Mothers, Mercenaries and Mediators: Women Providing Answers to the Questions We Forgot to Ask

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Current initiatives in countering violent extremism (CVE) often see women excluded or marginalised from the development, implementation and evaluation of these efforts. From informal grassroots levels to formal government platforms, women's participation and perspectives in CVE continue to be absent or minimal. This paper analyses the role women can play in CVE, including leveraging global frameworks such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In providing case studies of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Tajikistan, this paper seeks to elaborate on and promote women's engagement for more effective CVE outcomes.

Violent extremism is an increasing problem across the globe. The *Global Terrorism Index* states that, in 2014, there was a 172 per cent increase in deaths of private citizens from acts of violent extremism.[1] In 2000, 3,329 deaths from violent extremism were recorded, compared to 32,685 in 2014.[2] In 2016, thirty-four countries were affected by incidents that resulted in the deaths of over twenty-five people, highlighting an increase in violent extremist incidents in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).[3] This was due to an increase in Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-affiliated attacks. Within the last fifteen years, over 140,000 lives were recorded as lost from 61,000 acts of violent extremism.[4] There is a clear need to carefully think through how this problem can be better addressed and why efforts have not been wholly effective to date. With ISIS changing its tack last year calling for women to step up to fight, there has been a recognition that "the potential for women to lead efforts to counter future violent extremism is dangerously underappreciated".[5]

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[1] Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2015', 2015, <economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>, [Accessed 14 September 2017], p. 25.
[2] Ibid., p. 30.
[3] Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2016', 2016, <economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>, [Accessed 20 September 2017], p. 3.
[4] Ibid., p. 33.
[5] Julia Bergin, 'What Role Can Women Play in Countering Violent Extremism', Australian Institute of International Affairs, 3 December 2017, <www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/women-countering-extremism/> [Accessed 29 March 2018].

With the rapid rise of violent extremism—along with its increasing spread to Western countries—governments, and military and civil society organisations across the globe need innovative and flexible responses to the complexity of home-grown threats and social media-savvy religious extremists.[6] And it's not just the modality of the messages but also the power structures behind them. UN Women points out that "violent extremist groups manipulate gender stereotypes to recruit men and women to their ranks, promoting violent notions of masculinity and using women to convey these messages".[7]

Thus, it can be expected that this surge of interest in countering violent extremism (CVE) will continue, including a focus on the role that women can play, and we must be aware of the potential challenges this may present.

The push to align CVE programs with the global post-2015 agenda aims to maximise impact; however, this harmonisation may have unintended consequences. Whilst the interlocking frameworks outlined in several initiatives and studies (i.e. the Sustainable Development Goals; the Agenda for Humanity; and the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security [WPS]) and by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations could provide an opportunity to amplify CVE efforts and justify the efficacy of involving women in all peace and security issues, CVE approaches are inherently political and "incompatible with principled, needs-based humanitarian action".[8] This could result in less humanitarian access to affected populations and women and girls, being some of the most vulnerable groups in crisis, being deprived of humanitarian assistance and protection.

Although ideally CVE programs should be diverse and inclusive, ensuring representation and inclusion of different ethnic groups, religions, social status, physical abilities and sexual orientations and identities, this paper will focus specifically on exploring the role of women in CVE, noting, as the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) distinguishes, the difference "between women as actors in CVE and the 'gendered' natures of violent extremism".[9] The paper uses examples from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Tajikistan to demonstrate some of the many ways in which women are being

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[6] Peter Romaniuk, 'Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism', Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2015, <www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work_2015.pdf> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

[7] UN Women, 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities', 2017-2018, <www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2018/02/pve-brochure-final-web.pdf?la=en&vs=3112> [Accessed 29 March 2018].

[8] Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Humanitarian Action', Position Paper, June 2017, <www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/position-papers/170622-nrc-position-paper_cve-and-humanitarian-action---fv.pdf> [Accessed 19 March 2018], p. 2.

[9] Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', 2015, <www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-Women-and-CVE.pdf> [Accessed 20 August 2017].

increasingly involved in CVE contexts and programming. Recognising and understanding the role of women in CVE deepens our analysis of how violence is conceptualised, and of the scope with which responses are developed. Women are often excluded from CVE analyses—this could be for a range of reasons including historical inequalities and power differentials, women not having had a voice on this issue previously, the incorrect assumption that women are innately peaceful and are not involved in violent movements, or that women cannot make an impact in shaping the narrative or counter-narrative. This paper challenges these assumptions and will provide insight into where women fit into strategies and programs that aim to make our world a safer place.

The Current State of Play

One of the chronic deficiencies in CVE response is a lack of focus on the positive role women can play. In all three stages of CVE programming—prevention, reconstruction and peacebuilding—the role of women is usually grossly underrepresented. This underrepresentation is seen within civil society, structural institutions such as governments, and in the collection and analyses of case studies. Increasing the role of women in CVE is a crucial aspect of security and peace in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, this can lead to lessons on how to most effectively increase and sustain women's participation in CVE strategies. However, the role of women is a relative blind spot in the analysis around CVE. This directly correlates with the WPS agenda and its implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325[10] and UNSCR 2242.[11]

The role of women in enabling, supporting, benefiting from, being victims of, counteracting, and preventing violent extremism is crucial to explore and understand—but the discourse on this is lacking. This is a result of pre-existing, socially embedded gender inequalities. When a conflict occurs, these gender inequalities and disparities are exacerbated and are projected in many ways, such as through sexual violence, at times adding further barriers to their participation and inclusion.

WPS Agenda and UNSCR 2242

The WPS agenda is explicitly addressed through eight of the UNSCRs. These resolutions were passed over a fifteen-year period. UNSCR 1325—the historical, first resolution passed in 2000—is the acknowledgment that compared to men, women are often disproportionately affected by conflict. It

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[10] United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 1325 (2000), S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000), <documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf> [Accessed 20 October 2016].
[11] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2243 (2015), S/RES/2243 (13 October 2015), <www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2018].

also emphasises the underrepresentation and marginalisation of women in peace processes and conflict prevention, resolution and transformation.[12] The recognition of the WPS agenda as a framework to position the CVE response is becoming more common,[13] although not uncontested, resulting in an increased focus on the possible ways that women can be engaged as committed, active leaders in CVE initiatives and strategies, and as allies in prevention frameworks. UNSCR 2242 specifically calls for the "greater integration by Member States and the United Nations of their agendas on women, peace and security, counter-terrorism and countering-violent extremism".[14] A large part of this push is to collect gender-sensitive data around the drivers of radicalisation, which UN Women is heavily engaged in and is elaborated further in the case study below on Bangladesh. UNCSR 2242 also highlights the extreme vulnerability created by the current displacement crisis and the need to increase attention to WPS as a cross-cutting issue in all international peace and security initiatives. However, critics highlight the fact that the UNCSR 2242 does not fundamentally change the marginal status of women within CVE strategies and approaches.[15] This perpetuates the stereotypical dichotomy of women as "wicked purveyors of extremist violence or virtuous saviours of sons, husbands and communities", undermining the effectiveness of using the WPS agenda to advance the rights and protection of women in times of conflict and violence.[16]

The dominant discourse of responding to and preventing sexual violence in conflict is a concern, displaying a disproportionate focus on the protection aspects of the WPS agenda. This impacts on how women's participation and agency beyond being a victim are addressed,[17] and results in women being excluded from meaningful participation in government strategy development and implementation. This can compromise the impact of women's coalitions that strive towards CVE and promoting peace. Additionally, we need to examine the role of women in conflict situations beyond the context of sexual violence and human rights abuses. There is also the need to explore the roles women can play in protection and CVE.

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[12] UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 12 October 2015), <www.wps.unwomen.org/~/media/files/un%20women/ wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf> [Accessed 29 August 2016].
[13] Jayne Huckerby, 'Gender, Violent Extremism, and Countering Violent Extremism', Just Security, 3 March 2015, <www.justsecurity.org/20620/gender-violent-extremism-countering-violent-extremism-cve/> [Accessed 14 August 2016].
[14] United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2243 (2015), S/RES/2243 (13 October 2015), <www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf> [Accessed 30 March 2018], p. 6.
[15] Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, 'The "War on Terror" and Extremism: Assessing the Relevance of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (2016), p. 275.
[16] Ibid., p. 282.
[17] Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australia), Submission to the United Nations Global Study on Women, Peace and Security, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015.

This includes a woman's role in the family, community, faith-based institutions, law enforcement institutions, including formal and informal leadership positions, and access to decision-making forums.

Despite these advances, there is still profound concern about the global rise in violence, conflict and militarisation. We must be careful when analysing women's roles in CVE and recognise the risks that come with it. There is a significant risk that the WPS agenda and humanitarian action will be turned into a security instrument, resulting in the CVE agenda dominating other women's security and humanitarian issues. There is a current environment of militarisation—understood as the "reliance on the use of force as the sole means of conflict resolution"[18]—within many national security, political and social spheres, which often results in the overlooking of women's voices and experiences.[19] Women's rights and women's rights organisations have been adversely impacted in many contexts where there have been CVE attempts via military strategies and agendas.[20]

Difference Between Violent Extremism and Terrorism

Violent extremism is a concept that often lacks definition and is highly contested.[21] Both the UN and the European Union have yet to state an official definition. The UN, however, states that "definitions of 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism' are the prerogative of Member States and must be consistent with their obligations under international law, in particular, international human rights law".[22] Complexities arise due to the interconnectedness of the concepts, 'violent extremism' and 'terrorism'. The lack of a universal definition is due to several compounding factors, including politics, ideology and the various disciplines that undertake research on violent extremism and terrorism.[23] Furthermore, there is tension between the political and legislative frameworks that define these terms. The following section will put forward definitions of violent extremism, terrorism and CVE.

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[18] UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*, p. 25.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review* (Edinburgh, SA: Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, March 2011), <dspace.dsto.defence.gov.au/dspace/bitstream/1947/10150/1/DSTO-TR-2522%20PR.pdf> [Accessed 21 September 2017].

[21] Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach* (Vienna: OSCE, 2014), pp. 28-30.

[22] United Nations, 'Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism—The Way Forward', 7 and 8 April 2016, Concept Note, <www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org. counterterrorism.ctitf/files/Geneva%20PVE%20Conference%20Concept%20Note%20Final.pdf> [Accessed 20 September 2017], p. 4.

[23] Joshua Sinai, 'New Trends in Terrorism Studies: Strengths and Weaknesses', in M. Ranstorp (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Direction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 31–50.

In contrast to terrorism, violent extremism encompasses actions that threaten a country's core values and principles, including human rights, the rule of law, democracy, equal opportunity and freedom. The aim of violent extremism is to aggravate the victim into a "disproportionate response [to] radicalise moderates and build support for its objectives in the long term".[24] Many governments and societies reject all forms of violent extremism and seek to promote a harmonious and inclusive society. Violent extremists include groups and individuals who advocate the use of violence against civilians for social, ideological and political ends,[25] reflecting views that seek to exclude, dominate or marginalise others.

Violent extremism is much broader and focuses on factors that can impact it, such as community engagement and grassroots organisation participation. The additional spectrum that accompanies the sphere of violent extremism reflects the shift from traditional conflicts (such as state-versus-state or state-versus-non-state participants) to a conflict that may not directly target governments. Correspondence with various academics and government officials reiterated the still murky context in which violent extremism and terrorism exist.[26] This paper thus includes research and statistics that use the term 'terrorism', as it fits with the outlined definition of violent extremism, as explored above.

Women in CVE

As CVE is typically cited in the context of strategies that aim to either respond to or prevent violence, a new shift to a broader, more holistic approach to CVE is therefore relevant when discussing women's role in it. As explored above, there is a drive to turn away from traditional military approaches to CVE and move towards a paradigm that applies a multi-layered and multidisciplinary approach, including engaging with stakeholders who traditionally did not formally participate in CVE strategies.

Within academic and media discourse, some ground has been gained with the exploration of violent extremism through a gendered lens,[27] looking at

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[24] D. A. Lake, 'Rational Extremism: Understanding Terrorism in the Twenty-first Century', *Dialogue IO*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2002), p. 26.

[25] A. Aly, A. M. Balbi and C. Jacques, 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Implementing the Role of Civil Society', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 10, no. 1 (July 2015), pp. 3–13.

[26] Jacqui True, email communication with Director of Monash Gender, Peace and Security, 21 October 2016; Bradley Orchard, email communication with Colonel, Director National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security, 24 October 2016; Laura Shepard, email communication with Associate Professor of International Relations and Deputy Head of School, 22 October 2016.

[27] Ellie Hearne, 'Participants, Enablers, and Preventers: The Roles of Women in Terrorism', research paper presented at the British International Studies Association annual conference, Leicester, UK, December 2009, p. 2.

female suicide terrorism and the gendered nature of the war on terror.[28] Stories of women and girls committing acts of violent extremism interrogates the traditional, and often more socially accepted interpretations of gender and women. Women are not inherently peaceful; however, the perspectives that women's role in violent extremism and peace negotiations is that they have "served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls".[29] Therefore because of these gendered assumptions of women, it can make it easier for them to be successful, with violent extremist groups having turned this into a tactical advantage. A 2016 report highlighted that women have been involved in nearly one in four Islamist plots across Europe in the first five months of 2017—a 20 per cent increase from 2015.[30]

Nonetheless, with approaches to CVE shifting to align with new types of violent extremism, it is critical that there is a focus on a gendered lens in analysing violent extremist movements and groups. This includes focusing on women's role in disrupting and preventing violent extremism, and the various contexts in which women join both violent extremist and CVE groups. Of course, it is important to understand the intersectionality that exists when discussing the women in violent extremism and CVE. Around the globe, the identity of a human is so much more than their gender. The paper acknowledges that sexuality, religion, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, socio-economic and many more factors assist in forming an understanding of the power differential of a gendered understanding of violent extremism and CVE.

There is also a growing call at the UN from many Member State representatives, and from civil society, that women should be at the centre of efforts to fund a sustainable strategic effort to counter the violent extremist threat. There have been innovative studies on the role of women and violent extremism, and such recent research include the first international research focusing on the impact of the US government's counterterrorism efforts on women.[31] The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)[32] made a number of recommendations on women, violent extremism and radicalisations, including the need to effectively involve and

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[28] N. Pratt, 'The Gender Logics of Resistance to the "War on Terror": Constructing Sex-Gender Difference through the Erasure of Patriarchy in the Middle East', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 20, (2012), pp. 1821-36.
[29] United Nations, 'Secretary-General Calls for Council Action to Ensure Women Are Involved in Peace and Security Decisions', M2 PressWire, 25 October 2000.
[30] The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, *Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus*, (London: ICSR, 2016), <icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Criminal-Pasts-Terrorist-Futures.pdf> [Accessed 28 March 2018].
[31] Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, *A Decade Lost: Locating Gender in U.S. Counter-Terrorism* (New York: NYU School of Law, 2011).
[32] The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Women and Terrorist Radicalization: Final Report* (Vienna: OSCE, 2013).

engage women at all stages of the development, implementation and monitoring of CVE policies, strategies and programs, and learn from and integrate the experience of women's involvement and knowledge of CVE processes, including peacebuilding, and the resolutions of conflicts. This can lead to an increase in women's participation decision-making processes.

Despite recent recognition of the role of women in national, regional and global security issues, there is a need for more in-depth research and analysis of women's roles in violent extremism CVE.[33] With an increase of women engaging in violent extremism, the identity of women is being publicly disrupted. Traditionally, women are perceived as gentle, passive and non-violent.[34] Therefore the need for further analysis includes examining the many perceptions, drivers, determinations, goals and political agency of female participants in violent extremism, CVE and, more broadly, political violence. Women play a pivotal role in assisting to prevent both women and men from participating and engaging in violent extremism.[35] Community engagement in CVE can be defined as civil societies' efforts and attempts to both inoculate and extract those vulnerable to violent extremism through increasing these individuals' resilience and enhancing their capacity to resist recruiting efforts of violent extremism groups.[36] By considering women's roles in CVE, there will be an increase in the adoption of a holistic approach to understanding and addressing violent extremism, thus creating a shift from a militarised approach to an approach centred on community participation and engagement, particularly the reintegration of marginalised women into the narrative.[37] OSCE research concludes that women's involvement in the CVE narrative as "policy-shapers, educators, community members and activists" is essential in preventing terrorism.[38] This OSCE research emphasises that women have a critical role in communicating feedback to international communities regarding CVE efforts and strategies, highlighting when these are effective or when these have a counterproductive impact on their own communities and efforts.[39] Although the literature and strategies continue to evolve to include women in CVE initiatives in countries where violent extremism is on the rise, women activists still lack access to resources and support structures.

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[33] Richard Jackson, Lee Jarvis, Jeroen Gunning and Marie Breen Smyth, *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 95–96.
[34] Caron E, Gentry and Laura Sjober, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2007).
[35] United Nations, 'Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism—The Way Forward'.
[36] Romaniuk, 'Does CVE Work?'.
[37] Daniel P. Aldrich, 'Mightier than the Sword: Social Science and Development in Countering Violent Extremism', in R. Shaw and S. Radelet (eds), *USAID Frontiers in Development* (Washington: United States Agency for International Development, 2012), pp. 46–49.
[38] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Women and Terrorist Radicalization: Final Report*, p. 2.
[39] Ibid., p. 2.

The Shape of CVE in Bangladesh

Recent developments have seen a targeted recruitment underway in Bangladesh and women being involved in various roles including 'supporters, sympathizers and perpetrators' of violent acts.'[40]

Women are being arrested in higher numbers for various crimes including planning to undertake suicide attacks. Women's roles in violent extremism in Bangladesh is evolving, in the past being 'confined to indoctrination and recruitment'[41] and now moving into more operational and direct roles including logistics, recruitment, and planning and carrying out attacks, as well as being targeted for forced recruitment. 2016 saw the first female suicide attack in Bangladesh and since then there have been more arrest and attempted attacks by women. It is possible that this evolution is due to the rise of IS and the particular type of ideology and the reach this group now has across the globe.

There are a number of initiatives that are mobilising and supporting women to be more involved in the CVE space in Bangladesh. For example, women are a key stakeholder in the 'Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism (STRIVE)' program that aims to enhance young community radio producers to address violent extremism and enhance understanding of rural communities as to how to counter violent extremism.[42]

Another example is the government of Japan funded 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities' program in Bangladesh that has a dual approach of addressing economic inequalities at the same time providing training on CVE and engaging at-risk-communities. The women involved in the project also lobby schools to run programs allowing students to identify and prevent violent extremism The project aims to increase women's economic position and confidence that will empower them to address intolerance and radicalising in their communities.[43] This is part of a larger four-track program run by UN Women in the Asia Pacific, focusing on empowerment, participation, research and policy influence. Research from the project found only 32 per cent women in communities outside of the project agree that

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[40] Ashish Banik, 'Role of Women in Preventing Radicalisation in Bangladesh', Foreign Affairs Insights & Review, 20 June 2017, <fairbd.net/role-of-women-in-preventing-radicalization-in-bangladesh/> [Accessed 28 March 2018].

[41] Ibid.

[42] Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication, 'Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism Through Community Radio', <http://bnnrc.net/STRIVE/> [Accessed 29 March 2018].

[43] UN Women, 'Women in Bangladesh Bolster Efforts to Turn the Tide on Rising Extremism', 19 February 2018, <www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/1/feature-women-in-bangladesh-turn-the-tide-on-rising-extremism> [Accessed 30 March 2018].

they know what to do to prevent violent extremism in their families, whilst 51 per cent of women in the project agreed.[44]

In the Bangladesh part of this project

> about 1,200 "Polli Shomaj Women" (women-only community groups) have increased their business and leadership skills. In addition, they are building their capacity to identify the early signs of radicalisation of adults and children in their own communities and find solutions for prevention. In total, 600 women have also received funding to start up or expand their businesses.[45]

The strength of the program is its multi-faceted approach—empowering women at the local level, but also engaging the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs using this project to feed into Bangladesh's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in the hope this will harmonise and strengthen national efforts on CVE.

This programme also has a research component to inform effective CVE engagement—the most recent data shows that of those search engine users attempting to access extremist content, 89.1 per cent were male and 10.9 per cent were female. This is significant as online users can be desensitised to graphic sexual violence and other acts online that can lead to increased sexual and gender-based violence levels as well as communities becoming more accepting of extremist groups tactics.

Adding to the complexity is the narrative that is being used by both Myanmar and Bangladesh governments that the recent refuge flow of Rohingya into Bangladesh will be associated with an increase in violent extremism and terrorist activities. To date this has not been the case[46] and there are concerns that addressing the situation as a counterterrorism operation rather than a humanitarian operation could have catastrophic consequences.

Engaging Mothers to Reduce Violence Extremism

The role that mothers can play in CVE has increasingly been a focus of CVE programming. Evidence from research highlights that mothers can hold authority within their communities and families.[47] Mothers, through their emotional relationship with their families (and particularly children), are strategically well placed to access key information about "the social and

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[44] UN Women, 'Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities'.
[45] Ibid., p. 22.
[46] International Crisis Group, 'Myanmar/Bangladesh: A Humanitarian Calamity and a Two-Country Crisis', Commentary, 31 January 2018, <www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmarbangladesh-humanitarian-calamity-and-two-country-crisis> [Accessed 28 March 2018].
[47] Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism', <www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Good-Practices-on-Women-and-CVE.pdf> [Accessed 20 August 2017].

psychological landscape" of young adults and adolescents who could potentially become involved in violent extremism.[48] The rapid increase of violence in Asia, including Central Asia, has resulted in a CVE focus on the process of radicalisation and deradicalisation.[49] As a result of their position within the home and family, mothers are often able to identify behaviour that may be conducive to radicalisation and intervene at an early stage.[50] Furthermore, mothers often have the trust of their families and the broader community, and hence they are more likely to be able to engage with disengaged or isolated family or community members.[51]

An example of this approach is the Mothers Opposing Violent Extremism (MOVE) initiative in Tajikistan. In the past, Tajikistan's civil society experienced relative religious freedom, which was fundamental to the functioning of society. However, with the Tajikistan government's underdeveloped CVE strategy, there are now policies restricting religious freedom. In various international organisations' assessments and evaluations of civil and political rights, Tajikistan's scores are consistently poor.[52] With the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, one of the increasing threats from violent extremism for Tajikistan is the flow of Tajik fighters into Syria.[53] Approximately 400 Tajik citizens have joined ISIS in Syria since its rise in 2013.[54]

There are several women-focused CVE initiatives globally, and MOVE (a campaign from the international non-governmental organisation Sisters Against Violent Extremism [SAVE]) is one of them. SAVE is the world's first female platform that aims to create a cohesive and unified front for CVE. Mothers School was first launched in Tajikistan by SAVE, engaging with local mother's groups and providing mothers with the resources, support and encouragement to protect and deter their children from violent extremism,

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[48] Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture: Mothers Included!', in N.C. Fink, S. Zeiger and R. Bhulai (eds), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (USA: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016), p. 54.

[49] Global Center on Cooperative Security and The Institute for Inclusive Security, 'Strengthening Rule of Law Responses to Counter Violent Extremism: What Role for Civil Society in South Asia?', Policy Brief, May 2015, <www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/May-2015_Strengthening-Rule-of-Law-Responses-to-Counter-Violent-Extremism3.pdf> [Accessed 25 September 2017].

[50] Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture'.

[51] Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.

[52] Eric McGlinchey, 'Violent Extremism and Insurgency in Tajikistan: A Risk Assessment', United States Agency for International Development, 14 August 2013, <pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JSKG.pdf> [Accessed 14 August 2017], p. iii.

[53] The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (New York: The Soufan Group, December 2015).

[54] Ibid., p. 9.

and diminish the attraction of violent extremist ideologies.[55] Each Mothers School program is designed to address community-specific issues, such as communication skills, parenting skills, strategies to become involved in their children's education, and how to identify early warning signs of radicalisation. Through Mothers School, new and existing mother's groups undertake a workshop that integrates income generation and CVE. Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg's report 'Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?' is one of the most comprehensive studies examining the impact of mothers on CVE, and has helped shape and develop the MOVE initiative.[56] This study concluded with two key findings: (i) mothers are willing to prevent children from engaging in violent extremism; but (ii) mothers often lack the skills, confidence and tools to be effective in pursuing such prevention.[57] These findings support the need to engage with mothers as key players in CVE.

The Mothers School launch in Tajikistan stemmed from mothers who were becoming increasingly concerned about their children's safety and risk with regard to violent extremism. The MOVE mother's group agreed that peace begins, and is fostered, at home, and that understanding and communication are tools that are fundamental to building social resilience and cohesion. Through a five-day workshop in Khujand, Tajikistan, twenty-two women from different communities were mobilised to commit to and develop the education of mothers, so as to increase their capacity to counter violent extremism.[58] Mothers Schools were launched in various villages in two northern regions, and the course was able to be conducted in a community setting that was informal and safe. This community setting provided a space where women could find common ground, be provided training and education on early signs of radicalisation, and access resources necessary to address it. Mothers School's initial evaluations outlined that mothers carry intense worry concerning the radicalisation of community and family members. Furthermore, mothers felt immense pressure to ensure that their family's reputation remained unblemished.[59] In light of this, the community welcomed this new approach to security and creating allies in the home.[60]

The further development of the Mothers School program and its expansion into other countries is evidence of the program's success in empowering

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[55] Women without Borders and SAVE, 'Role and Function of Women without Borders / SAVE', 2011, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/specialmeetings/2011/docs/women-wout-borders-save.pdf> [Accessed 21 September 2017].
[56] Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, 'Can Mothers Challenge Extremism? Mothers' Perceptions and Attitudes of Radicalization and Violent Extremism' (Vienna: Women Without Borders / SAVE, 2015).
[57] Ibid., p. 53.
[58] Women without Borders and SAVE, 'Role and Function of Women without Borders / SAVE'.
[59] Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture'.
[60] Edit Schlaffer, 'Mothers of Extremists: The Unlikely Allies for a New Female Security Paradigm', HuffPost Blog, 21 May 2013, updated 21 July 2013, <www.huffingtonpost.com/edit-schlaffer/mothers-of-extremists-the_b_3314019.html> [Accessed 20 July 2017].

mothers to counter violent extremism. Because the program works with local organisations and is developed to address context-specific issues, the program thus has legitimacy and the trust of the community. Mothers School participants have been reported to have positive responses to the program, including: (i) an increased awareness of their impact on children; (ii) confidence in gaining new skills; (iii) gaining support networks to address the issue; and (iv) practical skills such as an increase in English language and computer literacies, which has resulted in new employment, and thus an increased status in the household.[61]

Another positive outcome of mother's groups is the increased feelings of optimism and hope for participants' families.[62] These engagements with mothers who have lost their sons to violent extremism are important to note, especially in view of the ability of mothers to act as leaders in their communities, stopping the recruitment of children into violent extremist ideologies. One woman, from a group of mothers using their voice to counter violent extremism, has stated:

> "When they come to recruit our sons, we must rebel! A mother will gain nothing; her son is more important to her than anything else, and if you promise me the whole world and even heaven I wouldn't change it for the life of my son."[63]

Women in Leadership—a Place at the Peace Table

It is important to understand how government actions and perspectives on military, defence, policing, and strategy implementation can impact CVE narratives. There is scope to better understand and utilise the capacity of the state to promote the role of women in CVE. Women's representation in CVE strategies is enhanced by their participation in formal government settings.[64] In the context of Afghanistan and examining the role of women and their contribution to the peace process there, this section will also illustrate how, although women may be present in formal settings, governments need to ensure that women's roles are meaningful and contributory. Additionally, this section will address women's absence from formal platforms, and the negative impact this can have on CVE strategies.

It is evident that women are considerably underrepresented in governments worldwide.[65] Currently, the responsibility of CVE falls heavily on government sectors such as the defence and policing sectors, as well as the security industry, and women traditionally lack access to these sectors. The global

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[61] Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 'Can Mothers Challenge Extremism?', pp. 11–40.
[62] Schlaffer and Kropiunigg, 'A New Security Architecture'.
[63] Schlaffer, 'Mothers of Extremists'.
[64] Global Counterterrorism Forum, 'Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism'.
[65] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (New York: United Nations, 2015), pp. 121–35.

statistic of women's participation in formal, political government settings remains low. Globally, women make up a meagre 22.8 per cent of representatives in national parliaments.[66] In terms of armed forces, women make up 14.8 per cent in Canada, 14.6 per cent in the United States, and 9.9 per cent in the United Kingdom.[67] With such limited representation in the aforementioned sectors, women thus lack the opportunity to formally engage in CVE efforts.

The post-2001 period saw Afghanistan transition into a country where gender mainstreaming, and the legal rights of women, made significant progress; after the 1996–2001 Taliban regime, women were able to participate more actively and meaningfully in peacebuilding efforts.[68] Women's participation and rights were formally embedded in the new Constitution for Afghanistan during its development in 2003, and forced the Afghan government to more seriously consider the various frameworks (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and international treaties (such as UNSCR 1325) that the country has joined. In addition to that, documents such as the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Women of Afghanistan were developed. The NAP has outlined the participation of Afghan women in the national security forces and formal peace processes as a priority. The development of the NAP came from a place where it was agreed that the basic rights, responsibilities, and contributions of women, cannot be compromised.[69]

It was the adoption and establishment of such documents and frameworks that assisted in developing women's participation in all peacebuilding processes in Afghanistan. However, in recent years the Taliban and other violent extremist groups have sought to regain their authority and power. In many conflict-stricken areas, strict Sharia law is enforced, imposing severe, strict rules on communities, particularly on women and girls. In such cases, women's societal freedoms and rights are considered as adverse to an ideal society.[70] Attacks on women are severe, such as stoning, and acid attacks of girls who attend school. Furthermore, Afghanistan does not have a national CVE policy or strategy, and the situation remains unstable. Such

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[66] UN Women, 'Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation', July 2017, <www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures> [Accessed 20 September 2017].
[67] The Atlantic Council of Canada, *Canada in the World: Youth Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security* (Toronto: The Atlantic Council of Canada, 2015), p. 29.
[68] Melike Karlidag, 'UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Afghanistan: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2014', November 2014, <www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/ UN%20Security%20Council%20 Resolution%201325%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf> [Accessed 15 September 2017].
[69] Elizabeth Weingarten and Leila Hilal, 'A Step Forward for Afghan Women?', *Foreign Policy*, 3 March 2015, <foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/03/a-step-forward-for-afghan-women/> [Accessed 29 March 2018].
[70] Zachary Laub, 'The Taliban in Afghanistan', Council on Foreign Relations, 4 July 2014, <www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan> [Accessed 10 September 2017].

CVE policy paralysis in Afghanistan means that there is little research in the country on CVE and its possible interplay with women.

For a long time, responding to security issues (such as defence or policing measures) has been accepted as a male-dominated sphere. Therefore, in such areas, women have been, and continue to be, underutilised and often prevented in contributing to peacebuilding efforts.[71] Involving both the government and civil society, peacebuilding has a direct focus on prevention, striving to "prevent, mitigate, and resolve local conflict and promote human security".[72] Although peacebuilding may seem like it does not explicitly address violent extremism, it can contribute to and enhance CVE measures. In contexts such as Afghanistan, women's formal participation in peacebuilding should be encouraged, as this encouragement would help create a non-securitised space, a space outside of the Afghan National Security Forces which is traditionally male dominated, that can be a foundational platform for creating and implementing effective CVE strategies. Government strategy and policy should incorporate a CVE framework that understands and respects human rights and is based on a platform where women are present, represented and heard. This can lead to increased trust between formal institutions such as the government and civil society, creating sustained peace and security.[73]

The UN Secretary-General's 2010 report, 'Women's Participation in Peacebuilding', cautions against simple assumptions such as that if women are simply present in CVE processes, then women are already participating in a substantive way.[74] It is argued that the representation of women is far more complex than simply placing women in leadership positions, and there is also a need to address entrenched gender biases in social norms and formal legislation.[75] However, it can also be reasoned that with more women in leadership positions at the highest levels, these gender bias issues would be more likely to come to the fore and thus be more readily addressed, recognising that having women in leadership position is not enough on its own. There is substantial evidence that women's political voice has resulted

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[71] Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger and Rafia Bhulai, 'Introduction', in N. C. Fink, S. Zeiger and R. Bhulai (eds), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (USA: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016), pp. 5–6.
[72] Georgia Holmer, 'Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective', *Special Report* 336 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013), p. 6.
[73] Ibid., p. 6.
[74] United Nations, 'Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: Report of the Secretary-General', A/65/354–S/2010/466, 7 September 2010, <undocs.org/en/S/2010/466> [Accessed 28 September 2017].
[75] Pilar Domingo, Rebecca Holmes, Tam O'Neil, Nicola Jones, Kate Bird, Anna Larson, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Craig Valters, 'Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-making: Assessing the Evidence', ODI Report, March 2015, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9627.pdf>, [Accessed 11 September 2017], p. 16.

in gender-responsive legal and policy reform.[76] The resulting impact of this includes: (i) increased transparency in government decision-making; (ii) increased budget allocations for services that benefit women; and (iii) more accessible and responsive services for women.[77]

There are various challenges that need to be overcome in Afghanistan in order for women to participate and engage in CVE at a formal level. Previous peace processes have failed to invite women to various dialogues and negotiations. Furthermore, in Afghanistan, women are constrained, often by families and gendered social norms, with regard to areas (such as insecure areas) they can travel to. This gender restriction is also evident in the representation of women in the High Peace Council in Afghanistan, which consists of only nine women out of a total of seventy members. When women are represented and their voices are heard, it promotes a more satisfactory and sustainable peace and security.[78]

In conclusion, this paper strongly highlights that women need to have meaningful access and participation to formal government settings. Currently, the lack of women represented in settings such as parliaments and formal peace negotiation forums can negatively impact the outcomes of these platforms, such as the development of an effective CVE strategy. When women are in leadership positions, it is important that their roles are not tokenistic and that they are able to participate meaningfully. Having women in these positions can have a positive impact on the government's transparency and effectiveness in CVE.

Conclusion

The inclusion of women in the formal and informal platforms for CVE continues to be insufficient. This paper provides an analysis of the role of women in the CVE narrative highlighting the positive impact women can have when they are able to participate at various levels of CVE initiatives, from grassroots to formal government participation. This analysis explores key approaches where the role of women in CVE can be strengthened and enhanced, this list is not exhaustive however and there needs further investment in exploring these avenues.

There are a number of crucial questions governments and other institutions can ask when creating and developing policies and programs. How can they support and aid grassroots movements that are developed independently of government? What role can and should the government play in initiatives

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[76] Ibid., p. 4.
[77] Ibid. pp. 2-4.
[78] Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, 'Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): The Role of Women and Women's Organizations', in N. C. Fink, S. Zeiger and R. Bhulai (eds), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (USA: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016), pp. 18–35.

created from grassroots movements? How can the presence of women in formal settings translate to meaningful participation and engagement in CVE initiatives? How can governments comprehensively support the WPS agenda and its links to CVE, in particular the relief and recovery aspect, without undermining humanitarian principles and politicising assistance?

In an era when the challenges posed by violent extremism are complex and dynamic, we cannot afford to exclude voices, efforts or leaders who could make all the difference.

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