

A black and white photograph of a person's hands holding several protest signs. The signs are white with bold, black, stencil-style text. The text on the signs reads 'PREVENT', 'COUNTERTERRORISM', '& TERRORIST', and 'RECRUITMENT'. The person is wearing a light-colored, textured garment, possibly a hoodie or sweater. The background is dark and out of focus.

Book Review:
Preventing and Countering Extremism
and Terrorist Recruitment: A Best
Practice Guide by Hanif Qadir
(Melton, Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd, 2016)

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A parent logs into a child's computer and a chat room window pops up on the screen. The parent starts scrolling through the chat history and realizes that the child was speaking to an ISIS recruiter. In this hypothetical situation, the child has not conducted any crime, yet the parent is worried. What should the parent do? Call the police? Is there anyone else that can help the parent with this situation?

Scenarios like this one are why communities and governments across the globe are developing intervention programs to assist vulnerable individuals. Interventions operate primarily within the non-criminal space, meaning that the programs serve individuals who need help, but have not committed any crime. Interventions provide these people with an off-ramp to radicalization by offering individualized plans to increase the subject's resilience against violent extremism.

Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, are leading global efforts in intervention programs, while communities in the United States struggle to implement intervention programs. In the U.S., communities still lack a solid understanding of what interventions are and how to conduct an intervention. A new book, *Preventing and Countering Extremism and Terrorist Recruitment: A Best Practice Guide* by Hanif Qadir, an intervention specialist in the UK, provides needed insights from the practitioner's personal experiences with conducting hundreds of interventions.

The book is structured in four parts. The first part explores Qadir's own personal experience with extremism. The next section outlines current intervention efforts in the UK. This section is followed by an exploration of extremism and the push and pull factors affecting vulnerable people. The book concludes with a theological overview of Islam's view of extremism and terrorist groups.

Qadir starts the book off with his personal journey towards joining Al-Qaeda and then leaving the group. As such, the introductory chapter provides a successful case study of a once radicalized individual turned into a community member who now helps others who fall victim to violent extremism. The chapter details how Qadir created the Active Change Foundation, a community non-profit organization that seeks to help vulnerable youth. It also documents the challenges he faced while trying to operate the organization. After reading this chapter, it is clear to the reader that Qadir is both qualified and experienced to write a book on interventions.

In the next section, Qadir provides an overview of current UK Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts, a program known as Prevent, and describes the underlying issues of violent extremism. Unlike other academics studying radicalization, Qadir emphasizes two contributing factors to the problem of violent extremism: foreign policy and the lack of critical thinking skills amongst the youth. Qadir argues that by ignoring the roles that foreign policy

actions and government treatment of Muslims play in fueling grievances, we contribute to the problem. Moreover, the lack of investment in education to improve critical thinking skills puts the youth at a greater risk of being manipulated by recruiters. The chapter concludes with an overview of future and current challenges wherein Qadir points to issues such as the lack of trust in authority amongst the youth and the adaptability of terrorist groups. This adaptability allows these groups to quickly adjust their strategies in accordance with changes in the world that pose significant challenges to efforts that seek to counter violent extremism.

The book continues with a section on how to tackle extremism. The section includes Qadir's views on the tactics used by recruiters and the push and pull factors affecting vulnerable people. In this particularly useful section for practitioners is a step-by-step guide for conducting interventions. Here, Qadir outlines five key steps for intervention, which include consideration, planning, technical, risk mitigation, and governance steps. The section concludes with seven case studies of interventions that Qadir conducted over his career. Although the case studies are limited in detail for privacy concerns, they still serve as useful examples of how to respond to different scenarios.

The final section of the book is titled "The Islamic Standpoint." In this section, Qadir provides an overview of the historical roots of extremism in Islam. He discusses the origin of Kharijite terrorists and how Kharijites falsify the Quran to promote their worldly objectives. This section provides practitioners with insights on how to counter the narratives of extremist groups.

Qadir's insights on how to ensure that interventions are successful will be valuable to those in the fields of homeland defense and security studies. Interventions and CVE efforts are long-term strategies and should be treated as such. There are no quick-fixes to the problem, rather Qadir argues that practitioners should take the time to understand communities fully, which includes understanding community dynamics. For a successful intervention, Qadir argues that trust is key and factors such as the environment in which the intervention takes place can influence the degree of trust between an intervention provider and vulnerable individual. For instance, police stations do not make ideal environments for an intervention.

Qadir also identifies problems within the UK's Prevent strategy from which practitioners can learn. The UK's strategy is known to promote moderate voices of Islam as a means to silence extremist voices. However, eliminating spaces for individuals to express grievances and debate issues enables recruiters to fill the void and offer subjects a listening ear and alternative. The UK's Prevent strategy is controversial, and Qadir takes note of this, but also proposes ways to mitigate opposition such as highlighting the program's successes. This is advice that CVE practitioners in the U.S. can and should adhere to, especially since there are misperceptions and opposition to U.S. CVE efforts.

The major weakness of this book, the lack of citations and dialogue with current research in this field, can also serve as the book's strength. This type of detailed account of a practitioner's experience with interventions is largely missing from the current literature on countering violent extremism initiatives. However, since the book is based on Qadir's personal experiences with both violent extremism and conducting interviews, the book focuses primarily on Islamic violent extremism. The strong emphasis on this form of extremism should not lead to the take-away that interventions should only attempt to counter efforts by groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. As Qadir argues, interventions should

not focus on one form of extremism. However, it is unclear whether these insights can travel to cases of other forms of radicalization.

Although Qadir offers insights in terms of how interventions should be conducted, the account is scant on recommendations for the structure of intervention programs. Questions left unanswered include who should conduct the interventions and how involved law enforcement authorities should be in the process. Qadir does mention that specialists with knowledge about extremism and interventions and individuals who have credibility within the community should be the ones conducting interventions. However, it is unclear who these ideal intervention providers are and how to determine if an individual meets the requirements. Moreover, Qadir's own personal background with violent extremism begs the question as to whether the ideal intervention provider is a former violent extremist. Several intervention models such as EXIT Sweden and Life After Hate in the United States are also operated by former, albeit right-wing, extremists. Nonetheless, the use of formers in countering violent extremism initiatives, at least in the United States, remains highly controversial.

Despite these unanswered questions, *Preventing and Countering Extremism and Terrorist Recruitment* serves as an excellent resource, and one of the only non-government guides for practitioners conducting interventions. The valuable insights provided in this book warrant the book's place on any CVE practitioner's bookshelf.

About the Author

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