and what conditions increase susceptibility to recruitment
- What entices a person to engage or refrain from participating in violent extremist acts
- What interventions can make a difference
- A case study of Boko Haram, showing how these concepts come in play

Political leaders have traditionally separated discussions of national security and violent extremism from those of gender-based violence and women's empowerment. We believe this must change. We also believe that the advocacy community, academic institutions, and scientific and medical institutes can and should combine their expertise and findings to create more robust and effective solutions to the interconnected problems of violent extremism and gender-based violence.

Dollars spent on prevention are more cost-effective than dollars spent on response. Yet funding for prevention is frequently scarce or altogether lacking. Investments must focus on evidence-based prevention that examines and improves social norms and that enables communities to build resilience, children and youth to experience healthy development, women to live free from violence and discrimination, and survivors to recover and reintegrate fully. Our national security strategy must give greater weight to prevention and to better understanding the critical relevance of paying attention to how women are treated in countries around the world.

This report builds on robust discussion, bold thinking, and tested knowledge offered by world-renown experts at a gathering organized by Futures Without Violence and Open Square in 2016. The event encouraged cross-pollination of thought leaders from different fields with the aim of identifying effective approaches and solutions for preventing violent extremism and focusing on the relevant impact of gender-based violence and adverse trauma.

We would like to recognize the many exceptionally talented and dedicated experts who participated in this endeavor and thank the contributing authors to this report. We are especially grateful to Alexandra Arriaga for her commitment, knowledge, and strategic thinking to guide this effort and craft this report.

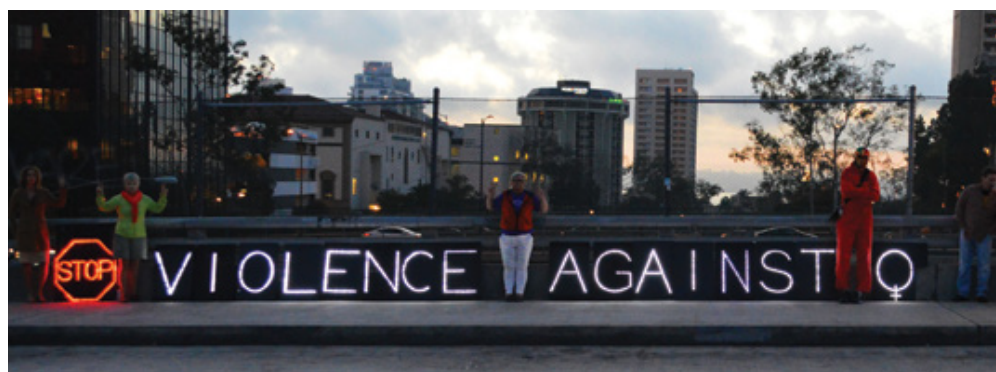


Photo by Chris West

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall level of violence against women is a better predictor of state peacefulness and relations with neighboring countries than indicators measuring the level of democracy, level of wealth, and civilizational identity of the state.

—Dr. Valerie M. Hudson

Professor & George H.W. Bush Chair, The Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University speaking in 2016

Women's empowerment is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic investment in our collective security. In short, when women do better, countries do better. Women's security is a matter of international security. Without it, we all lose.

—Thomas A. Shannon, Jr.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, speaking on March 29, 2017

Even after I escaped from them and live far away from my village, I am still afraid. I think of death many times. My father tries. He encourages me to forget everything, but it is not easy for me. I have terrible dreams at night.<sup>1</sup>

—A 15 year-old Nigerian girl who escaped Boko Haram

Statement to Human Rights Watch

New political leadership has promised to combat the rise of terror groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Levant (ISIS), one of many violent extremist groups that use gender-based violence intentionally to achieve their aims. The rape of women and girls, the kidnapping and selling of women and girls as enslaved brides, and the abduction of girls and boys for brutal yet distinct roles such as child soldiers are some of the deliberate and impactful strategies of these groups, and not merely the byproducts of war. These abusive acts not only are gross, systematic human rights violations that constitute war crimes, they also are exceptionally manipulative acts of power used to spread terror, expand territory, and control the victims.

Violent extremist organizations not only are committing widespread abuses against women and girls, they also are tapping the strategic and tactical potential of female extremists. Women have long been participants in terrorist activities, and this continues to be the case. Women are engaged with violent extremism as recruiters, fundraisers, combatants, and wives or mothers to the next generation of extremists. Women are also critical agents opposing and preventing violence.

The treatment of women by violent extremist groups underscores the urgency for gender-informed strategies to counter violent extremism. Assessment, analysis, and development of national security strategies must include data on how women are treated in countries of concern.

A growing body of evidence shows not only that violence against women is a critical indicator of instability, but also that it is a key determinant for whether a society will be mired in poverty, impunity, and insecurity.

Within unstable or warring nations, violence against women escalates and levels of stress and trauma increase in households and communities. The causal arrow also points in the opposite direction: Violence against women and the status of gender relations have a causal effect on state stability.<sup>2</sup> This is the case because what is lived and learned at home—especially when it is pervasive—spills over into the community and forms the social norm that will be felt nationally. In essence, a society “normalizes” violence, oppression, and discrimination between men and women.

At its core, this association holds because violence against women and national stability both are manifestations of how individuals and societies cope with differences. Valerie Hudson writes that the first difference encountered in life is experienced and learned through the interactions between men and women within the context of family and the home—in terms of power and control, personal value and respect, and expectations for equality and healthy interactions.

What is learned at home is carried into society. If a society's prevalent norms are that male interests trump female interests, conflict is resolved through violence, and violence is met with impunity, then these norms become the template for dealing with ethnic, religious, cultural, racial, and ideological differences in society as a whole. When these dynamics predominate, discrimination, intolerance of differences, and a propensity toward violence will create a climate of insecurity ripe for instability.

New research makes plain that individuals and societies that reject equality between men and women demonstrate significantly more hostile attitudes toward minorities in their own countries and toward other nations, and these attitudes in turn help form foreign and security policy stances. Conversely, the lived experience of gender equality prepares individuals and a society to live in harmony with others. In a very real way, it is impossible to build peace in the international system unless peace can be practiced between men and women within a society.

Violence against women needs to be acknowledged and understood as a barometer for societal health and stability: Its presence predicts and drives further injustice, impunity, and insecurity, and the absence of such violence creates greater opportunity, stability, and even democracy.

Public discourse has centered on the threat of “radical Islam” as a reference to violent extremism, which essentially paints the vast majority of Muslims and most Muslim countries with the same brush and excludes a broad swath of extremist groups past and present. In fact, security forces, militants, and extremist groups of diverse ideologies over centuries have used violence against women as a tool of terror.



Women's Leadership Forum hosted by  
Special Operations Command Africa, Chad  
Photo by USAFRICOM (March 2017)

**Ensuring women's rights benefits not only individuals and their families, it also strengthens democracy, bolsters prosperity, enhances stability, and encourages tolerance. It thereby helps every society realize its full potential, which is an overarching goal of our own national security strategy. And women's rights are at the core of building a civil, law-abiding society: a prerequisite for true democracies.**

**—Dr. Paula J. Dobriansky**

Former Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs under President George W. Bush, speaking at The Heritage Foundation in 2003





There's this idea somehow that the West has figured out that Jihadism is a terrible thing and now has to convince Muslims to join in opposing the phenomenon. In fact for decades, lonely intellectuals and women's human rights defenders—Egyptian, Afghan, Iranian, Algerian, and more—have been saying 'Hey, this is very dangerous, please be very careful about supporting these regimes. Please be very careful about who you're partnering with and which Mujahadeen group you're supporting. The ideology is going to come back and get us all.'

—**Karima Bennouna** United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, speaking in 2016

In the United States, "homegrown" violent extremists—including Americans who are anti-government, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, or jihadists—are a major concern. From September 11, 2001, through 2015, the number of victims killed in the United States by far-right and far-left violent extremists groups exceeded the number killed by jihadists. In 2016, the number of victims killed by jihadist attacks in the United States rose to exceed those by other violent extremist groups.<sup>34</sup> Mass killings in the United States should propel better understanding of the underlying factors that induce a person to commit them.

What makes extremist groups that espouse a perversion of Islam especially dangerous is the cloak of legality and legitimacy they place on practices that are severely abusive, repressive, and discriminatory.

In fact, many Muslims have been at the vanguard of opposition to such repressive ideology, risking their lives to support human rights and fight against extremism. Often from within their home countries, Muslims have urged external forces to tread carefully and desist from dealing with leaders, movements, and highly repressive regimes that espouse extreme ideology.

To meet current security threats and improve efforts to counter violent extremism, it is critical to understand the context in which extremists are operating, including how they are imposing gender-specific violations as normative acts. More specifically, the treatment of women is a critical indicator of how violent extremist groups are inflicting gender-based violence to recruit followers, advance ideological objectives, expand networks, and perpetuate terror.

It is impossible to fully isolate any one country from a global threat or to prevent all recruitment by radical ideological groups. In fact, recruitment within the United States has persuasively targeted a variety of people through very personal approaches, often focused on using social media to build a relationship and trust.

Violent extremist groups know the psychology of their potential recruits. The sophisticated, multidimensional social media campaigns of these groups reinforce their central message.

Many targets for recruitment are youth, who are susceptible not because of their ideology or religion but because the recruiter appeals to deep-seated desires for appreciation and a chance to contribute significantly to a cause of ostensible importance.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified factors that increase the risk of joining and engaging in organized violence. Among the critical factors is having experienced or witnessed violence—most likely at home—as a child.

If one examines the profiles of attackers who recently have committed acts of violent extremism and espoused radical ideology—such as Khalid Masood (London), Mohamed Lahouajej Bouhlej (Nice), Dylann Roof (Charleston), Omar Mateen (Orlando), Tamerlan Tsarnaev (Boston), Robert Lewis Dear (Colorado Springs)—there is a common thread. These criminals have a record of inflicting domestic violence, or as children had been exposed to domestic violence, or often both.<sup>5,6</sup>

Exposure to violence can have long-term health consequences. Particularly when experienced in early childhood, it can alter biological development, impair brain architecture, and even influence DNA.<sup>7</sup> Children and youth who have been exposed to violence are at higher risk and greater susceptibility to detrimental mental health development, depression, and deficiencies in empathy.<sup>8</sup> These impairments increase their vulnerability for recruitment into groups that engage in organized violence and violent extremism and for themselves perpetrating violence.

The good news is that these outcomes can be interrupted. Efforts to end violence against children are more likely to succeed where there are strategies to end violence against women and vice versa: Efforts to prevent and reduce violence against women over the long term requires attention to childhood exposure to violence.

Without addressing the underlying discrimination against women, gender inequality, and impunity for violence against women, the risk of organized violence will remain exceptionally high and fuel state and regional insecurity.

In their quest to prevent and defeat violent extremism, governments focus urgently on military operations, intelligence gathering, and cyber security. To curtail recruitment and growth of violent extremism

**Foremost among mankind's inhumanity to mankind is treatment of women. . . . We know that mass rape and abuse of women destroy societies. But how can the perpetrators live with themselves? Can they really push out of their consciences the thought of their own mothers and sisters? Can they separate themselves from the horror they inflict?**

**—Jim Moran**

Former Congressman (D-Virginia), speaking in 2016

**A 'raiding mentality' the idea that we'll get a fast, cheap, and efficient victory if we can only identify the crucial nodes and take them out . . . That's a fundamentally unrealistic conception. Targeting does not equal strategy. At its worst, a raiding approach is a militarized version of George Costanza in Seinfeld, 'leave on an up note'—just go in, do a lot of damage, and leave.**

**—Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster**

National Security Advisor to President Trump, as cited in Breaking Defense, 2013



Students from an all-girls Catholic school in Manila, Philippines, march in June 2014 wearing masks that depict the schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria and join the global call for the schoolgirls' release. (Photo by Erik De Castro, Reuters)

over the long run, it is critical to look at the motivations that drive a person to engage and participate in extremist violence and to dig deeper to determine a person's prior exposure to violence—especially violence against women.

A comprehensive approach is needed that ensures policy and programming incorporate what research shows: Violent extremists use differentiated tactics to enlist women and men, they leverage and inflict gender-based violence for strategic purposes, and adverse trauma has real physiological and health consequences that impair regional stability and security.

Prevention efforts must examine the gender dynamics in the community and help youth, families, and leaders build greater gender equality and opportunities for youth empowerment. Response must focus on recovery initiatives for all who were subjected to horrifying treatment or forced to commit unspeakable acts, whether they are women, girls, boys, or men. Reintegration efforts must enable victims to return to a community that is prepared to receive them, offer psychosocial and healthy support systems, and assist them to reengage productively in society. Underlying every initiative must be a gender analysis that facilitates women's participation as equal partners, diminishes discrimination and violence, mitigates harmful consequences, and builds local resilience.

Political leaders have treated national security and violent extremism as issues separate from gender-based violence and women's empowerment. They are not separate. The advocacy community, academic institutions, and scientific and medical institutes all have roles to play in addressing these intertwined dimensions.

Let's bring the full scope of evidence-based analysis to bear on new approaches and decision making. Let's rely on all available sources and our combined expertise to end to gender-based violence, thereby reducing the spread of violent extremism and strengthening the prospects for peace and greater security at home and globally.



Compare those societies that respect women and those that don't. If you think about societies that empower women and protect women in vulnerable situations, those societies are far less likely to be trafficking in people or drugs or weapons, they don't tend to send off huge amounts of refugees across borders or oceans, they don't transmit pandemic diseases, they don't harbor terrorists or pirates, and frankly they don't require American troops on the ground. And therefore it's in our national interest—not only from a rights standpoint and an economic standpoint but from a national security standpoint. There's a one-to-one correspondence. Don't tell me there's no relationship between national security and the empowerment of women.

—Ambassador Don Steinberg

President & CEO, World Learning; Former Deputy Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development, speaking in 2016

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## ENDNOTES

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4. Peter Bergen et al., "Terrorism in America after 9/11," part IV: What Is the Threat to the United States Today? web page (Washington, DC: New America Foundation, N.d.), <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/terrorism-in-america/what-threat-united-states-today/#americas-layered-defenses>. By 2016, total victims killed by the far-right was 50, far-left was 5, and jihadists, 94.
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# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

A strategy for curbing and ending violent extremism requires a comprehensive approach that integrates many sectors. A military response to violent extremism is not enough. Lasting success requires addressing underlying factors that fuel the growth of terrorist groups. Recommendations in this paper focus on the following areas:

## 1. Research & Data

What do we know and need to know? Where are the gaps?

## 2. Prevention

What can be done to disrupt the conditions that enable gender-based violence and to build resiliency within high-target populations?

## 3. Recovery & Reintegration

Which interventions and services are critical after violence occurs? Which initiatives assist recovery, reintegration, and ability to reengage productively?

## 4. Accountability & Good Governance

What is needed to end impunity, strengthen legal and judicial systems, and influence social norms to reject violence?

## 5. Governmental Role & Partnerships

How can governments improve their impact, maximize investments, and leverage public-private partnerships?



International Women's Day 2017 (Photo by Joe Piette)

There is no single approach to eliminating the threat of violent extremism. But dollars spent on prevention go much further than dollars spent on response. Investments in prevention examine social norms that enable women to live free from violence and discrimination, support healthy development of children and youth, build resilience in communities, assist survivors to recover and reintegrate fully, and promote rule of law, accountability, and good governance.

For nations to realize peace, security, and development, they must enable all people to achieve their full potential and live free from violence. The treatment of women is critical in assessing the risk of state insecurity and the rise of violent extremism. National security strategies must pay attention to how women are treated and give greater weight to prevention.

**If we can succeed in advancing opportunities for women, reducing the risk of violence, and ensuring their full inclusion and decision-making in the political and economic reconstruction of their countries, there will be a much better chance that those nations will be free and democratic, prosper, and be peaceful and stable allies.**

**—Charlotte Ponticelli**

Former Senior Coordinator for International Women's Issues at the U.S. Department of State under President George W. Bush



# 1. RESEARCH & DATA

State stability is integrally tied to the situation and status of women in society. Gender relations underpin all macro-level phenomenon within society.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CREATES SOCIETAL INSTABILITY & HOW IMPROVING SECURITY OF WOMEN IMPROVES SECURITY OF STATES

It is vital to fund research to further explore how the security of women and the security of the nation-state are integrally linked and how violence against women causes state instability. Discriminatory practices that deepen subordination in essence normalize the ill treatment of women, affecting societal norms and increasing state fragility. Where violence against women and insecurity are prevalent, conditions are ripe for violent extremism to spread. To better assess and predict where there is potential for instability and violent extremism, it is essential to track, as a key indicator, whether gender relations are progressing or regressing.

**Prioritize** the systematic collection and application of data on conditions for women, gender relations, exposures to gender-based violence, and adverse trauma as central factors for assessing stability and developing diplomatic and security goals. Integrate gender analysis systematically into the design, decision making, and implementation of all initiatives. Consider the impact on women and men and any actions to mitigate concerning gender-related outcomes.

**Support** the collection of sex disaggregated data on key indicators of gender based violence and societal factors that indicate insecurity or unrest. For example, collect information on women's mobility, brideprice and trends in dowry, and access to basic food resources. Improve measures for

evaluating gains in resilience, capacity building, social cohesion, and other factors that improve prevention.

**Create** synergies between the academic community and governmental and intergovernmental organizations charged with collecting data and encourage exchanges about what data would be important to collect and what glaring data gaps exist. Governmental and intergovernmental organizations may have the resources to create and house datasets devoted to capturing the situation of women worldwide because funding for these are scarce.

## IMPACT OF LOCAL NORMS & COMMUNITY-BASED EFFORTS

Local norms can help counter or escalate the rise of insecurity or violent extremism. Examine the prevailing norms and measure the progressive impact of community-based interventions designed to prevent recruitment to violent extremism and facilitate recovery and reintegration of survivors and former extremists. Areas where more research is needed:

**Within** the local community, how is violence against women and girls (and boys) perceived, condoned, or taught? Which cultural norms taught to children solidify over time?

**How** do communities view other cultures?

**What** is the role of faith leaders on interventions and narratives? Do they support returning survivors and former combatants? Can they do more to inspire opportunities for local empowerment and engagement in the community that can dissuade engagement in violent extremism?

## MOTIVES TO DESIST FROM VIOLENCE & DISENGAGE FROM EXTREMISM

Emerging research is shaping interventions to thwart initial interest in radicalized groups, causes or ideologies, and help disengage individuals from violent extremism.

**Identify** how gender-based violence can help predict and serve as early warning signs for rising radicalization. What protective resources have the greatest potential for addressing multiple risk factors? What drivers/factors lead women and men to join violent extremist organizations?

**Identify** psychological components for recruitment, resilience, recovery, and reintegration. What are the varied push and pull factors?

**Invest** in more research to determine why people desist or disengage from extremist violence; how gender beliefs and identity contribute to interest in extremist ideologies and even cause some persons to become more willing to commit acts of violent extremism; and how programs tackle gender-related issues and related drivers of violent extremism.

## IMPACT OF TRAUMA & YOUTH SUSCEPTIBILITY TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Children and youth who have been exposed to violence and adverse trauma are at higher risk for harmful health outcomes and feelings of extreme isolation, depression, and deficiencies in empathy. These impairments increase vulnerability for recruitment into organized violence and violent extremism.

**Step up** research on the impact of violence and adverse trauma on brain function and health for all ages but especially for children, youth, and adolescents. Examine the extent to which exposure to trauma impacts a person's capacity to form healthy attachments and also how it becomes a contributing factor or increases a person's susceptibility to participating in violent extremism. Use these data to craft more effective

prevention programs. Investigate the impact of interventions designed to support the mental health of victims of trauma.

**Design** methods to measure and evaluate the effect of programs on resilience (especially for youth) and determine what works best with whom, under what circumstances, and why.

## HARMONIZE PROCESSES FOR DATA COLLECTION

Disparate definitions and methodologies impede collaboration across national agencies and international entities.

**Share** guidelines and core indicators to improve data accuracy, consistency, coordination, comparability, and capacity to be disaggregated.

**Ensure** surveys integrate metrics that focus on at-risk populations, including ethnic and religious minorities and persons with disabilities.

**Facilitate** capacity-building and training programs for planning and implementing data collection systems and surveys among a variety of sectors, including justice, health, education, security, labor/workforce, and law enforcement.

**Encourage** use of common definitions and clarify research terms to facilitate application of data and research from a variety of sources.

## 2. PREVENTION

The recommendations below have the capacity to maximize the impact of prevention initiatives by building resiliency, reducing discrimination and violence, and instilling women's confidence in their capacity to access opportunities.

### WOMEN'S AGENCY

#### Women as Partners

Female viewpoints and skills, like those of their male counterparts, must be integrated into the push against violent extremism. It is important to recognize women's agency in joining and participating in violent extremist groups. Interventions that integrate women fully will be more effective in countering the rising power of women in violent extremism than those that do not.

**Empower women as equal participants and decision makers in program design and implementation.**

#### Shared Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence & Violent Extremism

Early research on recruitment and growth of violent extremist groups and well-developed research on gender-based violence show important similarities and points of intersection. Underlying both are experiences of deep-seated inequality, severe adversity, or perceived injustice. These experiences may transform into a desire for domination and control to diminish the relative power or standing of a victim and to enhance a sense of identity and power. In both phenomena, gains can be made by ending impunity for violence, empowering women and girls, and engaging men and boys to change social norms.

#### Gender Beliefs as Motivation

Gender-based beliefs, identity, and norms can play a role in making individuals more or less willing to commit extremist violence. For some women, extremist causes represent opportunities to develop a sense of sisterhood to challenge or seek freedom from gendered norms otherwise unavailable to them. Similarly, involvement may allow some men to fulfill a desired masculine self-image, resolve gender identity confusion or conflict, and reinforce masculine beliefs and related needs.

**Understand the role gender identity plays in recruitment, growth, and perpetuation of terror and control in developing policies on countering violent extremism.**

**Invest in addressing the root causes of gender-based violence:**

**Diminish** barriers and discrimination in economic, political, and civic arenas.

**Implement** initiatives that protect human rights and raise societies' values.

**Provide** inclusive education, economic empowerment, and political participation.



## COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES

### Community Support for Persons at Risk

Community-based interventions raise awareness, build resilience, and engage families and local leaders, law enforcement, social workers, health professionals, educators, grassroots activists, and others who can potentially catch warning signs. Most of these interventions are very cost-effective. Not all community-based interventions should be enlisted as programs to counter violent extremism, especially when such a label can place local players at risk.

**Invest in community-based interventions** that can be adjusted to diverse circumstances and that provide opportunities for everyone to develop a positive, healthy identity; build resilience; cultivate

a sense of value and belonging within society; and pursue political goals and objectives through legitimate and legal means.

### Resisting Recruitment & Desisting from Violent Extremism

Interventions that leverage psychological and social circumstances can help prevent individuals from engaging with extremist groups, from being willing to commit violence, and from actually committing acts of terrorism. They also can help survivors and former combatants recover and fully disengage from extremist causes and groups.

**Invest in evidence-based interventions** that help individuals discredit ideologies prior to growing involved in violent extremism; strengthen their pro-social identity prior to any exposure to extremist causes; fortify personal resilience against the appeal of extremist groups; and build resistance to supporting, facilitating, or committing violence.

**Mobilize community support** before and after someone attempts to leave by providing avenues for individuals to become self-invested locally and offering ways to be better integrated in the community, engage in peer-to-peer interactions, and access support and activities.



Discussion on protection issues in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo broadcast on a twice-weekly show on the United Nation's Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement "DDRRR" radio station.

(Photo by Caroline Gluck/Oxfam)



Faith Leaders Summit, meeting prior to the G-20. (Photo by Bread for the World)

## WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH

Many parts of society have a valuable role to play in prevention and disruption of violent extremism, such as women's organizations, the media, the criminal justice sector, educators, religious leaders, health providers, and the security sector. Support for capacity building, outreach, and coordination is helpful. Lasting success requires sustained investments to examine and improve behaviors and attitudes concerning violence, gender-based violence, and human rights. A whole-of-society approach integrates activities of many community sectors.

### Women Leaders

Facilitate women's participation as empowered actors and decision makers, including in political processes, peacebuilding, relief, and reconstruction efforts. Actively include women in programs to build entrepreneurship skills and assist their access to jobs in influential sectors of the economic and society. Support the work of women-led organizations working on myriad issues that enhance capacity, education, safety, and leadership.

### Civil Society Organizations

Support the active role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in prevention, recovery, and reintegration efforts. Regimes often use violent extremism as an excuse to shut down CSOs and moderate dissenting voices. CSOs play a key role in convening community members, facilitating discourse, and delivering programs and services.

### Youth

Identify victims of childhood adverse trauma and provide supports to facilitate healthy development and prevent harmful legacies of trauma. Promote youth engagement in positive interests and activities and integrate curricula for healthy interactions between girls and boys based on respect and equal partnership. Provide life skills for adolescents and pre-adolescents.

### Religious Leaders

Religion is a powerful influence. Encourage faith leaders to teach about respect, the harms of violence, and the principle of the Golden Rule (a tenet of many faiths). Develop programming that engages religious leaders on gender equality. When religious figures espouse and operationalize respect for women, the lived experience of the population will begin to shift at the household and community level.

## Men

Engage men as potential allies, facilitators, and activists in achieving greater gender equality and eliminating violence against women and girls. For lasting impact, invest in evidence-based programs to engage men and boys.<sup>2</sup>

## Parents & Teachers

Involve parent/teacher councils to improve collaboration across settings, enhance positive parenting and teacher role models, advise on signs of behavior changes in youth and about available support resources, and teach about internet safety and encryption. Support explicit curriculum for school-based interventions that teach healthy relationships, respect, and better understanding about gender equality. Also include this curriculum in programs for youth designed around interest areas such as sports, arts, and other interest areas.

## Survivors

Survivors have important perspectives and a powerful role in prevention efforts. Their knowledge is critical to include in consultations and the design of approaches. Recovery and reintegration of survivors is essential for lasting security. Mental health and social services should be survivor-centered and uphold personal dignity. There are many nuanced methods to deliver psychosocial support through general education and skills training that strengthen a sense of purpose, belonging, confidence, and hope.

## Marginalized Populations

Include multiple voices of communities in consultations, program design, decision making, and implementation of initiatives. Consider how violence may especially affect populations that frequently are marginalized, such as indigenous people, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ, and religious and ethnic minorities.

## MESSAGE & INTERNET

**Social media and online tools are powerful avenues of recruitment, especially of youth. Counter-narratives can take many forms.**

Because storytelling is a vital component of prevention and the most credible voice is the voice of someone who has been there, champion voices of survivors and defectors, allowing them to share what life is really like within ISIS and other violent extremist groups. Bring their stories to media outlets to counter extremist narratives.

**Frame** positive messages that speak to persons seeking to fill a void, find purpose, and engage with a group rather than provocative messages that attempts only to discredit an ideal.

**Engage** the support of religious leaders and offer faith-based counter-narratives.

**Elevate** voices of trusted peers and local authorities who can spur questioning about the merits of radical causes and introduce perspectives at variance with black-and-white extremist ideology.

**Consider** messages that go beyond women's rights as human rights and instead educate about ways in which violence against women contributes to broader societal insecurity.



Photo by frankieleon





Nadia Murad and Lamiya Aji Bashar, Iraqi Yazidi activists and survivors of ISIS, receive the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2016.  
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### 3. RECOVERY & REINTEGRATION

The recommendations below are essential to set a course for greater security over the long-term. Attention centers on how to enable positive reintegration, facilitate engagement in legitimate economic and political processes, and diminish the recurrence of violence and the pull toward radical ideology.

#### RETURNING HOME: SURVIVORS & EXTREMISTS

Whether they were captured or coerced and whether they were supporters or survivors of an extremist group's goals, it is important to help those who were formerly engaged with extremist groups to become positively engaged members of society.

**Assist** survivors and returning extremists who may experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and require psychological resources in order to overcome their trauma and successfully transition into daily life. Help them access psychological and health resources, facilitated support groups, job training, community activities, and productive work.

**Provide** psychosocial and health services, social support systems, and related activities to women confronted by stigma associated with rape, child and forced marriage, and forced or coerced participation in terrorist activity. Assist them in reengaging with their communities in a healthy manner and enable recovery and healing from the violence they may have experienced.

**Intervene** to support women who are victims of domestic violence and the children who are witnesses. Support initiatives to address and alter the behaviors of perpetrators, including criminal accountability. Provide local leaders training to recognize and respond to cases of domestic violence.

**Support** families through training, financial assistance, and other interventions to reduce misdirected stigma assigned to victims and diminish any perceived dependency on terrorist networks.

**Develop** tailored interventions that differentiate between categories of violent extremists (leaders, mid-level, followers) and adapt psychological interventions to different types, recognizing that no single program will work for every offender or in every region.

## TRANSITION & POLITICAL VOICE

A recurring theme among survivors of violence and also former combatants is a deep desire to regain purpose, have their voice heard, and participate in a meaningful way in political processes. Having the capacity to participate in legitimate political discourse and decision-making is important for recovery and reintegration.

**Ensure** women are fully empowered as equal participants, decision makers, leaders, and implementers in peace negotiations, postconflict transitions, and political processes.

**Recognize** that reintegration and legitimate political participation by extremists or combatant groups need to be accompanied by accountability. In Algeria, ex-combatants were reintegrated without accountability and were essentially rewarded. Include survivor groups in political negotiations and decisions about combatant reintegration.

**Ensure** peace agreements and related accountability or transitional justice mechanisms address the crimes of gender-based violence, reduce impunity, and support non-discrimination against women and other frequently marginalized populations.

**Emphasize** initiatives in the transition from relief to development that build resilient communities, integrate women as equal partners, and clearly oppose violence or discrimination against women and survivors.

## REFUGEES & INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

The high numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally pose a great challenge. These vulnerable populations require assistance to build resiliency and engage in meaningful activities.

**Build** the groundwork for reintegration and recovery by protecting the rights of refugees and IDPs, most of whom are women and children. Include women in the design, oversight and decision making in refugee and IDP camps. Provide alternative reporting mechanisms for human rights violations by humanitarian workers, members of the military, and members of civilian task forces. Couple such mechanisms with swift and public discipline of offenders to ensure women's safety within camps.

**Give** special attention to structural issues in active and postconflict settings in order to provide protection—especially to women and girls—from physical harm. Safely deliver the psychosocial and health support that is critical for recovery and reintegration, and create conditions that minimize risk from harm, exploitation, and abuse in humanitarian relief settings.

**Include** women fully in resettlement and redevelopment programming. Design humanitarian assistance and redevelopment programs around women and prioritize gender equality while scaling up donor assistance.

**Integrate** as part of any technical and financial assistance consultations with women (and their organizations, where they exist) to identify what support and initiatives women prioritize. Enable them to have influence on the postconflict agenda.

**Recognize** the trauma caused by widespread violence and terror tactics, and provide health services and interventions to facilitate recovery and improve reintegration for all members of the community.



Chadian women speaking at the first Women's Leadership Forum hosted by Special Operations Command Africa and facilitated by the U.S. Embassy in Chad and Spirit of America. (Photo by USAFRICOM, March 2017)

## 4. ACCOUNTABILITY & GOOD GOVERNANCE

There will continue to be a space ripe for radical ideology and competing allegiance, without addressing impunity, systemic abuse, and structural discrimination. The recommendations below focus on inclusion of women as equal participants in government processes and decision-making, and on accountability, which is a critical component in the rule of law.

### JUSTICE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Many models exist for upholding justice and human rights—from local courts to international criminal tribunals to national commissions on truth and reconciliation. Accountability is critically important for recovery and reconstruction to take hold. Without accountability and access to justice, a climate of impunity will perpetuate violence.

**Include** women as empowered partners in design, decision-making, and implementation of justice reforms to strengthen an independent judicial process; foster nondiscriminatory laws; and train judges and law enforcement in their consideration of men and women, treatment of gender-based violence, and support for survivors. Collaborate with civil society organizations to provide public education about rights, build confidence about equal access to justice, and create a climate that opposes violence and impunity.

**Bring** the architects and leaders of mass abuses to justice. Insist on trials for high-level officials responsible for abuses and not settle for low-level prosecutions.

**Link** anti-corruption work with efforts at countering violent extremism—and integrate women into consultations and initiatives—as a means to hold officials accountable and support good governance.

**Strictly enforce** regulations prohibiting sexual misconduct by governmental personnel, contractors and subcontractors, writing into contracts stiff penalties for misconduct.

**Create** staff positions that allow for unannounced monitoring of ground-level behavior. Develop real-time, crowd-sourced mechanisms for reporting sexual misconduct by those implementing programming.



## SECURITY SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Security forces frequently are the first to meet survivors, and their interactions can either facilitate recovery and access to resources or cause further harm.

**Implement** gender-sensitive security sector reform. Military-to-military training exercises are prime opportunities to help mainstream gender into security-sector reform initiatives. Critical security partners should collaborate to prioritize gender analysis in training and equipping missions. Programs should also improve structural gender equality and increase the number of women within security forces.

**Design** training programs for militaries that emphasize best practices of interacting with women and civilians generally. In particular, train on how to interact with the (often female)

family members and associates of suspected insurgents without violating human rights and on best practices for counterinsurgency. Desist from criminalizing returning victims of violence.

**Promote** the professionalization of security forces for top military leaders and local security officers. Widespread training could help local forces do a better job of protection and directing survivors to resources for recovery.

**Increase** the number of women at all levels in peacekeeping, security forces, and civilian military and policing operations.

## INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT

Diplomatic and technical assistance programs should enable inclusion and full participation of women and protect against discrimination and violence.

**Strengthen** participation of women in all political mechanisms, including peace negotiations and constitutional reform. Start with hard targets for women's inclusion by insisting that women be in key governance and decision-making positions such as delegates, lead negotiators, mediators, and chiefs of missions. Insist that contractors and subcontractors also meet hard targets for women's inclusion.

**Provide** technical assistance to government institutions to develop legislation and standardize laws that are nondiscriminatory and that prevent and respond to violence against women and children.

**Work** with civil society, including women's organizations, to develop education and implementation plans about rights, laws, and policies.



U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley and Secretary of Defense James Mattis  
(Photo by U.S. Department of Defense, Army Sgt. Amber I. Smith, March 2017)

## 5. GOVERNMENTAL ROLE & PARTNERSHIPS

The recommendations below recognize resource limitations. This section offers approaches that can improve efficiency and effectiveness in government processes and help leverage additional investments and partnerships strategically.

### WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Better coordination, intentional strategies, and multi-sectoral models will increase the impact of resource investments. In designing and determining government approaches:

**Examine recent multisectoral and interagency models** that link gender-based violence and security (e.g., atrocity prevention, ending child marriage, child protection) in order to establish a whole-of-government approach to countering violent extremism.

**Commit strong funding** and do not neglect postwar investments that promote recovery, reintegration, and safety, including investments to end gender-based violence and promote greater equality.

**Use successful frameworks** for a whole-of-government approach that offer a menu of policy and program options, such as the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Appoint senior-level officials to elevate and integrate gender issues and gender-based violence issues, such as the U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, who coordinates and spurs actions across government agencies.



**Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Florida), Chairman Emeritus of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives,** engages with participants in the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program. Photo by House Foreign Affairs Committee 2011

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

There now are more sources for private funding that can complement government investments and much more known about how to structure such partnerships and investments. Drawing on successful models:

**Create mechanisms to coordinate public and private funding** to maximize investments and better meet the needs of local communities. For example, private-sector funds could match government assistance programs and initiatives. A rapid response fund could provide emergency cash assistance to survivors so that they can reach safety and access care. An innovation fund could support locally inspired initiatives that have the capacity to meet a local need effectively and efficiently and the potential of application elsewhere.

**Conduct gender analysis in the design and implementation of investments and programs across sectors**—whether economic development, road construction, political participation, judicial reform, security training, media development, or education programs. Consult closely with women and local leaders to determine the following:

- potential impact on women and girls, men and boys
- impact on safety and exposure to violence
- actions that may be necessary to reduce the risk of harm and violence
- how to enhance the equal status of women and girls with men and boys

**Encourage specific sectors** that have not traditionally been associated with discussion about gender-based violence to elevate and strengthen their roles:

- labor and trade associations initiatives that improve accountability and reduce discrimination or gender-based abuses in the workplace
- infrastructure programs that encourage design to minimize the vulnerability of the project's beneficiaries to gender-based violence
- health services that integrate screening of and response to gender-based violence and deliver safety and psychosocial services

It is one of these cases where, having invested an enormous amount of money [on war], we are now arguing about a tiny amount of money in terms of bringing this to successful conclusion. It reminds me of the last scene in *Charlie Wilson's War*, where, having forced the Soviets out of Afghanistan and having spent billions to do it, Charlie Wilson can't get a million dollars for schools.

—Robert Gates

Former Secretary of Defense under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, speaking in 2010

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## ENDNOTES

1. Valerie M. Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, et al., *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
2. For examples, see Francisco Aguayo et al., "Engaging Men in Public Policies for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls," (Santiago: EME/CulturaSalud, Washington, D.C.: Promundo-US, Panama City: UN Women, and UNFPA, 2016); MenEngage, "Hombres, Masculinidades y Cambios en el Poder: Un Documento sobre la Participación de los Hombres en la Igualdad de Género desde Beijing 1995 hasta el Año 2015," <http://www.eme.cl/masculinidades-y-cambios-en-el-poder/>.





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