TACKLING INSURGENT IDEOLOGIES 2.0

Rapporteurs' Report

ORF

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Implementing the Christchurch Call: Towards a Global CVE Agenda

Maya Mirchandani

The year 2019 witnessed some of the most brutal terror strikes in recent memory. Separated by ideology, but united by violence, extremists struck New Zealand and Sri Lanka at the very core of their multicultural, multi-religious national ethos. In India, the suicide attack in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir brought the country to a war-like situation. In neighbouring Afghanistan, as it prepares for elections, candidates who choose to enter the democratic sphere continue to be targeted by Taliban-backed insurgents.

All these incidents serve to highlight just how committed radicalised extremists are to violence, whether they are groups or individuals, and how deftly they loop between violent ideologies, technology, and terrorism. The democratisation of the media space through social media has come with attendant challenges: while technology and platforms may be value-neutral, what happens when malevolent actors use these to their advantage to radicalise and recruit individuals as their foot-soldiers? The loop is evident—whether it was the livestreaming of the attacks in Christchurch, the online radicalisation of the Easter bombers in Sri Lanka and their use of digital platforms to communicate during the attack, or the virality of a video message on social media by the Pulwama attacker.

Christchurch also brought to the forefront another key challenge confronting governments, civil society actors and researchers working to develop effective policies that counter violent extremism (CVE). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to tackling the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, and asks member states to promote inclusion and cohesion within their borders, to engage with relevant local communities, and to address conditions that abet the spread of violent extremism by empowering youth, families, religious and cultural organisations. The Christchurch attacks underscored the huge gulf in the willingness of member states to acknowledge the reality that one kind of violence often feeds another.

Yet, some good must emerge from the bad. Indeed, 2019 saw the emergence of a fresh resolve to mobilise effective responses to violent extremism. **The Christchurch Call to Action Summit** that took place in Paris in March 2019 was the first time that States and technology companies attempted to ideate and execute a common and coordinated strategy to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. Seventeen countries, including India, became signatories to the Christchurch Call, but it is imperative that more countries sign on. As the world continues to grapple with the aftermath of the fall of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and deal with the challenge of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in home countries where they are no longer welcome, questions abound on whether rising tensions between religious and racial identities fuel radicalisation across divides. While creating CVE policies, it is imperative to tackle identity- and ideology-based polarisation, and combat hate-fueled rhetoric in public spaces to ensure that these do not drive individuals towards violence.

As the global political barometer increasingly shifts towards insularity, protectionism and propaganda-driven populism across countries, the CVE community is faced with a varied set of challenges. Whether it is on the question of dealing with returning ISIS FTFs, and preventing their move to different geographical theatres; or combatting majoritarian groups that rally around grievances, race or religion and fuel extreme violence—we need to ask ourselves how much more vulnerable we are today, and

identify where the faultlines lie. While addressing these challenges, it is equally necessary to ensure that the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are balanced as governments address security priorities.

It is with the desire to see more global conversation on the manifold ideologies that drive violence and the responsibility of governments, platforms and civil society engaged in CVE initiatives that the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) organised the second iteration of Tackling Insurgent Ideologies, with the theme "Implementing the Christchurch Call: Towards a Global CVE Agenda." We brought together a diverse group of policymakers, researchers and practitioners involved in the process of developing strategies that deal with the proliferation of radicalism and violence to debate and discuss best practices, learnings and a way forward.

Inaugural Session

Nandini Sarma

In 2018, the conference, "Tackling Insurgent Ideologies" organised by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) focused on South Asia and the security challenges in the region. In 2019, the scope of the conference was expanded in light of the more recent terror incidents in different parts of the world, such as the one at Christchurch in New Zealand in March 2019 and the one in Sri Lanka a month later. In India, the Pulwama attack of February 2019 brought the nation to a war-like situation, and the ensuing tension continues to challenge the national security apparatus.

Considering these incidents, the Christchurch Call to Action Summit was held in Paris in March 2019. For the first time, state agencies and technology companies came together to execute a common coordinated strategy to combat extremist activities. In the fight against terrorism, one of the most pervasive challenges has been the seamless use of technology, whether in the form of livestreaming, online radicalisation or the viral messages circulated on social media. Seventeen signatory countries attended the summit, including India, which is in a unique position to engage and lead this conversation. It is imperative that more countries join the initiative. With this in mind, the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) organised the second iteration of the conference, to facilitate global conversations on the manifold ideologies that drive violence and the role of government platforms and civil society in addressing the challenges.

In 2016, Samir Saran (President, ORF) had highlighted the importance of conducting serious research on the subject of countering violent extremism. The research would target the

youth, who are the largest user base of technology. Subsequently, the "Voice + Challenge" was launched in 2018, involving over 60 universities and colleges, to engage the youth in a conversation regarding the misuse of technology—specifically, the internet—and the ways to tackle it.

It is important to keep the internet a safe and secure space, since it is used as a medium of communication, globalisation and wealth creation. Thus, the digital space must be governed by a code of conduct, which must be implemented urgently, before the state steps in with largely ineffectual regulations. In formulating a solution, some aspects must be kept in mind.

1. The citizens, who form the internet's user base, must be involved. It is crucial to tap into the diverse set of ideas that exist out there and to fashion evolutionary solutions.
2. The solutions must be polysemic, because the internet is polysemic, i.e. it is universally used.
3. The solutions must target the most vibrant communities that use the platform.
4. The states must be reassured that their sovereignty, responsibility and agency will not be diminished.
5. The solution to a dynamically evolving technology cannot solely be a fixed legislative and regulatory framework.

Thus, the regulation of technology must include two central agents: the technology itself and the users, whose capacity-building and literacy must be enhanced. For the latter, it is imperative to also engage with school children, who are at an age where it is easiest to learn certain digital ethics.

Ankhi Das' work focuses on Facebook's approach to fighting terrorism and terrorist content online. Facebook has a zero-tolerance policy for such content. To this end, a holistic approach has been undertaken: partnering with experts in this area, as well as

civil society and governments and using a variety of methods such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and human reviews. Over the years, Facebook has expanded its capacity to deal with the issue, introducing new tools and seeking partnerships with institutes such as the ORF to enhance its research capacities. Further, Facebook supported the Global Call to Action to fight against terrorism and its nine-point agenda. It is now time to determine how best to operationalise the agenda and involve local governments in the process.

The conference reiterated the importance of research in detecting terror groups (despite their ever-shifting identities) and enforcing strict rules against their presence in the platform.

Dangerous Evolutions: Towards a Global Response to Insurgent Ideologies

Aarshi Tirkey and Swati Pant

Terrorist attacks are evolving and taking different forms across the world, posing new challenges. To tackle them, it is necessary to adopt a multistakeholder approach involving the government, civil society, technology platforms, and the research community. Together, they must formulate an evidence-based policy approach and establish a global response to insurgent ideologies.

David Wells (Head, Research and Analysis, United Nations Counterterrorism Executive Directorate) stressed that the focus is now on involving a greater number of civil society and research organisations to collect evidence-based information that will help counter violent extremism. Since the terrorism threats that countries face are shifting, the trends in counterterrorism are also changing. Research organisations not only help in identifying new trends in the spread of extremist ideologies and behaviour, but also illuminate how those engaged in extremist activities are using the internet to spread propaganda. Further, a broader approach to this problem is equally important, and will require stakeholders to maintain the centrality of upholding human rights in their efforts and policies.

While many terrorist organisations such as the Al-Qaeda and ISIS have been defeated militarily, their ideology persists. Thus, there is a constant threat of these ideas gaining more ground and finding new sympathisers. With more than a third of the Afghan population connected to social media, radical content that is

amplified in these platforms can succeed in attracting younger generations. For instance, the return of Al-Qaeda in Northern Afghanistan has witnessed support from both the educated youth and the rural poor. Moreover, even as outfits like the Taliban are supported by a mere 10 percent of Afghanistan's population, they have managed to obtain a place in the Afghan peace talks, because they are loud and violent enough to be noticed.

A global debate is currently ongoing about combining CVE policies with a vigilant security apparatus. Ramiro Martinez (Foreign Affairs Officer, US State Department) noted that the American CVE strategy focuses on five areas: countering terrorist ideology; monitoring use of the internet by terrorists; community engagement; rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), their families and partners; and a sharper focus on role of women, both as victims and perpetrators of violence. Out of these five, rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs has progressed the least due to lack of political will and capacity within the government.

Europe also faces complex challenges in the repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation of radicalised people who have visited territories controlled by terrorist organisations. Matteo Pugliese (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) drew from the European experience and said that while many people believe that such FTFs could be a potential security threat (despite no evidence of crimes committed), others argue that repatriating and rehabilitating them is an important part of a holistic, forward-looking de-radicalisation strategy. Countries have started focusing on the role of civil society, local communities and the youth in such efforts.

Technology companies and social media platforms are one of the biggest stakeholders in CVE strategies. There is no place for hate speech and terrorism on social media platforms, stressed Dina Hussein (Counterterrorism and Dangerous Organisations Policy Manager at Facebook). For tech and social media companies, the absence of a universal definition of 'terrorism', 'hate speech' and other associated terminologies has been a challenge. For example,

Facebook is an international platform with policies that are applied globally. This makes it difficult to curb online hate speech or violent content, considering how their interpretation differs across geographies, cultures and languages. In this context, research, technological advancements and multistakeholder engagements and collaborations play an important role in swiftly responding to extremist content online. International platforms, such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) and new technologies like hash-sharing databases can be crucial in designing a swift and coordinated strategy against such content.

With the meteoric rise of social media platforms, the role of traditional media has become fractured. The culture of instantaneous and viral news delivered via social media has created echo chambers, where consumers are more likely to see content that align with their own views. According to Saad Mohseni (Founder and CEO of Moby Group, a news network company in the Middle East), while humans have always been susceptible to bias, with immense capacity for vitriolic speech or hatred, echo chambers tend to bring out the worst in people. Thus, social companies are partly responsible for the attacks in which their platform plays a part. Whether or not these companies and this particular issue should be the subject of legislation, is part of a larger debate.

Apart from jihadist extremist ideology, there has been a significant rise in far-right extremism, neofascism and racially motivated terrorism, such as the 2011 Norway attacks, the 2017 Charlottesville car attack, and the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings. While there are certain similarities between jihadist and far-right terrorism, there are differences as well, necessitating a different form of policy response to each.

Today, insurgent ideologies continue to evolve in their form, structure, content and target audience. Given the dynamic nature of the problem, framing a coordinated global response is difficult, but not entirely impossible. With a multistakeholder approach supported by cutting-edge research and technology, a modest beginning can be made to tackle these threats in different geographies across the world.

Panel 2

No Enemy at the Gates: Examining State Responses to Christchurch, Pulwama and Easter Bombings

Khalid Shah

New Zealand's response to the Christchurch attack of 2019 was grounded in its rejection of all forms of violent extremism, irrespective of the ideology that lies behind it. It was also a reaffirmation of the country's resolve to develop a tolerant and inclusive society that will not abandon its progressive outlook at a time of grave national crisis, while maintaining a holistic approach in dealing with terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE).

Christchurch served as a reminder to the world that no country is immune from the scourge of the ideologies of hatred. The attack was an assault on New Zealand's core values of openness, tolerance, diversity and inclusivity. In response, the government and community mobilised to reject the ideology of white supremacism. Civil society overwhelmingly rallied behind the victims of violence, while at the government level, Prime Minister Jacinda Arden led a path-breaking effort to delegitimise not only violent extremism but also the technological tools that facilitate and amplify it.

New Zealand's approach to counter-terrorism and CVE employs both hard and soft means. The hard measures include law enforcement and security measures, which are coupled with soft measures such as building inclusive communities to address the root causes of terrorism and resisting all forms of extremism. A notable feature of New Zealand's response was the recognition of

the immense harm caused by the weaponisation of the internet. The country made a serious effort to galvanise governments, the tech industry and civil society in its efforts towards eliminating terrorism and violent extremist content online, but without undermining freedom of expression. This effort culminated in "Christchurch Call," which seeks actions from governments and tech companies in dealing with extremist content online and building resilient communities.

Like the Christchurch attacks, the Easter Sunday bombings in Colombo in 2019 sent shockwaves through the global community. After the 30 years of wars against LTTE insurgency, Sri Lanka had witnessed a decade-long peace until 2019. It was an unexpected attack for the country and its people, and served as a warning to remain vigilant against terrorism. Equipped with the experience of dealing with an insurgency, the armed forces jumped into action as soon as the government called for a national emergency. Within a month, the government managed to arrest most of the individuals who were involved—directly or indirectly—in the attacks. The attacks caused deep fissures in the Sri Lankan society, and a curfew had to be imposed to prevent sectarian violence. The hateful discourse on the web, in particular, proved to be the most challenging, forcing the government to implement an internet shutdown.

To the west of India, Afghanistan has witnessed many decades of war, conflict and terrorism. Currently, there are approximately 20 terrorist groups in the country involved in hundreds of brutal attacks every year. In the aftermath of 9/11, Afghanistan became the battlefield for the war on terrorism. Peace negotiations with the Taliban could have inspired a great deal of hope. The power-sharing agreement, which was discussed in the negotiations, could have been utilised as a tool to make the Taliban more accountable. However, the 17-year-old US-led war has not seen any victories. Some scholars suggest that the generational transition within the Taliban could help in reintegrating the foot soldiers of the group back into society and ending the war.

India's challenges of cross-border terrorism—on the northern and eastern borders—are not comparable to the situation in Sri Lanka and New Zealand, since most terror attacks in the country have been sponsored by external groups. Over the decades, India has taken many measured actions against the countries that have aided and abetted terrorism in the country. The pre-emptive Balakot airstrike, for example, is a tactic that has been frequently employed across the world. In India, the focus has now moved towards taking action against the states sponsoring terrorism in Indian soil.

At the same time, however, grievances within various sections of the population have led to internal extremism. These grievances are addressed through development and political measures. Being a historically assimilative country, India has managed to create a resilient society with syncretic cultures. This ability to assimilate and accommodate has kept India free from the ideological conflicts that other countries are currently facing. For instance, within India's large population, there has been minimal participation in the Islamic State. While India has witnessed small conflicts, which are likely to continue, there has been no large societal conflict to speak of.

Deciphering the Manichean Binary: Alpha Politics, Extreme Violence

Nivedita Kapoor

Dutch academician Cas Mudde defines 'populism' as a belief in the purity of people in the face of elite corruption. The global rise of populism in recent years has necessitated an examination of its core elements. Dhruva Jaishankar (Fellow, Brookings India) noted this in his opening remarks at the panel dealing with linkages between populism and extreme violence. Jaishankar observed that some of the factors that have fuelled populism include relative economic deprivation, lack of opportunity, scepticism about checks and balances in the government, hyper-partisanship, belief in the purity of certain people, and scepticism about international obligations.

While populism is a global phenomenon, it gets replicated in different forms in different countries. Nevertheless, Salim Çevik (Visiting Fellow, German Institute for International and Security Affairs) identified one root cause, i.e. a change in the content of politics from economics to culture. This, he argued, had resulted in the conversation moving from issues of wealth and resource distribution to identity-based questions, which are harder to negotiate. In Turkey, for example, populism gained ground due to a sustained focus on cultural and identity-based issues in the political realm. The resulting decline of democracy and institutions did not happen through revolutionary means, but over a long period of time in a peaceful manner. This serves as a warning for other democracies facing populist regimes.

Vaiju Naravane (Professor, Ashoka University) traced the history of populism in Europe, attributing its rise to a combination of

factors, e.g. the decline of institutions; the public sentiment that national sovereignty has been taken over by a higher sovereign entity of Brussels, creating amongst people a sense of loss of control over their lives vis-à-vis their own governing structures; and the economic deprivation of the poor, as the elites have become wealthier. Haroro Ingram (Senior Research Fellow, George Washington University) highlighted how economic deprivation has led to a heightened sense of insecurity among people, in turn further intensifying populism. Naravane noted that economic deprivation has stemmed from complications arising out of globalisation. To this, Ingram added that rapid advances in technology have worsened the deprivations.

To deal with this situation, Naravane proposed the creation of a new social contract, which will include elements such as a basic universal income. This will help quell the discontent brought on by the loss of jobs. Çevik, too, reiterated the link between economic insecurity and the rise of radicalism, the prevention of which is an important goal for societies.

Further, Ingram pointed out that while there might not be direct causation between populism and violent extremism, both thrive on linking "the Other" with a sense of crisis, and they seek to leverage social feelings of uncertainty. Having created this enemy, they then project themselves as being the only ones capable of solving the crisis. Once the trinity of social trust, satisfaction with democracy and trust in authority/expertise is eroded, people become more susceptible to polarising, simplistic narratives peddled by both extremists and populists. Çevik added that organising politics as a struggle amongst communities for limited resources enables leaders to stigmatise a minority. This narrative provides a fertile breeding ground for populism. Naravane noted that there has been an intentional manipulation of the people's anger, which must be analysed to devise preventive mechanisms.

Lorena Pacheco (Program Officer, Club de Madrid) scrutinised new technologies for their impact on the phenomenon. In her remarks, she highlighted the role of social media and its increasing

popularity in the rise of populism. Social media platforms specifically build on the fear and uncertainty of society, stoking discontent. The rise of artificial intelligence, projected to usher in a capitalistic technological revolution unseen so far in global history, is also likely to cause disruption and must be examined carefully.

Panel 4

Rohingyas: Stateless, Marginalised, Radicalised?

Swati Pant

Following a state-led military campaign in 2012, 1.2 million Rohingyas have been displaced from the Rakhine province in Myanmar. Indeed, the Rohingya refugee crisis has become one of the biggest humanitarian crises in recent history. Myanmar's neighbour, Bangladesh, has provided shelter to the majority of the stateless population. However, other countries in the region have been reluctant to provide refuge, citing as a reason the growing Islamic radicalisation amongst the community and labelling it a "security risk." Are the Rohingyas—described by the United Nations (UN) as one of the world's most persecuted communities—a regional security threat, or is this merely a smoke-screen for countries to shun involvement?

Maung Zarni, an exiled Rohingya activist, explained that the displacement started as a social engineering project by the Myanmar government in the late 1960s. The Rohingyas were the single-largest Muslim community in Myanmar. They were settled in the Bay of Bengal area, adjacent to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), and were thus considered a security threat. To dilute the communal concentration, the government first attempted to relocate Buddhists to the area. In 1978, after this largely peaceful endeavour failed, the government made the first violent attempt to suppress the Rohingyas. The very presence of Rohingyas was not documented or talked about in Myanmar, making them an invisible and alienated community. Till date, this systematic state suppression and aggression against the community continues unabated. This, despite a lack of any evidence that the community as a whole, supports or is involved in religion-based terrorism.

There is one designated terrorist organisation that belongs to the community, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army; however, its only demand has been that Rohingyas be given the status and rights of citizenship.

Kanchan Gupta (Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation), differed from Maung Zarni, stating that one of the demands in the charter of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army is a separate state for the Rohingyas, which can be interpreted as a threat. Mr. Gupta asserted that there is radicalisation amongst the Rohingyas, which did lead to some anti-Buddhist violence. This, in turn, triggered the state-led pre-meditated violence against the entire community. However, state-led violence cannot be justified or legitimised, since government processes or actions must be temperate, proportional and democratic.

According to Meenakshi Ganguly (Human Rights Watch), in the cycle of violence, often, only the majoritarian perspective gets properly represented. Globally, the Rohingya issue is viewed as religion-based violence. However, one of the biggest reasons for the discrimination against the Rohingyas is their ethnicity. The Myanmar state considers the Rohingyas "Bangladeshi Muslims," who belong in Bangladesh or in the Indian subcontinent. On their part, the Rohingyas are not opposed to being repatriated to Myanmar provided they are ensured safety, dignity and citizenship rights, which they have been denied for decades.

Despite being one of the biggest players in the region, India has not been proactive in the crisis, viewing the migration not as a humanitarian crisis but as 40,000 Muslims at the country's borders. This stance, while disappointing in light of India's long history of providing refuge for persecuted people, is perhaps driven by its experience with refugees in the past. The permanency of refugees in any country is not acceptable, and once the political unrest in the home country has been resolved, it is expected that the refugees be repatriated. For example, India provided shelter to Tibetan refugees and continues to do so, since they are still persecuted in their homeland. However, during the partition of

East and West Pakistan, of the 10 million East Pakistan refugees that India accepted, only one-third went back even after the crisis was resolved and Bangladesh came into being. The rest remained in India.

The power vacuum created by India's apathy has allowed China, the other major power in the region, to hijack the situation by taking charge of a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Further, China has blocked all UN resolutions pertaining to the conflict. K. Yhome (Senior Fellow, ORF) suggested that the reasons behind China's leading role in resolving this ethnic conflict are multifold. In 2012, when the crisis began in earnest, Myanmar and China's relations were strained due to the new political leadership in the former. China wanted to not only regain lost political ground but also gain a strategic advantage in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Myanmar's new political regime was sympathetic to the US and other Western governments, and China wanted to weaken these ties with the West. The Rohingya refugee crisis can only be resolved regionally. As an intermediary in this crisis, it is expected that China will take steps that further its own goals. India should consider taking a leading part in the resolution of the Rohingya crisis by overseeing and facilitating a repatriation process that is safe and verifiable. To this end, India can leverage its historically amicable relationship with Myanmar.

While Bangladesh has sheltered the refugees, it does not want to provide any permanent arrangement for them. The refugee camps are situated in the Bay of Bengal area, which receives heavy rainfall and cyclones yearly. Only temporary structures have been provided, and even cyclone shelters (which necessarily must be strong, permanent constructions) are not being built. The children are not provided any formal education; consequently, their education is left to makeshift madrasas. The global refusal to address the issues of the displaced Rohingyas has made the persecuted community susceptible to extremism or violent extremism, in the face of forced marginalisation and a lack of sufficient assistance.

Synthetic Truth: When Perception Kills

Premesha Saha

The panel, 'Synthetic Truth: When Perception Kills', discussed the spread of fake news via technology (specifically, social media), by non-state actors and those who want to create fissures between governments and citizens. Bombarding people with misinformation and fake news has become the new tactic employed by different actors to shape perceptions and aid their agenda of polarisation. Jency Jacob (Managing Editor, BOOM) illustrated this by pointing out that in Kashmir, various stories are being projected about atrocities against Muslims. Since most of these are misinformation, they almost constitute an active war being waged online. India has a large online population, and quite a few feel that it is their job to correct a perceived historical wrong or push a particular political agenda. Most of the population responsible for spreading fake news are also highly educated. The frequency of fake news increases during certain periods, such as in the run-up to big events like elections. According to Rema Rajeshwari, the District Police Chief of Mahboobnagar, Telangana, the largely unmoderated discussions that happen on social media can influence people to engage in extremist and violent activities. Social media has been hijacked by anti-social elements, and there is a connection between online harm and offline hatred. This is the biggest law enforcement challenge that India now faces, even if the country has not experienced an incident of mass killing by a terrorist outfit.

Extremist groups also create false truths to discredit regimes and breach the trust between citizens and the government. According

to Mercy Abang, a journalist with Al Jazeera English and NewsWireNGR, terrorists take advantage of the faultlines in society. Boko Haram is one such group that has taken advantage of the faultlines of the state. In countries such as Nigeria, when one talks of extremism, the people participating are often victims who have experienced abuse in the hands of state forces. In this scenario it is the state forces who are clearly at fault. An example of this cited by the panelist is the extra-judicial killings of three children in Nigeria.

Abhinandan Sekhri (co-founder and CEO of *Newslaundry*) reflected on how a distinction can be drawn between an insurgent ideology or group, on one hand, and the government that is trying to create the rift.

Rema Rajeshwari (District Police Chief of Mahboobnagar, Telangana) observed that fake news is also a social problem that needs a collective response. Since nearly everyone today has access to smartphones regardless of literacy level, anyone can log onto WhatsApp or watch a YouTube video and forward it without applying any sense of circumspection over the content. Therefore, digital education is required, and not only accountability on the part of the social-media companies. News media can also often disseminate incorrect, imbalanced information; therefore, what is the news media's role in both magnifying the problem and creating solutions?

Ms Abang observed that with the widespread use of social media, media houses are forced to undertake a lot of self-checks. These days, citizens are more aware as well, and they are quick to check the truth behind media reports. Sometimes, state agencies are also involved in spreading fake news. Mr Sekhri wondered whether fighting fake news is a priority for governments or state actors at all. Jency Jacob also questioned the Indian government's lack of policy on taking digital education to a mass level. Digital education should be a part of the school curriculum; the government does not seem too keen to push this as a part of an organised strategy as they have vested interests in fake news.

Rema Rajeshwari noted that issues arising from malicious content on social media—disruption, mass fear, and hysteria—have been on the rise. She pointed out instances such as the case of a social media-fuelled mob lynching in West Bengal. In response, the approach has been to come out with local solutions to what is now a global problem. Thus, her team in Telangana have been teaching the local communities how to self-regulate especially on social media. The government has drafted intermediary guidelines, and the Supreme Court of India has issued preventive and remedial measures to tackle the problem. States like Manipur have initiated regulations and laws against mob lynching.

Despite the initiatives taken to deal with this issue, progress has been at a snail's pace. As Rema Rajeshwari pointed out, methods need to be developed to protect institutional integrity and nurture the citizen-police relationship amidst sustained online digital propaganda.

Panel 6

Insecure in South Asia: A New Wave of Radicalisation

Angad Singh

With the ongoing Afghanistan peace talks, a gradual withdrawal of NATO troops, and Islamic State (IS) offshoots establishing themselves in South Asia, there are growing concerns over internal and external terror threats in the region. The panel attempted to understand the changing dynamics in South Asia, and the options for responding to violent extremism, particularly in light of recent developments on the India–Pakistan front and evidence of regional inroads made by IS.

Ahmed Hashim (Associate Professor, Military Studies Programme, RSIS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) observed that more in practice rather than theory, there is a blurring of lines between insurgency and terrorism. Terror groups are growing more capabilities, and insurgent groups are using terrorist tactics much more than in the past.

On the ideological front, he noted, there are three key concepts underpinning Islamic radicalisation in South Asia. First, that radicalisation is increased by the sense of victimhood, oppression, and socio-economic marginalisation. Second is the notion of 'Ghazwa-e-Hind', or the reference in Islamic Hadith of a 'Battle for India', which was a concept embraced by Al-Qaeda head Ayman al-Zawahiri as he built alliances with Pakistani jihadist groups and expanded into South Asia. Last is the notion, borrowed from Carl Schmitt, of 'absolute enmity'—and the clash between Islamism and majoritarian religious nationalism in India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other States in the region.

Flagging the increasing role of families in the radicalisation process, Hashim asserted that families are difficult to penetrate because they interact face-to-face. These are also neither poor nor marginalised families—for example, those involved in recent attacks in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. As a result of these familial factors, terror and insurgent groups are developing a strategy of fracturing societal cohesion, resilience, and inter-communal harmony. This is an old strategy of 'divide and conquer', but essentially provoking communities to attack one another, facilitated by the notion of absolute enmity. Instead of meeting government forces head-on, they are working by disaggregating society.

Shaheen Afroze, Director for Research at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, pointed out that while Bangladesh is near-homogenous (ethnically 99 percent Bengali and 90 percent Muslim), with a history that has been a "happy blend of secular Bengali culture and deeply entrenched religious identity steeped in Sufism", the emergence of Islamist extremist groups has affected this harmonious cultural system. Recent trends show that educated youth from affluent families are also engaging in such activities, and this new phenomenon has given rise to a generation that is technologically literate and well-versed in the use of social media, thereby garnering more support and boosting recruitment. This new wave of technologically literate militant groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Hizb-ut Tawhid, and the Ansarullah Bangla Team is playing a pivotal role in propagating the global jihadist ideology in the local languages.

Evidence indicates that Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism in Bangladesh are homegrown but globally linked phenomena. While the formation of groups takes place internally, the radical ideologies and inspiration come from external sources.

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, Founder and President of Mantraya, flagged the changing dynamics of threats in Afghanistan and Pakistan. While Taliban and Al-Qaeda links remain, despite assurances to the contrary, the presence of the Islamic State in

Afghanistan–Pakistan, and the infighting between Taliban, Al-Qaeda and IS are all causes for concern. Continued fighting in Afghanistan points at the Taliban's desire to negotiate from a position of strength and extract a favourable peace deal. This is problematic in the precedent it sets for other terror groups in the region—an insurgent group that has not been defeated coming to the negotiating table and dictating terms. There are also questions around the timing of the negotiations themselves, their conclusion relative to the Afghan election, and ownership of the outcome. An external deal imposed on Afghanistan would look and be implemented differently compared to a deal with greater Afghan ownership.

Ms. D'Souza also noted that between countering and preventing extremism, attention is usually given to the former. In the Afghan case, the education and economic arguments do not hold merit the way they do in Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, yet not enough is being done to address this in Afghanistan.

Looking at India, IS has not made inroads as far as physical presence is concerned, but has made calls for Indians to join and has received recruits, particularly from the southern state of Kerala, where radicalised returnees are a clear issue. Online radicalisation has been under-studied and needs much greater attention, particularly because there is precedence for educated, employed youth taking up on behalf of IS online, for instance, the case of a software worker in Bengaluru three years ago.

Stephen Tankel (Associate Professor at American University and Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security) addressed the panel title head-on, saying historical context is important while talking about a 'new wave of radicalisation'. Radicalisation and recruitment do look rather different today, with social media being a principal factor compared to 30 years ago. He also raised a more practical mercenary aspect of the problem, stating that IS pays better than the Taliban and that is one of the reasons they have been able to recruit effectively in Afghanistan. While IS in Iraq and Syria might be territorially defeated, they are

not gone and IS-Khorasan has seen and continues to see investment, chasing regional expansion.

As for the Afghan peace process itself, there is still a lot that remains uncertain in terms of what can be expected. The US has said a drawdown would be 'conditional,' but no one has articulated what those conditions might be—there is no clarity on specific security guarantees, on whether the Taliban and Afghan government could come to an agreement, and if they could not, what would happen to a drawdown, and where the Haqqani Network fits into all this. Tankel highlighted the fact that Haqqani is a 'more global' organisation than the Taliban, making that particular problem broader than the Afghan peace process. In a similar vein, IS-Khorasan remains unaddressed, so accords with the Taliban alone will not solve all issues in the region.

ORF Senior Fellow, Sushant Sareen raised another significant concern—that of enforceability of guarantees secured through the Afghan peace process. He noted that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are closer today than they were at the time of the 9/11 attacks. The fear in India, he said, is that whatever happens in Afghanistan will have an impact in India, and there are apprehensions about Taliban-type fighters coming into Kashmir. But having faced that threat in the 1990s, Indian counter-terror officials are confident that they can handle such fighters. The more pressing problem is Pakistan, which stands to absorb a 'transfer of the technology and tactics of terror.' The success of the Taliban will enthuse a large number of bad actors and could become a driver for replicating some of those tactics in India.

On the issue of radicalisation itself, Sareen said that while social media and the internet are being used by Pakistan to instigate hate and violence, in general terms, violence in India is an 'action–reaction cycle.' This implies that to speak about just one form of radicalisation is to hide from other aspects of radicalisation that are taking place. Both majority and minority radicalisation in country 'feed off each other,' and that is what should concern India, not the odd attack from external actors.

Stephen Tankel also made the point that while social media is certainly an accelerant for radicalisation, it is also increasingly being used as a tool to plan and execute attacks, as seen in Bangladesh and other places. Moderator and ORF Senior Fellow, Naghma Sahar noted the extent to which IS indoctrination and recruitment have been successful in Kerala entirely through social media and without any physical presence in the state. Tankel also claimed that what drove people to join previous incarnations of Indian jihadist movements were communal factors, and this likely remains a major driver of radicalisation even today.

Toxic Citizenship: When Radicals Come Home

Ketan Mehta

A large part of the current debate on violent extremism is gradually shifting in focus to understanding a state's response to fighters that are motivated by violent ideologies and who return to their country of origin. This emerging phenomenon was the theme of the panel, 'Toxic Citizenship: When Radicals come home.'

Nooshin Waheed (Chair, Maldivian Democracy Network) observed that countries are yet to come up with a concrete framework for dealing with the return of fighters back home. From a state's perspective, radicalised individuals pose a security threat and therefore need to be provided avenues that will enable them to disengage from violence. Historically, Maldives has refused to even acknowledge that it has emerged as a major contributor of fighters; this dynamic is now changing. Maldivian authorities are increasingly looking at the de-radicalisation programmes of other countries to work out their own solutions.

In other parts of the world, the response lacks coherence due to the various complexities attached to it. For instance, though Europe has witnessed the inflow of foreign fighters since the 1970s and the 80s, today it is witnessing the return of women and children in large numbers from war zones. There is no particular trend: while in some cases, returning individuals de-radicalise themselves, in others they become facilitators of future attacks. Europe's response to the phenomenon is largely determined by the local politics of the country and its leadership. Its attitude is also influenced by the existing public mood in the continent that further deters the rehabilitation of returnees.

The return of radicalised fighters is a two-pronged problem for the state apparatus as it involves both law enforcement agencies and facilitating the fighters' re-engagement with society. The rehabilitation of returning fighters requires the participation of community as well as state agencies. It is clear that due process needs to be followed up by the law enforcement agencies if returning fighters are guilty of violating the law; however, it is unclear how de-radicalisation programmes should be implemented. In India, there seems to be a lack of a coherent policy on the matter. Saudi Arabia's de-radicalisation programme, on the other hand, is claimed to be successful by Riyadh.

In Australia, the government's approach has also been two-pronged, with extensive legal backing. There are around seven pieces of legislation aimed at governing and managing returning foreign fighters. The authorities have resorted to 'tech bashing', or putting the blame on social media platforms for the phenomenon of returning fighters. In Australia's case, it has been observed that around 30 percent of fighters are directly related to a network that was previously involved in extremism.

Additionally, the vast number of Europeans going to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State has changed the dynamics of the problem. Earlier, the focus of the state was to deal with those who have come back, rather than to tackle those who have gone abroad to join extremist groups. Different countries are pursuing their respective approaches in dealing with the issue, considering their varied judicial systems and associated procedures.

In Conversation with Maulana Madani

Shubhangi Pandey

At a time when the world is struggling to cope with and contain the use of new technologies for the propagation of insurgent ideologies in the context of increasing terrorism and violent extremism, India is often looked at as a 'circuit breaker'. In a report mapping the Islamic State's global support network, a project funded by the Counter Extremism Project explained how incidents of terrorism and violence were found to be rampant, from the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and to the other side of the world, covering Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, except India in the middle. Although there are some apprehensions that with the military defeat of the ISIS in Iraq, their jihadist ideology could be moving eastward to look for possible avenues of expansion and proliferation, the Indian social landscape has largely remained disengaged with such forces of radicalisation so far.

Maulana Mahmood Madani, General Secretary of the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, remarked that the low levels of radicalisation among Indian Muslims when compared to the Muslim community residing in other parts of the world, could be attributed to the widespread and deep-rooted influence of the 'Sufi' tradition in India, the secular credentials of the population at large, and the moderate nature of Indian Islam. Having said that, one recognises the fact that there are also Indian Muslims who have chosen the path of violence in the name of religion, making it imperative for those working in the domain of countering/preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) to understand the fundamental reasons for such developments.

Indian Muslims who move to the Gulf countries for work, get influenced by the Islamic ideologies prevalent in the region, which includes Salafi Islam that is different from Islam followed by Indian Muslims. One may also argue that there is a sense of victimisation in some sections of the Indian Muslim population, where the narrative states that the aspirations of the majority, trump those of the minority. And finally, building on the factor of victimisation is the explanation that in many instances, radical activity is initiated as a 'reaction' to an 'action,' which may have been influenced by communal tendencies.

One of the challenges to CVE is the increasing use of technology and online platforms for the proliferation of insurgent ideologies to appeal to the youth. At the same time, the moderates among Muslim clergy or those who may possess the intellectual wherewithal to positively influence the youth, have not been able to reach out to the younger lot even remotely close to what the extremists have been able to achieve, due to a staggering deficiency in their technological expertise. It is important, however, to combat extremist voices on the very platforms being used by them, as the internet today has emerged as possibly the single-most significant tool of dissemination and assimilation of all kinds of ideologies.

Another significant challenge is the fact that the language of Islam has been abused by those who claim to be engaging in violent acts in the name of their religion. The Quran or the holy book of Muslims worldwide, as well as the sayings of the Prophet or the Hadiths, talk about 'jihad' as a celebrated term, but not as one that celebrates violence. Rather, the term 'jihad' celebrates those that persevere against odds for the betterment of the faith, the followers and humanity at large. By referring to terrorists as 'Islamists,' 'jihadists,' or 'mujahideen,' the world as a global community has legitimised the abuse of Islamic terminology by the perpetrators of violence. As a result, argued Maulana Madani, even religious leaders, especially those belonging to the Islamic clergy, and those that wish to promote values of peace, coexistence, and harmony, are often viewed with suspicion.

The propagation of narratives meant to isolate the men of Islam or those who conduct themselves in keeping with the tenets of the Holy Quran or the Prophet, undoubtedly aggravate already existing cultural and religious faultlines, not only in India but across the globe. Although the sheer size of India, in territorial and demographic terms, makes the existence of myriad differences seem understandable, there is a definite need for the community of citizens to collectively work to build bridges rather than burn them. There is an urgent need for the articulation of a common strategy that brings together the government, the media, and thought leaders in particular, with strength of purpose directed towards greater assimilation of different communities in the Indian social fabric. If concrete steps are taken in that direction, India could potentially be a model for other countries to emulate, exemplifying respect for syncretism and peaceful coexistence.

Panel 9

Question Time India: Ideas, Ideologies and Insecurities

Kartik Bommakanti

India has pursued different approaches to a variety of insurgencies and extremist violence and threat. The question therefore is: Is there an *Indian approach* to tackling insurgencies and violent extremism? Three core themes emerged from the panel discussion: Accommodation, Pre-emption, and Legitimacy.

Zafar Sareshwala, Former Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University, observed that the youth in India who mobilised for jihad and violent extremism were greatly motivated by the emergence of the Islamic clergy from countries like Pakistan who travelled to countries such as the United Kingdom to spread hate and exhort Muslim youth to take to violent extremism. Their mobilising instruments are often video material that show atrocities on Muslims committed by non-Muslims, from the conflict in the Balkans to the riots in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002.

The Indian Army has tackled the insurgency in Kashmir in different phases. For instance, in the initial years of insurgent and extremist violence, the Army used hard tactics with heavy force. The 1996 State Assembly elections brought about a change by weaning many Kashmiris away from violence. A campaign to 'win hearts and minds' gained traction in the military top brass and was pursued for a period of time. It involved the Army not just employing iron-fisted tactics but also conciliating with the local population. This 'iron fist with a velvet glove' approach did bring down the incidence of violence and led to the surrender of some

militant leaders. Human rights violations did decrease with the Army recognising the imperative of preventing Kashmiri youth from joining the ranks of militant outfits. However, it was a short-lived affair as the Indian Army adopted a more hardened approach at least since 2014. Nevertheless, the involvement of a third-party sponsorship of violence by Pakistan complicates the efforts of the Army.

Indrani Bagchi (Senior Diplomatic Editor, *Times of India*) observed that there is no specific template for the way India has dealt with insurgencies and violent extremism. India dealt with Punjab, for instance, in a different way than it has responded in Kashmir and the Northeast. However, there is a broad pattern seen in the way India has approached violent extremism and insurgent violence. A critical factor that has enabled reconciliation and mitigation in the case of some insurgencies facing the Indian state is that it has attempted to be accommodating. India's ethos is generally one of inclusiveness, allowing it to overcome intense resentment towards the state from disaffected segments of its population. Pre-emption has also played a key role in preventing people from taking to extremism. For instance, in some states such as Andhra Pradesh, families of individuals who may be on the edge of joining extremist activities informed law enforcement agencies about the threats their family members could pose, allowing authorities to foil potential threats in the bud.

While a combination of accommodation and pre-emption has helped neutralise threats of extremism and insurgent violence, legitimacy stands as the other core pillar in tackling insurgencies and extremist violence. The internet too has become a medium to stoke extremism. Kashmir, as Khalid Shah (ORF Associate Fellow) observed, has witnessed youth taking to extremist violence not out of support or sympathy or antagonism towards either India or Pakistan, but radicalism stemming from online extremist propaganda.

Legitimacy, according to Anshuman Behera (Assistant Professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies), has also been critical to

why insurgent movements emerge. While the foundation of the state is based on a monopoly over violence, insurgent movements seek to contest the writ of the state not so much because they want to overthrow it, but because they expect it to address their pressing grievances. If the state's legitimacy or writ is to gain traction among disaffected and alienated groups, then the state has its resentment problems. However, if the response of the state is glossed over or outrightly ignores the demands of insurgent groups and the population they represent, then the state is merely pursuing a policy of preserving its monopoly over violence and its interests.

Broadly, all the panellists agreed that there is no one-size-fits-all model in dealing with extremist and insurgent violence. New and innovative ways will be necessary to address both legitimate grievances as well as violence borne out of an extremist conception of faith and ideology.

From Ideas to Action: The Road to 2030

Swati Pant

The concept of Prevention of/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE), as we know in its current form, first came about in the early 2010s. Many programmes and projects have been launched over the past decade, but they eventually failed and petered out. Can we learn from the mistakes and successes of this decade and ensure that the following decade is more effective in global P/CVE efforts?

According to Matthew Lawrence of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the role of education is crucial for adopting a realistic approach towards extremist ideology. Education plays a key role in building resilience and increasing inclusivity, and therefore, policies should be formulated in such a way that they not only protect children from extremist ideologies but also build resilience in them for a future resilient community. Often education is hijacked by extremists to push their agenda, and therefore it becomes important to know how it is imparted and what is being imparted through it. It is not fair to put complete blame on the education system, but since the scope of reaching a large number of population through education is a very practical option, its role in national policies to counter extremist ideologies should be evaluated and assessed, and good practices be incorporated in national responsibilities. Education that builds on interaction and dialogue between children of different communities is important since such interactions reduce the demonisation of people perceived as different, thereby building resilience. Since school teachers are not experts on issues like extremism or hate speech, appropriate training could help them

deal with such issues amongst their students. Teachers trained holistically in critical thinking and dialogue will pass on the same to their students.

In the same vein, Saiful Haque of MOVE Foundation in Bangladesh spoke about how his organisation is working with madrasas in the country, which are private Islamic seminaries for young children. Since the madrasas usually have a set curriculum that is different from that of national educational boards and not as immersive and expansive, his organisation works to introduce basic civic education like understanding of police laws, responsible media literacy, and countering violent extremism. They also work towards introducing the national constitution as an alternate guideline governing administration in the country, to these religious students for whom the Quran is the only governing guideline.

In Bangladesh, there is a dichotomy in the P/CVE system, which is echoed in several other countries. The state, through its police/army or official CVE body, discourages civil society from getting involved in CVE work; inversely, they are reluctant to participate in measures towards preventing violent extremism. In the future, coordination between state actors and civil society can be crucial in effectively dealing with extreme ideologies.

All responsible states should work towards countering and preventing the spread of extremist ideologies but without a national framework, it cannot be tackled effectively. Jessie Francescon of Hedayah reiterated the United Nations Secretary-General's call to all member states to formulate their country-specific national action plan for P/CVE. Just the formulation of such plans will not lead to any effective change; they need to be holistic, encompassing multiple stakeholders like state, civil society, grassroots communities and media. A parallel communication plan should run along with the action plan, externally, to make the public aware of the national plan and another internal plan for different state bodies. To ensure that the ideas to counter and prevent extremist ideologies remain

sustainable, proper mentorship of programmes aided by evidence-based research and evaluation are intrinsic.

With countries the world over pushing back, there have been a number of terrorists who have surrendered or retreated. The issue of such radicalised people returning to the general population will continue to grow. Retired Major General Daya Ratnayake of Sri Lanka, who successfully oversaw the rehabilitation and subsequent reintegration of the ex-combatants of LTTE in Sri Lanka, believes that it is only through these two means that the threat to internal security from such people can be assuaged.

P/CVE measures look at multiple approaches like psychological, sociological, socio-economical causes of extremism, but according to Dr. Sumaiya Shaikh, one crucial link that has been largely ignored is that of neurobiology, since all mental processes and perceptions are processed by the human brain. The real security threat right now is not extremism, but violent extremism, and it becomes imperative to find the root cause of individuals' extremism that can turn violent. There is a tendency at times to simplify causes of extremism based on religion and socio-economics, but human behaviour is multidimensional and affected by multiple stimuli. A comprehensive study into the root causes of violent extremist behaviour from multiple disciplines should be the way forward.

Panel 11

Reel Villains, Real Violence

Priyal Pandey

Cinema plays an important role in shaping and disrupting popular narratives. Through the medium of cinema, storytellers and filmmakers attempt to weave an engaging narrative that has the power to motivate change and bring positive influence. As cinema can be used to depict social and political realities, it becomes an important tool to de-radicalise and provide counter-narratives to proliferating hate and violence. In this context, two critical questions emerge—can cinema be employed as a tool to respond to violent ideologies and extremism, and do filmmakers hold a responsibility to positively influence representation, portrayal and perception?

In India, there is a new wave that has emerged within the entertainment industry that offers counter-narratives on established interpretations of violence and portrayal of extremism and its perpetrators. This is in stark contrast to the old formula of entertainment that confined cinema to themes of leisure than initiating debates. These so-called "unconventional" forms of cinema are meeting with both critical and commercial success, implying a change in the audiences. These movies are no longer being consumed only by a niche of cinephiles in the peripheries, but by larger populations who may otherwise be used to escapist entertainment. The question is, however: Should cinema hold the responsibility to de-radicalise and positively respond to growing hate, ideological stereotyping and bursting the clichés established over the years?

Another concern is that the over-depiction of violence can be misconstrued as normalising or glorifying it. Therefore, a corollary question is equally important: Is the medium of cinema an agent for propagating violence? Often, while providing a social

and contextual background to the portrayal of antagonist and protagonist, the over-narrative results in justifying and making the perpetrator more sympathetic.

A key question persists whether we are opposing the depiction of violence in cinema or the portrayal of a particular kind of violence. Due to negative connotations attached to violence and its portrayals, not all violence-based films are accepted by the audience. Usually, cinema depicting patriotic themes, showcasing valour and violence of states and armed forces are appreciated for being "nationalistic". In this scenario, war and violence do not appear problematic or unacceptable. Thus, we can argue that we have been conditioned to accept some form of violence as more legitimate than the other.

This also makes us wonder if the industry can train filmmakers to be responsible and make them participate in the process of counter-radicalisation. For the past two decades, such reformulation has become evident as filmmakers are not afraid to make films that reflect their surroundings and the political violence engulfing it. Another approach can be the focus on content-building. For instance, a video by a terrorist organisation gets far wider viewership than most commercial movies. However, the contention remains that it is the ideology that has more subscriptions than the quality of the film itself. By introducing counter-narrative as a discourse and videos as a tool to propagate these discourses, cinema can assist in responding to rising intolerance and extremism.

Such an endeavour could be seen along with the rise and genesis of Over-the-Top media services which are expanding into the Indian market. These platforms provide an avenue to explore more scripts and narratives which may not be mainstream but might allow direct engagement with the audience. Furthermore, the rise in video-on-demand platforms in direct correlation with the need for better and engaging content might assist in presenting different and positive narratives.

It has become essential that we implement the Christchurch Call to Action. For this, arming ourselves with the gift of story-telling will assist in de-radicalising and bringing positive reform. It is time to rethink and recollect ourselves in regard to the portrayal of violence, extremism and its perpetrators. And as people rethink, cinema plays an influential role and can be an apt tool to introduce more positive and stronger ideas to the consumers.

Terror Bytes: Responding to Insurgency in the Age of Technology, Ideology and Extremism

Akhil Deo

The scale and velocity of information flow has democratised access to the public sphere while providing the same amount of space for malicious actors to propagate violent narratives. Indeed, emerging technologies have created new markets and tools for malicious actors to access finance, recruit individuals, and maintain organisational coherence. In the process, these actors are undermining social cohesion and trust in institutions and democratic processes. Acknowledging these concerning trends, the Observer Research Foundation curated a panel that sought to interrogate state, industry and civil society responses to this new reality at the CVE 2019 conference.

The nature of the interests that require reconciliation makes countering violent extremism particularly challenging. On one hand, restrictive content policies run the risk of undermining free speech rights, and, on the other, the virality of violent narratives poses fundamental risks to national security. Lt. General Rajesh Pant, India's National Cyber Security Coordinator, identified two aspects of this evolving debate: the emergence of new technological tools and the ideation of new policy frameworks.

While information communication technologies have certainly created new space for extremist ideologies, he noted, recent years have seen concerted efforts to develop tools that identify and filter violent narratives without encroaching on legitimate speech.

Panellists unanimously praised Microsoft's photo DNA technology, which creates unique identifiers for images and videos that are illegal and filters them across the internet. Such tools, Lt. Gen. Pant believes, are only the beginning.

On the question of policy responses, panellists agreed that national strategies will remain insufficient until they are supported by international efforts. The Christchurch Call for Action is one such effort, catalysed after the early 2019 terror attacks in New Zealand were live-streamed on social media. Facebook's public policy lead for India, South and Central Asia, Ankhi Das, noted that it is the first instrument that creates collective and individual responsibilities for states, platforms and communities. Even so, many panellists noted that both state and platform responses remain too cumbersome in the face of malicious content that is inexpensive to produce and disseminate at scale.

Therefore, some believe that the Christchurch Call did not do enough. Erez Kreiner, Former Director, Israel's National Cyber Security Authority argued that the Christchurch Call sidestepped the crucial question of liability. Multiple actors operate in cyberspace: states, platforms, communities and deviant individuals and organisations. Who is ultimately responsible for legal action against the deviants? Should sovereigns create liability regimes? This approach risks the over-enforcement of speech laws. Should platforms be held liable for incendiary content, even though they might then be incentivised to censor content more proactively? Without clear delineation, there is a risk that states and platforms might either evade the responsibility or duplicate similar efforts.

These are not easy trade-offs, and many argue that these debates must take place through international multi-stakeholder organisations to ensure consistency in enforcement and respect for democratic values. Ian Bowden, a specialist at the EU Internet Referral Unit, Europol believes that cross-sectoral and cross-platform collaboration must be incubated to respond to violent extremism in cyberspace. Organisations like the Global Internet

Forum to Counter Terrorism, which bring together stakeholders from the security community and the platforms have already created templates for such collaboration. However, these organisations still remain hobbled by questions of legitimacy and efficacy.

Finally, the panel concluded by acknowledging that digital technologies have disrupted traditional information flows, social arrangements, economic processes and national security considerations. Malicious actors have leveraged this period of disruption to propagate fake news, to undermine social cohesion, and to mobilise individuals in the service of perverse ideologies. Open societies are particularly vulnerable to these trends. Conferences like CVE 2019 and efforts like the Christchurch Call are only preliminary efforts to preserve space for democratic discourse and civic participation.

Address by Mr Sunjoy Joshi

Swati Pant

In his address to the conference participants, ORF Chairperson Sunjoy Joshi took a thought-provoking view on extremist ideology and its oft-debated correlation with technology and media platforms. First, he observed that the information and digital age has given three powers to the world: the ability to disseminate and broadcast information to every individual; global reach for that broadcast; and anonymity.

These powers, however, he said, have not enabled humans to assimilate and understand information at the same speed at which it is broadcast; people often forward messages faster than their ability to understand and disassemble the message. The power of anonymity has exacerbated trolling and tribal mentality. Similarly, increased connectivity has increased tribalism instead of mitigating it.

What the world is labelling as a trend of nationalism sweeping across the globe, is nothing but tribalism masquerading as nationalism. The two are very different concepts. Nationalism implies a connection to the core values, ideas, and constitution behind a nation as well as the institutions that arise out of these. Tribalism, on the other hand, is basic loyalty to a social more, culture or person that is considered to belong to the nation more than any other. Instead of allegiance to the institutes or structures of a nation, tribalism consists of loyalty to an identified tribe, even at the cost of destroying or sabotaging the values, institutions, and norms that make up the foundation of that nation.

In this context, placing much of the blame on social media platforms or tech companies for the amplification of polarisation and hatred is neither fair nor correct. Tribalism existed well before

the advent of social media platforms. Similarly, the narrative or the process of spreading hatred and hate speech has not changed over history: picking out the object of hate (either in the form of an individual or a group), comparing them to other figures of hate, attributing all the ills of the world to them, and dehumanising them.

No solution to violent extremist ideologies can be effective without understanding their appeal and endurance. Any ideology that catches on and endures, does so because it fulfils the deep-rooted need of individuals for social aggregation and belonging. Adherence to violent ideologies provides an outlet for the deep-seated and previously inexpressible insecurities, fears, and prejudices of certain people. If dispensing with logic and conversely believing wild, unsubstantiated conspiracy theories and fake news is the price to pay for this process of bonding and sense of belonging, then such sacrifice is inconsequential.

Developing a deeper understanding of the cultural milieu that makes the proliferation and sustenance of such extremist ideologies possible is, thus, more important than focusing only on the weapons, financing, and platforms used to perpetrate the violence arising out of such ideologies.

In the aftermath of 9/11, acts of war as well as terror attacks have increasingly been designed for the small screen, with intrinsic values of shock and awe and aspirations of a well-mounted production containing context, platform, backdrop, and audience. Such production values ensure that the commercial and consumer value of propaganda grabs the most views. Nevertheless, curbing only social media will not arrest the natural inclinations of its human consumers. The way forward is de-polarising social discourse by creating an effective counter-culture that works towards assimilating differences. The post-9/11 US response of anger-filled revenge and grandstanding worsened the situation, whereas the response in New Zealand following the Christchurch shootings—one of grief, empathy, and love with an emphasis on values that hold us together—brought global appreciation.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

16

H.E. Syed Muazzem Ali
Bangladesh High Commissioner to India

I am very happy to join you all at this conference to share my views on the Rohingya crisis and its implications for radicalisation as well as for the growth of terrorism in our region and beyond.

First of all, let me define exactly who are these Rohingyas who are known as forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals. The United Nations has termed them as the most oppressed and displaced people on earth, and indeed, these people are the most unfortunate people as they are stateless in their own state. They are denied citizenship in their own country. The history and origin of this crisis is one of the saddest chapters in the annals of contemporary history.

Before I proceed any further, let me share some historical facts regarding the origins of the Rohingya crisis. Rakhine State occupies the northern coastline of Myanmar, up to the border with Bangladesh, and corresponds to the historical kingdom of Arakan. The Arakanese kingdom was conquered by the Burmese in 1784, and the British colonial powers who were in South Asia at that time had warned them that they would not like them to intervene in Arakan. Eventually, the Burmese government had to cede the territory of Arakan in 1824. But by then, British colonial powers had gained sufficient power. So they went ahead and captured the entire territory of Burma in 1886. Now Arakan and Burma were under British rule. After the annexation of Burma by the British colonists, Arakan became a part of the crown colony of Britain, which was split from British India in 1937. So before

1937, Burma, Arakan, and the Indian subcontinent were all ruled by the British colonists from here.

In the year 1938, British colonists decided to draw a line of partition between India and Burma. For the first time, the Burmese side was separated from the Indian side. In 1939, when the Second World War started, there was a classic split in Burma. Barring Arakan, the rest of the Burmese sided with Japanese invaders. The Arakanese completely sided with the British, and most of our generals and field marshals got their field training during the Second World War while they were stationed in Arakan and Rakhine. As the British were withdrawing from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, the Arakanese were quite apprehensive about their fate in a newly independent or to-be independent Burma, and they sought British help. They requested that their future be determined along with the future of the Indian subcontinent and not so much with the Burmese side.

But they were assured by the British colonists that they would be protected and given full rights. In fact, in the 1947 Constitution of Burma, Rohingyas were given nationality registration certificates with full legal and voting rights. After Burma became independent in 1948, full rights were restored to the Rohingyas and some Rohingya representatives were elected as members of the parliament. Some Rohingyas did play a very prominent role in the national development of Burma from 1948 to 1961. Here I would like to remind you about one fact: as soon as Burma became independent, it initially sided largely with the other countries of South Asia. As a schoolboy, I used to go to the Dhaka stadium to watch football matches of the Quadrangular—or Burma, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and India. Burma was also a part of the Colombo Plan through which the development activities of this region were governed right after independence.

In 1962, once the military government took over, there was an end to Burma's association with South Asia, and they decided to cut off from the British side. In fact, Burma never joined the British Commonwealth. After the military takeover, in 1982, the

Citizenship Act arbitrarily denied the rights of the Rohingyas and they were termed, arbitrarily, as foreigners. They were told that you can vote, but you cannot contest. There were three stages. In the first stage they could contest and they could vote; in the second stage they could not contest, but they could vote. The third stage came suddenly in 1982 when they were told now you can neither vote nor can you contest. You are no longer a citizen.

It is clear that the core of the Rohingya crisis is the denial of citizenship and of their fundamental rights to operate and live in the country of their birth and domicile. As a neighbour to Myanmar, we have been facing this problem from the beginning, particularly after the 1970s when the militaries started exercising ruthless power to drive out these Rohingyas; they have been taking shelter in our part of the world from time to time.

The international media and our media have kept you well aware of what has been happening to these Rohingya people for years. Just to refresh your memory, around 700,000 Rohingyas were forced out of their country and have had to cross the border to Bangladesh since 25 August 2017, facing all kinds of persecution in their homeland, the Rakhine State of Myanmar. The new influx, adding to the already existing 400,000 Rohingyas who had entered Bangladesh in several rounds before August 2017, has taken the total number to over a million. This recent mass exodus of around 700,000 Rohingyas has been termed as a humanitarian crisis of catastrophic proportions by the current UN Secretary-General.

Bangladesh has been giving them temporary shelter on humanitarian considerations because when we look back at our suffering during our liberation war, we can feel the pain of this stateless, oppressed people. I served my country as a diplomat during the liberation war, when I had switched my origins from Pakistan to Bangladesh while serving in Washington. I can empathise with the plight of the Rohingya refugees. As our honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Haseena mentioned in her speech to the last UN General Assembly, "We can feel the pain and

suffering of the countless people around the world persecuted and expelled from their homes like the Rohingyas. It is impossible to build a peaceful, just, and sustainable society by ignoring such situations. The Myanmar situation repeatedly reminds us of the genocide committed by the Pakistan occupation forces against our people in 1971."

As regards the atrocities and injustices suffered by the Rohingyas, our prime minister had added that we are appalled by what we have seen in the UN reports about the atrocities against Rohingyas—some of whom have now taken shelter in Bangladesh—which are tantamount to genocide and other crimes against humanity. As fellow humans, we can neither ignore nor remain silent about the plight of the Rohingyas. We expect the international community, particularly the UN, to give due importance to the atrocities and the injustices suffered by the Rohingya population in Myanmar. The 1.1 million Rohingyas hosted in Bangladesh are living in uncertain situations. To the best of our ability, we have made arrangements for their food, clothing, healthcare, childcare, and security. Many countries and organisations, particularly India, have shown solidarity with the Rohingyas and have extended support and generous relief assistance to them. But giving them shelter in other countries does not solve the basic problem. It is a very difficult situation for us to arrange food for such a huge population, and the effective solution is that they have to go back to their own country. We wish to see the immediate and effective implementation of the agreement concluded between Myanmar and the UN, and we want an early, peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis. However, we are disappointed that despite our earnest efforts we have not been able to begin the Rohingya repatriation in a permanent and sustainable manner.

Let me make it clear that Myanmar is one of our neighbours and we have been trying to find a peaceful solution to the Rohingya crisis through bilateral consultations. So far three bilateral arrangements have been concluded between Bangladesh and Myanmar for Rohingya repatriation.

You would kindly recall that our honourable prime minister had presented a five-point proposal at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2017 to find a durable and peaceful solution to the sufferings of the Rohingyas. In the last UNGA in 2018 she had reiterated these five points for solving the Rohingya crisis at its roots:

1. Myanmar must abolish its discriminatory policies and practices against the Rohingyas and address the root cause of their forced displacement in a genuine and timely manner.

2. Myanmar must create a conducive environment—guaranteeing protection rights and pathways to citizenship for the Rohingyas—for their sustainable return and if needed, create safe zones inside Myanmar to protect all civilians irrespective of religion and ethnicity.

3. Recommendations of the Kofi Annan Commission must be implemented unconditionally and in its entirety.

4. Prevent atrocities and crimes against the Rohingyas in Myanmar by bringing accountability and justice, particularly in light of the recommendations of the fact-finding mission of the UN Human Rights Council.

5. Humanitarian and development support from the international community for the Rohingyas and other affected countries must be predictable and in the spirit of international responsibility-sharing.

We continue with our persistent endeavour. Of late, this year in July, a high-level Myanmar delegation visited Bangladesh. Their permanent foreign secretary visited my country, and in line with the provisions of the bilateral instruments on repatriation directly interacted with the Rohingyas in camps to encourage these displaced people to return to their homeland in Northern Rakhine. The Rohingya representative placed a three-point demand to the visiting delegation which included (i) formal dialogue on key issues; (ii) settlement of the citizenship issue; and (iii) ensuring safety and security for the returnees. The discussions

were warm, but the Myanmar side came up with hardly any new proposals to accommodate the concerns of the Rohingyas. A real intent for serious negotiation is still missing from their side.

This humanitarian crisis is a very important dimension in the question of the security of the region and beyond. The Rohingya crisis is being seen as a humanitarian crisis now, but there is a security dimension to this problem. A permanently dispossessed people have the potential to impact regional security in ways we have not yet imagined. It is in that context that their safe return is important not only on humanitarian grounds but also on security grounds. If it is not solved at the soonest, this could be a serious destabiliser in our whole region.

In a report on Myanmar given to the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General called the crisis the world's fastest developing refugee emergency and humanitarian and human rights nightmare. The UN chief also warned that the humanitarian crisis is a breeding ground for radicalisation, criminals, and traffickers. He also said that the crisis has generated multiple implications for neighbouring states and the larger region, including the risk of inter-communal strife.

The prestigious Foreign Policy magazine has not too long ago termed the Rohingyas as the "new Palestinians", and you can easily understand its implications. They are fast emerging as a symbol of global injustice and deprivations now spread in various countries of the world—just as the plight of the Palestinians has left a permanent scar in the Middle East. You will surely agree that the mass exodus of more than a million Rohingyas is a serious threat to international peace and security, especially in our region which is already beset with various security problems. The sooner we can resettle them in their own homes, the better. Otherwise, the stateless Rohingyas, in their desperation, could emerge as a major threat to peace and security in our region and beyond.

I do not know whether you have ever been to any Rohingya refugee camps. If you visit them, you will see a complete picture of

the situation. Since 1982, the Rohingyas have been living in a state of limbo in their country. They are a self-sustained community who cannot go to any school, do not have any police protection, cannot go to any hospital, cannot go out of town without police permission, cannot marry anyone outside their village, cannot leave the country. We have a population in Arakan right now who are barely trained, barely educated, and without any basic amenities. When you go to the Rohingya refugee camps—and I did take several Western ambassadors to these camps about a year and a half ago—every Rohingya refugee brings with him a solar lamp. I was a bit astonished about why every camp and every tent has this solar lamp. On inquiry I learned that there is no electricity in Rakhine. Everyone must provide for himself. They have no water, they have no protection, and indeed these people have emerged as the least trained and least qualified people for any kind of employment. I lived in Saudi Arabia for quite some time, and I have seen the Rohingya refugees who were given shelter there. Unlike the South Asian expatriates who could find jobs in 15 days, these Rohingyas could not find any job for themselves; most of them were involved in one kind of crime or the other. These Rohingyas are indeed the most vulnerable group of people in the world, who could be hired by any radical element for terrorism and other radicalisation activities.

A few months ago we all saw reports in the Indian press that some Rohingyas were hired in the Kashmir area. They were hired for carrying some bags and weapons at a salary of INR 600 per month. I would just like to pose a question: which labourer, on God's earth, would take a job for INR 600 a month, which roughly works out to something like $8 a month? He does it not because he likes it but because he does not have any other option.

My country's commitment to a terror-free South Asia has been firm and total. My prime minister has shown zero tolerance towards terrorism. As you know, currently the Bangladesh-India relationship is based on security and confidence in each other. Prime Minister Sheikh Haseena has time and again mentioned that Bangladesh will not be allowed for any terrorist activities by any

element. In the past, we have had certain insurgent groups and separatist elements from India's Northeast take shelter in Bangladesh. But once Prime Minister Sheikh Haseena took over power, she controlled the situation with an iron hand. But for how long can Bangladesh can control the security situation and these Rohingya refugee camps?

Another area of major concern for us is that Myanmar produces a large number of Yaba tablets and other drugs, and these are transported to Bangladesh and India through the borders between our two countries. Without any legitimate source of income, there is a huge risk that the smuggling and distribution of these drugs and its network could be established through the help of Rohingya refugees. The third is the potential for this camp to be a base for cross-border insurgency. Although we are trying our best to limit any such activity, the question is for how long can we contain them and check their activities, particularly in a region where we have different insurgent groups and terrorist outfits operating with the assistance of certain well-known countries who are backing them?

We also have an emerging situation in Afghanistan when the American troops will withdraw. We have seen that some Rohingya people were taken to different countries during the last five years. Some of them migrated to your country; some of them migrated to Pakistan. Currently, there are about 5 million of them living abroad. They are spread over Saudi Arabia, other different countries of the Middle East, Malaysia, Pakistan, and India. In addition to that, we have 1 million refugees living in Bangladesh. There is no guarantee that this Rohingya problem will remain a humanitarian problem for too long. Yes, a large number of these refugees are indeed women and children, and they are not an immediate threat as it seems to us. But you do not need 1 million people to join this terrorist network; you need a small fraction of them. There are several reports which have been appearing in the international media, and I am sure many of you must have seen them. I think a month ago, 'Rohingya - A New Terrorist Threat' by Andrew Selth was published, and here he has given a three-part

report on the Rohingya crisis and has mentioned just one fact: "Looking at the refugees in Bangladesh, almost every factor identified by radicalisation experts can be found to a greater or lesser degree. This is partly due to the harsh treatment of the Rohingyas before 2016 but much more so as a result of their brutal expulsion from Myanmar, described by the UN as ethnic cleansing and probably genocide. This has made the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh potential breeding grounds for extremism."

Echoing the voice of Prime Minister Sheikh Haseena, I will reiterate that the Rohingya crisis originated in Myanmar, so the solution has to be found in Myanmar. As a responsible government, we have opened our border and provided shelter to the forcibly displaced Rohingyas. By doing so we have not only saved lives but have stabilised the entire region by containing the crisis within our borders. However, we would like to see the Rohingyas return to their homes in safety, security, and dignity. Pending their return, we are trying to address their basic needs. But ultimately, the Rohingyas must secure their future in their own country. We believe that a continued and sustained engagement by the international community with the Myanmar government on the issue would be a catalyst for a permanent solution to the crisis. I hope the Government of India, as well as the international community, will continue to play a crucial role in persuading the Myanmar government for the safe and dignified return of the Rohingyas to their homeland on a priority basis. Otherwise, the Rohingyas are today Bangladesh's burden, but tomorrow they will be a burden for the entire region and beyond.

(H.E. Syed Muazzem Ali passed away on 30 December 2019.)

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