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Applying Private Sector Media Strategies to Fight Terrorism

A Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program

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Applying Private Sector Media Strategies to Fight Terrorism

Introduction

Representatives of the public and private sector convened under the Intelligence Community (IC) Analyst Private Sector Program and later the Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program in a team focused on Applying Private Sector Media Strategies to Fight Terrorism. The Media Strategies Team conducted meetings with private and public sector representatives from mostly US-based companies and entities from April through July of 2015 and from January to July 2016 to identify strategies that could be applied in US government-led efforts to counter extremist messaging.

Executive Summary

“It is just plain embarrassing that al-Qaeda is better at communicating its message on the Internet than America. As one foreign diplomat asked a couple of years ago, “How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world’s greatest communications society?” Speed, agility, and cultural relevance are not terms that come readily to mind when discussing US strategic communications.”

– Former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, November 2007

The ideological threat of violent extremism is a global problem with domestic implications. Extremist groups conduct continuous communications campaigns, targeting vulnerable and receptive individuals to get them to self-radicalize and conduct violence in the name of extremist ideologies. As evidenced by Americans who have joined terrorist organizations or conducted mass casualty attacks, such as those witnessed in Orlando, Florida, and San Bernardino, California, the implications of violent extremist propaganda campaigns are becoming more complex, more widespread, and more deadly.

The United States government (USG) currently spends billions of dollars each year to understand, communicate with, and engage various audiences, but its efforts in countering extremist propaganda remains fractured, uncoordinated, and inefficient. There have been numerous studies, reports, and reviews identifying problems and recommending solutions but no sustained success. There have also been attempts to enlist America’s private sector to fight terrorism. From the 2002-appointment of former Madison Avenue advertising executive Charlotte Beers as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs to the recent effort to assemble a “Legion of Superheroes of the Madison Avenue crew” in the Fall of 2015, the USG has been enchanted with idea of unleashing the power of, what former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called, “the world’s greatest communications society.”

The Media Strategies Team conducted interviews with over 22 private sector and government entities to understand how the USG and partner nations can comprehensively deal with the intractable problem of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) through the kinds of smart media strategies that private sector marketing, social media, political and other concerns employ. These entities, experienced in developing a brand and dealing effectively with an audience, communicated that the best messaging campaigns use a storytelling approach, have an emotional appeal, and leverage effective visual imagery.

This three-part paper outlines the CVE problem space noting key public and private-sector criticisms of recent CVE approaches; relevant tools in the private sector community, including non-profit and for-profit capabilities on social media; and finally, outlines a potential model of a sustainable engagement communications platform to deal with CVE leveraging to bridge entities. This paper also focuses our efforts to capture the potential of collaborating with the private sector without rehashing previous recommendations for one-off efforts. In this paper, we recommend options for ongoing sustainable collaboration that will encourage the best private sector solutions while saving tax dollars by coordinating resources across government and avoiding duplication of effort.

The team intends for this information to inform analysts, policymakers, and private-sector entities seeking to create lasting solutions in the CVE space. We also aim to broaden the toolbox for government leaders and advocate for a unified approach between the Global Engagement Center (GEC), Department of Defense (DoD), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

I: Defining the Problem

Both foreign and domestic terrorist organizations use sophisticated messaging to promote their brand of violent extremist ideology. The messaging is aimed at receptive or vulnerable targets, with the aim to influence individuals to support or engage in acts of violence in furtherance of that ideology. This may manifest in the form of an individual joining or providing material support to a terrorist organization, or the individual may become a home grown violent extremist inspired by, but not directly collaborating with a terrorist organization. The US is presented with the challenge of countering that messaging.

For example, Islamic violent extremist media campaigns from terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al-Qa'ida, use global influence and minimal effort to achieve high impact results. Despite setbacks in their operational zones abroad and decreased recruitment of foreign fighters from Western countries, the groups' continued calls for violence and attacks against the US continue to be answered. Further, as demonstrated by the attacks in Paris, returning terrorist foreign fighters immersed in the terrorist organizations' messaging pose a dangerous and costly operational threat.

Violent extremist groups, members, and safe havens have dramatically increased abroad in the past 15 years despite the US War on Terror. With the increased use of social media, the appeal of these groups is global- and at home. Kinetic campaigns alone are insufficient as global support enables terror groups to regenerate strength quickly. To degrade their ability to regenerate, more needs to be done to curb the appeal of these groups and promote societal resilience against their messaging in the US. Unless the USG can curb this appeal, kinetic operations amount to little more than scooping water out of a sinking ship without first plugging the hole.

Government Widely Acknowledges Challenge

“Countless studies, articles, and opinion pieces have announced that US strategic communication and public diplomacy are in crisis and inadequate to meet current demand... There is disagreement among the various sources about exactly what changes are required. These may include realignment at DOS, a reorganization at DoD, a coordinating authority at the NSC level, or all of the above...”

- Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations, 2009

Since the beginning of the Global War on Terror, the USG has been aware of the importance of engaging violent extremist groups in the media space, and civilian, military, and political leaders, including both Republicans and Democrats, agree that a key component of winning the "war on terror" is defeating the ideology that supports terrorism. For this effort and others, the USG currently spends billions of dollars each year to understand, communicate with, and engage foreign and domestic populations. These strategic communications activities are conducted through the Department of State (DOS), DoD, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), DHS, and multiple other agencies within the Intelligence Community (IC). The numerous departments and agencies involved are often duplicative, uncoordinated, or ineffective and do not agree on a common lexicon. The strategic messaging against terrorism falls across fields of endeavor, to include public diplomacy, psychological operations, information operations, public affairs, military information support operations, and influence operations. Further, there are ad-hoc coordinating committees and structures housed in DoD and DOS, but they lack the budget or the authority to effectively coordinate government-wide strategic communications.

After the terrorist attacks in 2001, it became clear that the US strategic communications capability had deteriorated since the end of the Cold War. Budgets were deeply cut in the 1990s, and the cadre of valued specialists from the US Information Agency was reassigned to DOS. To address the threat posed by al-Qa'ida and fight the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, DoD dramatically increased its information and influence capacity, in part, because of a lack of civilian capability and capacity. However the growth in DoD's role in strategic communications has been accompanied by conflicts with civilian agencies.

In a 2008 speech, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admitted, “The United States military has become more involved in a range of activities that in the past were perceived to be the exclusive province of civilian agencies and organizations.” A specific example can be found in the dozens of Army Military Information Support Teams (MISTs) working at US Embassies around the world, assisting DOS with strategic communications. With President Obama’s inauguration in 2009 came a new push for “re-balancing” military and civilian capabilities, but a lack of funding, capacity, and professional development left civilian agencies ill equipped to reclaim these responsibilities from the DoD.

The problems with US strategic communications have not gone unnoticed. There have been dozens of reports and studies conducted by the Defense Science Board, the Government Accountability Office, the Congressional Research Service, as well as a variety of think tanks. To address the failure of America’s broadcasting and public diplomacy organizations to function effectively since 9/11, former Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) introduced “The Strategic Communications Act of 2008” (S.3546), and in March of 2010, Congressmen Mac Thornberry (R-TX) and Adam Smith (D-WA) formed a “Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Caucus” to raise awareness of its challenges and to provide multiple perspectives on proposed solutions. Efforts to improve have continued, including the January 2016 announcement that DOS was standing up a new GEC to more effectively coordinate, integrate, and synchronize CVE communications to foreign audiences that undermine the disinformation espoused by violent extremist groups, including ISIL and al-Qa’ida, and that offer positive alternatives. Unfortunately, these efforts have not remedied the still fractured USG strategic communications community.

Findings from the 2016 Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program (AEP)

From interviews with US strategic communication officials and analysts, we identified several key criticisms of past and current practices:

Lack of overarching strategy

A perception exists among private sector participants that there is a lack of a coherent strategy among the whole of the US government. This is reinforced by the shifting nature of entities, the lack of coordination among CVE institutions, and consistent turnover. The recent creation of the GEC underscores this argument, implying that previous efforts were not effective. While the GEC has made progress in attempting to coordinate, integrate, and synchronize messaging to foreign audiences, there is still a lack of an overarching strategy for USG’s efforts to message domestic audiences. The GEC is not budgeted or resourced to

effectively manage a whole of government effort. It is also hampered by legal barriers to strategy and message coordination with agencies involved in domestic communications and operations, such as the FBI and DHS. This has resulted in the development of multiple agency-level strategies.

Bureaucratic obstacles

The USG's bureaucratic structure hinders effective CVE activities. As a result, it is neither nimble nor quick enough to react to or proactively outmaneuver ISIL messaging campaigns. Too many actors, inefficient coordination, and conflicting lines of authority stagnate the process of producing guidance and messaging. The USG is structurally averse to risky, nimble, quick, adaptable, and iterative processes - all of which are required to take on ISIL's media machine.

Inability to compete with volume

ISIL messages overwhelm western governments, including the USG. The USG is not structurally equipped to deliver volume on par with ISIL's current production. By the end of 2014, ISIL had put out 100,000 tweets a day compared to 100 or 200 from the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC)¹. In 2015, there were approximately 200 self-declared anti-ISIL organizations around the world compared to 20,000 identified pro-ISIL accounts on social media. Currently, the USG is unable to compete directly against ISIL's messaging volume. In addition, finding content from third parties, such as nonprofit groups or religious leaders, which the government finds worth backing is also a problem. There is not enough such content, nor is there a mechanism to credibly promote it.

Lack of credibility

The USG is not a credible messenger in Muslim communities. First, its policies in the Middle East are negatively viewed, and it is widely associated with "waging a war against Islam" in the service of Israel. This undermines the USG's ability to persuade Muslim audiences. Secondly, the USG willfully does not engage ISIL on theological grounds. Third, CVE involves all those whom extremists love to hate: intelligence services, police, mainstream preachers, and local communities. Communities around extremists have mixed feelings about messages from a government that is tasked with both protecting and prosecuting Muslims.

¹ The CSCC is an American government enterprise established in 2011 at the direction of the President and the Secretary of State to coordinate, orient, and inform government-wide foreign communications activities targeted against terrorism and violent extremism.

Challenges to audience segmentation

ISIL messaging is more effective than current USG messaging efforts, as demonstrated by ISIL's successful recruitment of youth in the US. While it is unrealistic to reach those already radicalized by ISIL, as the USG has difficulties identifying and segmenting pre-radicalized audiences, it messages many people whom do not require inoculation against ISIL ideology. This could cause unanticipated blowback. The USG and its proxies must direct the right speech towards the right audiences.

Honing the response

The USG is always tempted to respond rationally and critically to the arguments made by ISIL. Countering faith with facts does not convince those who are radicalized or in the process thereof. The USG and its proxies must speak to their values and grievances, or otherwise redirect their attention.

Over reliance on social media tools

The USG is too focused on social media tools. While ISIL has a very successful social media operation, it owes that success to its appeal and message, not to the medium itself. The USG must not focus exclusively on social media, forsaking traditional media or peer-to-peer interactions.

Need for improved coordination

There are abundant examples of regional CVE conferences, but these efforts are not coordinated into a coherent action plan. While CVE often follows the mantra that all efforts should be "local," there are relevant lessons learned that could be exported on an international basis to complement an overarching strategy.

II: Tools and Methods of the Private Sector

Several key themes and tools emerged in meetings and discussions with private sector partners that could be leveraged to enhance government communications efforts in CVE messaging. Private sector partners who provided insight to the team are highlighted in this section.

Find the Right Audience: Segmentation

Private sector partners discussed the importance of segmenting the communications audience to reach the desired groups. There is a spectrum of audiences with different needs and trying to reach all of them with a single message results in a broad and ineffective message. One practitioner emphasized that it is tempting to conflate various groups, but emphasized a highly distinct breakdown of the intended audience to the regional and local level matters in effective messaging. Several companies stressed the need to appeal locally, noting that the themes and cultural context needed to message against, for example, would differ from Syria to Europe to the homeland. Even within the homeland, film executives reported that different messages worked in different parts of the country. Messaging that was not narrowly targeted risked creating more problems than it aimed to prevent; for example, vulnerable people on the cusp could be further radicalized if they receive the wrong message. Partners suggested launching the strategy from desired outcomes and working back to find which audiences, interlocutors or middleman in the conversation, and messages were likely to generate the desired goal. Some suggested considering family members of the radicalized as a potential audience. One partner gave the example of an extremely successful campaign in partnership with the Colombian government that targeted mothers to convince their children fighting with the

“There is no one-size-fits-all approach.”

Company Spotlight: Brandwatch

Brandwatch, headquartered in Brighton, United Kingdom, with US-offices in New York and San Francisco is a social intelligence company. Its analytics platform gathers online conversations every day and provides users with the tools to analyze them to facilitate data-driven business decisions. Clients include including Cisco, Whole Foods, Whirlpool, British Airways, Sony Music, and Dell.

FARC to come home for Christmas in exchange for immunity that was temporarily made available in coordination with the campaign. The campaign resulted in numerous defections.

Private sector tools help in segmentation and achieving a more detailed picture of potential audiences. A key tool is “social listening” in which companies monitor social media outlets to track themes and trends online. Social media analysts monitor the web across 18 million sites a day in multiple languages and are able to build precision around the “noise.” A research company said they try to break down the questions for a client and used the analogy that the client might be interested in the broad category of ice cream, but the tools at their disposal allow them to come back with details on what flavors and combinations people are talking about online. Twitter profiles can be monitored and the audience segmented on available biographic information, interests, and interaction.

Once the audience is identified, understanding its motivations is central to crafting the strategy and message to influence behavior. An advertiser held up the example of Motel 6, lauding its treatment of being thrifty and frugal as a preference and a demographic over an income level, leading to a more lifestyle-driven campaign that seeks an emotional attachment to “downhome” fun over simply emphasizing low cost rooms. (Richards Group)

Find the Right Messenger: Building Credibility through Partnerships

Private sector partners frequently raised the importance of finding the right interlocutor to build rapport with the target group. Several discussants raised the prospect that the US is not a credible interlocutor and indicated behind-the-scenes support would be more effective than direct messaging. One described a “trust deficit” dogging the US government in the aftermath of 9/11 that would complicate messaging efforts, especially among younger

“We have to recruit and maintain a coalition.”

people, and would be best regained through finding partners at the community level. Influence mapping, the practice of identifying drivers of decisions in a group and which parties they are most able to persuade, can prove a helpful tool in identifying potential partners. The aim of counter-messaging is frequently to change a behavior or belief. Messaging strategies will benefit from having partners who understand the mindset of the target audience on the level needed to reach them enlisted to help.

Build partnerships

Several private sector representatives underlined partnerships as a way to overcome this credibility gap, advising to recruit and maintain a coalition of partners to help transmit key messages, and add to the government's limited ability to reach a wider audience. It is also necessary to find the values that drive influential relationships among the target audience and determine the basis of respect in the culture to be influenced. For example, scholars of Islam are at a disadvantage to recruiters, who are typically young enough to understand their target audience and seem approachable, but old enough for potential recruits to look up to. Cultural touchstones are important. One adviser pointed out that the US is a transaction-based economy trying to penetrate more "relationship-based" economies elsewhere in the world. He described a key potential factor for success as building a network of interlocutors to amplify US messages and counseled to not discount the importance of person-to-person exchanges in bolstering these networks. Such groups, according to private sector contacts, could include victims of terrorist violence or family members of terrorists who could help generate more emotionally resonant content. One discussant said some foreign governments were soliciting help from former terrorists to formulate effective messaging; similarly a Google Idea project against Violent Extremism was also enlisting help from former extremists to prevent radicalization. Contacts commonly repeated the importance of identifying and seeding key messages to well-placed partners who hold clout among the desired audience.

One contact highlighted other private outreach could be amplified as the US adopted the role of an "enabler" in cases where a trust deficit prevented it from being an effective "actor." He referred to the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts in Jordan, which Steven Spielberg helped establish, as a possible venue for engagement. He also said to seek out lesser acknowledged sources of messaging and narratives, offering up the example of textbook authors as a group with influence over views of the US.

Anticipate the long game

A key challenge the US faces is the frequent restart to communications strategies, wrought by changes to programs and people, as opposed to the continuity of a unified approach, said one contact. He pointed out that by contrast the "enemy" does not reset to zero but rather builds on failures and successes. The government also would benefit from longer-term engagement with private sector partners. Advertising executives said that the government had approached them for one-off programs, but that ongoing contact would help ensure a more cohesive strategy.

Any partnerships should be envisioned as long-term and require government actors to focus on convincing a network of people in select countries, as one partner phrased it, “that the US cares about their children and grandchildren.” This suggests that any government-led appeal to these groups needs to reflect an interest in lasting relationships and enduring values over short-term communications transactions or one-off events.

Identify and understand messaging channels

Communications professionals tap into youth through focus groups or even spot polling of younger employees to learn how to build and maintain audience through emerging tools, channels, and trends, such as BuzzFeed, an internet page focusing on trending topics; Listicles, bullet-pointed list on the internet; live –video applications such as Meerkat and Periscope; or “celebrities” on video/photo-sharing sites’ YouTube and Instagram. Moreover, Internet channels are probably more willing to take and disseminate messaging in their drive to continually churn out content than more established media outlets such as newspapers.

Social media is clearly a central feature of any messaging strategy with its users blending their online and offline experiences, but it has not erased the need for peer-to-peer or person-to-person engagement, though it has made those connections more diffuse. Advertisers manipulate multiple channels in a bid to increase word of mouth, for example, distributing messaging in a more traditional market to boost activities in another. Having people talking about an ad or commercial across multiple outlets will drive people to seek it out to stay in a public conversation and helps counter the trend of people skipping thought or tuning out advertisements. Any online research or social listening will have to be coupled with a close examination of other outlets to reach less networked populations.

The divide between engaging and messaging will need to be bridged. Private sector campaigns typically involve some kind of feedback loop or opening for further involvement. Social media routinely provides a forum for interaction. Messages “lobbed” into cyberspace will have little effect, especially as compared to ISIL and similar groups, which are hyperactive on social and other forms of media to “invite and lure” potential jihadis, but still rely on some element of personal contact to complete recruitment.

Find the Right Message

The volume and range of social media outlets and interactions have boosted the need to “punch through the noise,” according to numerous private sector contacts. An overarching strategy and standing out with a strong, memorable, and resonant message are critical in the current crowded and fast-moving information environment. Partners warned that swaying opinion and beliefs requires a different approach than marketing a product and counseled to gather insights from social marketers and activist groups to blend with private sector tactics. On the whole, private sector representatives judged the most effective messages were those that told a story, emphasized an emotion appeal over facts, and made strong use of visual images. A focus on more positive, more emotionally gripping themes, rather than facts and talking points that can be dismissed as out of touch or propagandistic was widely urged – partners encouraged developing messages that communicate a human truth or celebrate an idea or value.

Private sector parties said that in many cases they reach out to other demographics for help on what might resonate with a target audience. Some also pointed out the importance of cultural knowledge, knowing which words resonate—or provoke unwanted reactions—with each target group. Jihadist recruiters have an advantage in that they will not shy away from topics young Muslims people are trying to reconcile with Islam but scholars are reluctant to address.

Company Spotlight: Persistence of Vision

*Persistence of Vision is a special effects and production company that specializes in “previs” or previsualization technology. The firm uses computer imagery to compile dynamic storyboards that help filmmakers plan shooting of expensive or complicated scenes. Persistence of Vision has worked on a range of Hollywood productions, including **Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol**, **X-Men: First Class**, and **Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian**.*

Focus on strengths

Private sector partners shared that in their observations, US counter-messaging frequently did not leverage elements of US culture and society known to be admired among the likely desired audience. One partner said that US technology and many businesses are admired

while views of US policies are much more negative. Another suggested a campaign drawing on the themes of American successes in information technology, for example, centered on whom could be the next Bill Gates; he additionally noted the respect accorded to well-known American universities. Others pointed to sports figures or Ted Talks as sources of inspiration.

Film industry executives also contended the USG could integrate American values to positive messaging rather than negative, reactive messaging. Coming from an emotional perspective was viewed as reducing the sense of government messaging as being overly responsive and could lead to messages with more “stickiness” –a term borrowed from the internet used to describe how long someone will remain on a web page. Filmmakers brainstormed broad outlines of a campaign with a structure illustrating American values. They envisioned enlisting US thought leaders and influencers—for example, Mark Zuckerberg or Jon Stewart—and filming them talking unscripted directly to the camera about a prescribed theme related to the CVE effort. The format in itself exemplified the

*“Don’t build
the story
about what
you’re not.
It’s too hard to
go back and
define what
you are.”*

American ideal of freedom of speech while assuring a wide range of voices would promote American values of diversity and inclusion. The executives have produced a similar campaign for Special Forces Officers. Officers across a range of occupations were filmed answering the question “What do you believe in?” Other potential directions for campaigns included one based on humor poking fun at ISIL’s contradictions. The executives underlined how many viewers get news from the Daily Show over NBC’s nightly broadcast. Any campaign should however not solely address the specific threat, but work to address underlying issues and be less reactive in a way that can build resonance over time and lay the groundwork to counter future threats.

The government was encouraged to seek out themes less *directly* related to CVE. It is perceived as hewing too closely to themes of anger at US policy; for example, using data on funding to the Palestinian Authority to demonstrate support for Muslims. Such a focus is unlikely to drive change. Empowerment was seen as a promising focus.

Plan a proactive response

In a social media world and on sound bite-driven media, messages also need to be short, conversational, and direct. It is also important to introduce and repeat key themes and

leveraging opportunities to reinforce these themes by redirecting the focus of traditional or social media outlets. One partner suggested that US messaging frequently does not reflect consistent underlying themes rooted in values and said government actors are typically under the “tyranny of the immediate.” However, there are types of events that can be anticipated and US messengers can more readily respond to international events by preparing a number of messages in advance to circumvent lengthy approval processes. Moreover, having these key messages planned in advance can help ensure less reactive, sustained strategic messages are incorporated and reinforced in quick turnaround communications to press and other outlets. Prepackaged messages could then be released by more automated means if there is a network of message champions established to help diffuse and reemphasize with desired audiences. This sentiment was echoed in a suggestion that the US should have a steady flow of social media accounts transmitting in a domestic medium similar to the Voice of America.² Additionally, government messages should leverage the information cycle to expand penetration of messages, for example, tying a related message to a current event. Advertisers reported keeping calendars of upcoming world events to be able to launch a social media message tying their product to trending news, such as the birth in the British royal family to improve its chances of wider circulation.

Private sector media practitioners said they anticipate critics’ arguments to be able to counter negative messaging more quickly, but cautioned against repeating the negative and unintentionally reinforcing external criticism. Constant countering risks giving up ownership of the narrative. An advertiser noted the trend of competitive advertising had changed as it frequently led companies to a race to the bottom. Partners acknowledged negative messaging can still be effective, but must be approached carefully and only with robust knowledge of the intended audience’s motivations.

² Voice of America is a US government-funded multimedia news source and the official external broadcasting institution of the US that provides programming for broadcast on radio, TV, and the Internet outside of the US.

Changing the Landscape

“You can’t point to past performance because you have to create new initiatives...Look at how government can do this differently.”

Private sectors urged more mechanisms that foster flexibility to counteract the terror groups that can quickly adapt to new circumstances and technology. These groups are able to resonate with potential recruits because they solicit feedback to their actions and ideas online. The government on the other hand is tethered to an all-in, highly centralized and expensive process tied to lengthy approvals. Partners offered instead a model of deploy, test, and evaluate as a more flexible approach that facilitated adapting to new outlets as an audience moves. An advertising executive relayed how the model of his industry has changed. Companies now sought continuous engagement through building opportunities for consumers to experience and interact with a brand or product over a single repeated ad and had moved to a perfect and produce model to experiment and optimize.

Private sector contacts urged government to seek advice from parties experienced in innovation to develop more nimble responses. The owner of a business incubator that fosters Muslim entrepreneurship urged working with startup executives to learn the mindset of responsive reinventing. He indicated that the “80 percent solution” was already a thorny standard and argued that by the time a near full target was achieved, the landscape was likely to have changed and require even newer solutions. Many partners advocated an iterative process and recounted their own strategy of developing a culture of experimentation and prototype. While the success of government programs is based on metrics, partners warned these are difficult to identify for measuring changing minds and that old metrics cannot be the judge of new ideas.

III: Foundations of Sustainable Collaboration

The idea to enlist America’s private sector to fight terrorism is also not a new idea. While we included a few tools and methods we found during our research, we focused on providing options for a sustainable method for continuous private sector collaboration to avoid repeating one-off interactions.

Features of Sustainable Collaboration

After examining over 22 different media groups and entities dealing with the potential public sector CVE space, the Media Strategies team determined that a sustainable CVE summit structure would feature some key characteristics. Sustainable in this context means an ongoing commitment to engagement in the CVE space on some time-scale, either weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Information technology simply moves too quickly to not have a consistent rhythm to the engagement, as terror groups like ISIL continue to leverage cyberspace to very effectively spread their message of hate. Characteristics of sustainable CVE conference experiences are as follows: establishing effective goals and objectives, empowering of credible voices, and supporting massively open online engagement.

Establishing effective goals and objectives

Developing effective goals means opening minds and thinking beyond security into community environments. Security professionals must be willing to look at potential rampant poverty and endemic corruption, and media professionals should look at the security aspects of a particular CVE problem set. The goal set must reflect an appreciation for a fully inclusive audience and focus on the long game. A number of entities work in the public-private messaging space and we need to use these meetings to ensure we are not in each other’s virtual or physical space or, even worse, sending conflicting messages. Above all, we need to focus on a “do no harm” philosophy. The objectives must be able to be translated into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound actions. Much of this will involve the amplification of credible voices.

Empowerment of credible voices

The idea of credible voices is not new, although many of the key voices in Islam were silenced by ISIL’s media machine with its slick, gruesome videos. Some key religious scholars were not aware of how social media worked, referring to one popular platform as

the “book of face.” The voices behind popular media campaigns can provide their states a service and vehicles exist to bring these voices out into the public, such as the Ad Council. While the government can coordinate efforts, its media machine is not often nimble enough to stay ahead of a sophisticated media actor such as ISIL. Enter private sector and academic participants who can aid us with all kinds of capabilities to amplify the voices of former fighters, for example, who can show the horrific reality of ISIL.

Massively open, online engagement

The best practice for a sustainable CVE conference to aid in the amplification of credible voices is to be online in various forms. From Google Hangouts to anonymous chats to video teleconferencing, a summit in a city must be followed up by continuous education in the form of online courses, focus groups, hackathons, and localized capabilities such as Ushahidi³ to spread the objectives and goals moving into the next session. Conferences are all about creating a “fire in the belly” to set a path towards achieving messages that topple the liturgy of hate that is spewed by violent factions, destroying the vision of a jihadi utopia through facts and credible religious interpretations.

³ Ushahidi is an open source project that allows users to crowdsource crisis information to be sent via mobile.

Annual Public-Private Sector Collaboration and Summit Concept

The following describes different options for an annual summit and recurring collaboration throughout the year. While we recognize that some private sector companies will volunteer some of their time and expertise to support CVE efforts out of patriotism, we are proposing a formal structure that will also motivate with the potential for profit.

We propose an annual planning and collaboration cycle that provides for:

- Government identification of problems or challenges
- Private sector identification of potential solutions to problems / challenges
- A multi-agency coordinated review of potential solutions
- Coordinated funding of best solutions

Governance structure

This annual cycle should be led by a government organization for credibility, resourcing, and management, supported by multiple executive sponsors from government, private companies, and community organizations. The lead would coordinate memoranda of agreement with all participating organizations, and this structure would allow for expertise and coverage of both domestic and foreign audiences and messages.

Potential participants

- Host: DHS and/or GEC
- Executive sponsors:
 - Government: DHS, DOS (GEC), DoD (US Strategic Command (STRATCOM), US Special Operations Command (SOCOM), the Geographic Combatant Commands, US Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC), etc.), Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), FBI, selected state and local law enforcement
 - Private Sector: connect through organizations such as Business Executives for National Security (BENS), Ad Council, Aspen, Highlands

NDAs/collaboration agreements should be signed with all participating organizations to:

- *Protect anonymity of participants (as desired or needed by participants)*
- *Provide industry partners a secure way to provide input / discussion*
- *Provide industry partners access to government officials*
- *Guarantee industry partners invitation to an annual summit*

Annual cycle

Instead of providing a specific month-by-month timeline, we provide activities in order through the annual cycle.

Month	Activities
1	• Government review of current problems / challenges
2	• Virtual roundtable
3	• Refine problems / challenges • Applications for Government-Industry exchange program
4	• Select participants for Government-Industry exchange program • Government determines the summit theme
5	• Call for white papers to industry • Virtual roundtable
6	• Select white papers; invite to present at conference
7	• Prepare for annual summit
8	• Annual public-private sector collaboration summit
9	• Coordinate funding for potential solutions with sponsors
10	• Develop / release Request for Proposals (RFPs) to industry
11	• Virtual roundtable
12	• Award contracts to best proposals credible religious interpretations

Proposed activities

The following are proposed activities to conduct each year. These may be further refined or modified.

- Government review of current problems / challenges. The first step in the annual cycle is for the government to identify and analyze current problems and challenges related to CVE communications and engagement. Each executive sponsor should provide its own input to the lead agency. This will allow the IC, DoD, DOS, DHS, FBI and others to provide their perspective on what the true challenges are.

- **Virtual roundtable.** We recommend several virtual collaboration sessions (at months 2, 5, and 11) with public and private sector organizations each year. Each executive sponsor would provide one or more participant. Ideally, this would be limited to no more than 30 participants to support an interactive and engaging discussion. The purpose of the session would be to hear the latest developments and perspectives; this will help the government decide:
 - What capabilities should it have?
 - What questions should it be asking?
 - What could industry really do to support effort?
 - This also helps to set agenda for annual summit, helps to decide topics for call for white papers, helps determine RFIs / RFPs, etc.

- **Refine problems and challenges.** By month 3, the program lead will work with the executive sponsors to refine problems and challenges for the government as a whole. The goal of this process is to determine a prioritized list of challenges that require a solution.

- **Government-Industry exchange program.** We also ask the government to consider an exchange program with industry. This could be fairly small scale, involving just one to three government leaders taking roles in the communications, marketing, or media industry, and an equal number of industry professional taking roles in government for assignments lasting just three to six months. We believe this has the potential to attract those in industry that simply have a passion for the cause (i.e., selfless or looking for a challenge). It would also allow industry leaders to better understand the government’s challenges.

- **Government determines the annual summit theme.** By the end of month 4, the government will have enough information to be able to determine the annual theme for annual challenges and solutions. The government can then announce the theme in preparation for an annual summit.

- **Call for white papers to industry.** As part of a systematic “sources sought” process, the program lead will issue a call for white papers or abstracts from industry based on the prioritized list of challenges and problems related to CVE communications. Industry would be invited to submit their ideas. The government would then

review the submissions and select the most promising solutions. The selected partners would be invited to present at the annual summit.

- Annual public-private sector collaboration summit. We propose an annual event to assemble the best and brightest from government, industry, academia, and non-profit / community organizations to come up with solutions to the threat of violent extremist ideology and propaganda. The following are options for the event:
 - **Timeline** - We recommend executing the event in month 8, which ideally would not be before February or after August of each calendar year.
 - **Host** - DHS and/or GEC. We advise not to have the event hosted by DoD or the IC, as this may be a concern for some potential partners.
 - **Attendees** - We recommend approximately 200 attendees to allow the participation of a wide range of partners while limiting costs. The following is one option for a breakdown of attendees:
 - Industry: 80
 - Academia: 10
 - Think Tanks: 10
 - Non-government organizations / community organizations invited by: 20
 - Government: 80
 - **Cost** - Keep to a low enough level to avoid negative scrutiny of excessive costs. Follow conference approval guidance of summit host(s). We recommend defraying costs with corporate sponsorship and corporate attendance fees.
 - **Locations** - We recommend alternating between three locations: Washington, DC; New York, NY; and Los Angeles, CA. Rotate to and from Washington, DC (e.g., DC, NY, DC, LA, DC, NY...), resulting in 50 percent of events in DC to limit travel costs for government. This would have at least 25 percent on west coast to encourage wider participation and reduce perception as an “East Coast” organization

- **Agenda** - We propose a two- to three-day agenda. Each day would include a keynote speaker, presentations, and break out session with small panels (no more than 20 participants).
 - Day 1: Issues and Requirements. The first day's agenda is focused on providing the government time to describe challenges and problems in more detail. This could be all day or start in the afternoon.
 - Day 2: Fresh ideas. The second day's agenda is focused on providing partners from industry, academia, and community organizations to describe their solutions to challenges and problems. This is designed to be all day.
 - Day 3: Recap of conclusions. The third day's agenda is focused on actionable next steps. We recommend a "take-away panel" that will discuss five to ten things that the host and executive sponsors are going to do. This could be a much smaller group to continue discussions after a closing ceremony for most participants. Day 3 could be just the morning or last all day.
- **Post Summit Actions.** After the summit, the program lead will coordinate with all executive sponsors for funding for the most promising solutions identified by partners. This will help the government fund priorities and avoid duplication of effort between agencies. After selection of priorities to fund, selected agencies can develop and release RFPs to industry with free and open competition. The issuing agency would then award contracts to the best proposals. We recommend considering the solution as most important when rating proposals.

Building Effective Public-Private CVE Campaigns

Working with the public-private sector community to achieve joint aims in countering violent extremist narratives through media

Foundational Information: A CVE Snapshot

~40%
US Gov't past CVE messaging (not seen as credible (NCTC))

P2P
ISIS and Extremist Recruitment Tactics (Al Jazeera)

1000x
Number of tweets ISIS puts out vs credible counter-messages (2014, CSCC)

2,000+
Highly Committed ISIS Twitter Users (JM Berger)

Imperatives for public-private messaging

- Build credible, coordinated messengers and messages (GEC)
- Navigating the Bureaucracy (Ad Council)
- Understand appeal of extremist rhetoric – family, future, faith, authenticity (F3A)
- Power of critical community engagement (all CVE is local)
- Focus on weaving in the story with the facts

Analysis stems from anecdotes, quantitative and qualitative research in the CVE space leveraging 100s of subject matter experts

Winning the War of Words

How is ISIS doing it?
https://www.zerofox.com/wp-content/uploads/post/ISIS_Terror_Social_2015.pdf

How do we beat it?

- **Inclusion** – Include NGOs, Academia and all manner of potential credible voices
- **Best Practices** – learn/emulate the best (Aspen Institute, White House)
- **Focus on the long game** (Conference leveraging virtual technologies as much as possible)
- **Creative Partnerships** (Private Sector Media has been doing this a long time...)



Source: <http://www.mediametainstitute.org/1682-2/>

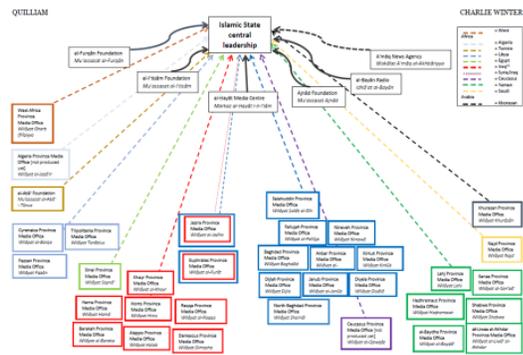


Figure 1
 Source: <http://www.charliewinter.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/IS-Structure-Updated-2014.pdf>

IS wants to be a state – they have multiple departments – our campaigns must seek to delegitimize and this starts by using the word “Daesh”

Notional Conference Topics...

- “Building Peer to Peer Competitions: Engaging Disadvantaged Millennials”
- “Understanding the Defector Narrative: Leveraging the Truth”
- “Myth of Daesh as a State: De-legitimizing a Terror Group”
- “CVE New Thinking: Lessons learned from Sex Trafficking Analysis”

Working with the private sector through entities like the Ad Council and Business Executives for National Security can parlay government knowledge and facts into effective CVE messaging that is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. Above all, we must do no harm to our current efforts to destabilize Daesh and other extremist narratives.

A Call to ACTION

Inspiring Change
Improving Lives
<http://www.adcouncil.org/>

2016 PUBLIC-PRIVATE ANALYTIC EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Private Sector Media Strategies To Combat Terror Group

Business Executives For National Security

- Define outcomes
- Focus on values and facts
- Understand audience, Segment focus
- Effort must be part of a comprehensive strategy

CVE Conference Outline

The **Global CT Forum** outlines an outstanding set of strategies to develop community engagement as part of a CVE strategy. Yet, how do we build the best possible CVE conference? Below are several strategies based on the DHS Public-Private Analytic Exchange Program Sector Media Strategies Team Research.



Learn from Wirebuzz's best practices for conferences from the perspective of sales and marketing personnel.

Establishing Goals and Objectives



A distinct set of goals and objectives for a particular conference needs to be established prior to any serious planning. Planning needs to move beyond "securitized" thinking into a space where initiatives focus on the best needs for the community using techniques such as open, transparent engagement with candor and humor. Look at the wide variety of media that is available.

Learn from the 99 comic book series, which pit heroes who appreciate the 99 virtues of Islam against the forces of chaos and disorder. Created by Naif Al-Mutawa.

Empower the Credible Voices

Some users, especially the Muslim scholars that have engaged with actors in the CVE space like **Amr al-Lah**, do not have a good understanding of social media technologies. Use conference technology from private sector groups such as **Calismen** to capture their inputs and place it smartly on "the book of Face" (Facebook) and other platforms that will have an impact. Bring together a diverse group like NGOs, media professionals, academic, government and even former jihadists to the discussion.



Create A Tentative Agenda



Massively Open Online...Engagement?

Virtual Outreach Techniques

- MOOCs
- Google Hangouts
- Twitter
- Hachothoms
- Relay Chat
- Ushahidi

Knowledge Curation is critical during these types of events. From Washington D.C. to Kenya, regional CVE conferences shine relevant spotlights on all kinds of key issues underlying CVE, such as food insecurity, lack of educational opportunities and limited job prospects. Assess and capture memes and bin knowledge so that contextual and cross-cutting "golden nuggets" of information can be quickly captured and applied.

Private Sector Media Strategies To Combat Terror Group

"Sustainable conferences burn bright but leave a fire in the belly of the participants for more..."



Appendix: Project Partners

The following individuals made up the Media Strategies team.

Member	Organization
Leanne C.	Federal Bureau of Investigation
Neil D.	Deloitte Consulting
Laura E.	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Melanie G.	Thomson Reuters
Samuel I.	Sony Pictures
Krystal L.	Federal Bureau of Investigation
Dan O.	National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Heather P.	Central Intelligence Agency
Pascale S.	Insight Through Analysis, LLC
Fred S.	Rebellion Films
Sam S.	Echo Analytics Group
Stephanie Z.	New York Stock Exchange
Team Champion: Larry S.	Central Intelligence Agency

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All judgments and assessments are solely based on unclassified sources and are the product of joint public and USG efforts.