

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT, STATUS AND WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

The increasing threats of extremism that lead to violent action have compelled several countries to design some comprehensive measures or plans to address the issue. Violent extremism take in many forms; (i) white supremacy movement, (ii) religiously-inclined terrorism, (iii) overzealous leftists, or even (iv) fanatical human rights groups. With the advent of digital technologies, their ideas could be transmitted and spread out easily to reach the large masses. By promoting violent action to achieve political goals, a country could enter into socio-political chaos if preventive measures are not adopted. Hence, a national action plan needs to be developed to guide the country in handling such threats. The United Nations through its General Assembly has adopted a resolution in 2016 to encourage its member states to develop a National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE) in preventing violent extremism. Some of the western developed countries have developed NAPPCVE, while some others are in the midst of preparing a plan. The plan would not only constitute the security measures but also “a systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and joint violent extremist groups”. Malaysia, furthermore, is in the process of developing its own NAPPCVE. This article, therefore, would highlight and review several countries NAPPCVE. It discusses the common perspective towards extremism and violent extremism (VE) as well as the different viewpoints countries have in regards to such matter. Furthermore, this article also highlights how Malaysia could learn from other countries approach to develop their NAPPCVE.

Keywords: *Violent Extremism, Terrorism, Strategic Planning, National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE)*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary violent extremism is not a new phenomenon but its impact and lethality need to be taken more seriously. Violent extremism comes in various forms and shapes; white supremacy movement, religiously-inclined terrorism, overzealous leftists, or even fanatical human rights groups. Past studies have examined the correlation between violent extremism and terrorism (Boutellis & Fink, 2016; Cherney & Hartley, 2017; D'Souza, 2017). Yet, some may argue that the act of terrorism do not necessarily be linked with violent extremism. An individual may be a terrorist, but it does not necessarily mean that he or she holds extreme viewpoints. Extremism refers to an individual, group or members of the society holding a strong belief towards something that they believe or practice which are most often extreme in nature (Berger, 2018). The practices of extremism are commonly associated with political, religious, groups or parties while referring to their own or other forms of ideologies (Gelfand, LaFree, Fahey, & Feinberg, 2013).

Global trends of violent extremism have also compelled governments to react and counter the threats. The September 11 attacks on the New York Trade Centre, mosque burnings and attacks by Hindus in India, and white supremacy extremists in the United States, as well as terror attacks by the Daesh or Islamic State (ISIS), contribute to a strong impact on the history of violent extremism (Besley & Peters, 2020). For instance, the Christchurch attacks, has not only created strong political emotion in the society but also more importantly disturbed the development of the rise of right-wing extremism in the country (Battersby & Ball, 2019). These acts of violent extremism have forced governments all over the world to adopt drastic measures in countering, preventing and mitigating such occurrences. Some government's hard approaches, nonetheless, receive criticisms from human rights groups. Detention without trial and potential security forces' abuse on suspected extremists indeed raise the prospect of the human rights abuse. In retrospect, there needs to be a proper balance in order to ensure citizens are still protected by their own set of rules and law of the country.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, presented a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) in 2016 General Assembly, in response to the fourth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Security Council resolution (UN General Assembly, 2016). The plan emphasises that “member State should consider developing a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist”. Many countries have already implemented their National Action Plan or Policy (NAPPCVE) in deterring, countering and preventing the acts of violent extremism for instance in Europe and Asia (Hussin, 2018). In some western developed countries, the plan is needed in order to have strong countermeasures and adequate intelligence gathering information that could enable them to efficiently counter and prevent violent extremism (Kessels & Nemr, 2016). The plan could also provide them with all necessary resources, data and strategies; empowering them to prevent such violent extremism. Nonetheless, Malaysia, is in the process of developing its own NAPPCVE in countering violent terrorism.

This article, therefore, will highlight and overview some countries’ NAP on violent terrorism, where it could become a reference to Malaysia’s endeavours of forming its own NAP. The study’s major methodological approach was based on available data published publicly. Their contextual use and formulating method in promulgating NAP on violent extremism were also examined. It should be noted that there is currently no official central database for NAPPCVE. Such plans may be deemed confidential and not for the public domain.

2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Conceptualizing extremism or violent extremism is very crucial in the early stage of developing NAPPCVE. It should provide a clear direction on what constitute extremism and issues that have to be dealt with. This is to avoid having deviated understanding of the phenomenon by focusing only on a particular issue rather than examining it in the wider context. Many research examines the phenomenon under the terrorism study context of where aspects

of social, political, and economic are emphasised. (Breton, Galeotti, Salmon, & Wintrobe, 2002; Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, & Sloman, 2013; Hogg, 2014; Columbia, 2015). Past studies also examine the relationship between culture and extremism by using cultural dimensions that suggest that fatalistic beliefs, gender roles and collectivism in the group are related to higher levels of terrorist attack and fatalities (Gelfand et al., 2013). This shows that various factors come into the context that should be considered first before defining violent acts. This also a major debate among many policymakers when developing NAPPCVE. For Berger (2018), extremism is a rarely simple occurrence and not part of a race, religion or political school and it is profoundly consequential in societies. The International Centre for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution of Columbia University, furthermore, states that extremism is a form of activities that involves beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions and strategies of the individual or group from the ordinary practices (Coleman & Bartoli, 2003).

Extremism is also commonly associated with the social identity theory. Tajfel and Turner (1979) were among the first to introduce ‘an integrative theory of intergroup conflict’ that attempts to outline a theory of intergroup conflict using the approach of intergroup behaviour and intergroup relationships (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). They argue that an individual’s sense of belonging comes from their group membership based on the important holdings of pride and self-esteem in their groups. In their viewpoint and assessment, people would incite differences and similarities within groups. For example, a rich country that has a thriving economy and financially prosperous would have citizens who assume themselves to be righteous and noble in achieving economic greatness, in comparison to those in a poor country. Citizens of the rich country may also view the citizens of the poor country as primitive and are in despair due to their economic outlook. This identification has contributed towards the social identity theory that was developed as an integrative theory that interacts with the behavioural motivation of these individuals or groups (Hogg, 2016).

Extremism can also be divided into a number of categories such as violent, non-violent, domestic, or even social perspectives (Gelfand et al., 2013). There are a number of forms of extremism that exists in various researches. The following Table 1 maps out types of extremism that are phrased in common works of literature.

Table 1. Types of extremism

Types of Extremism	Description	Source
Domestic Extremism	The involvement of the individual in groups conducting either social, political, criminal and various activities	(Schlembach, 2018)
Right-wing Extremism	Activities that can involve hate crime or organised terrorism through the unique form and justification of political views	(Merkl & Leonard, 2003)
Religious Extremism	Associated with the extreme association of a specific religion or belief or ideologies	(Iannaccone & Berman, 2006)
Rational Extremism	The notion that the acts of terrorism are acted in their own specific belief and rationality	(Lake, 2002)
Political Extremism	The beliefs of the individual fall outside of the mainstream societal values of the community or nation	(Breton et al., 2002)
Digital Extremism	The use of online or digital technologies for the purpose of each specific goals or targets	(Aryan, 2018)
Democratic Extremism	The term is largely associated with political extremism, there are arguments that the term and use democratic is opposition towards extremism. There are however cases that involve the use of democratic extremism to eliminate systems and structure of a country	(Lucardie, 2013)
Violent Extremism	The use of violent acts to achieve either political, social, economic	(Borum, 2011)

and various other forms or field”
in order to achieve certain goals or
targets

Source: (Breton et al., 2002; Lake, 2002; Merkl & Leonard, 2003; Iannaccone & Berman, 2006; Borum, 2011; Lucardie, 2013; Aryan, 2018; Schlembach, 2018)

Table 1 also highlights various term that are associated with extremism. There are good, bad, positive and negative connotations that could be connected with the word extremism. It can also be concluded extremism which can exist in the form of ideology, ideas, or political views. But what concerns us is when those extremist ideas or political views is translated into violent action.

Violent outbreaks from extremist ideas is the main cause of concern for most governments across the world. Violent extremist act could not only bring physical harm to society but can also bring mental harm or impact to the population (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Violent extremism occurs when the individual or group of people believe that changes can only be justified by using force to achieve their political, social or economic agenda (Borum, 2011; Kessels & Nemr, 2016; Hussin, 2018).

The act of violent extremism can be carried out by an individual or group who has deviated or different perspectives from existing societal beliefs or system (Carlsson et al., 2020). They are willing to harm others to achieve the objectives. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states that violent extremism is associated with push and pull factors (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). Push factors arise when the conditions are leading towards violent extremism emerges. This can be resulted through an experience of being oppressed or enduring prolonged conflicts. Pull factors refers to elements that motivate the perpetrator to perform the act. Some examples of it are drug cartels and terrorist cells that spread their views among targeted group people. Other push and pull factors also include personal and family reasons. Personal factors may relate to the personal characteristics that make someone vulnerable to receiving or learning radical viewpoints (Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar, & Barton, 2020). In addition, there are five drivers that can promote a person or group towards violent extremism (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). They can be influenced by the lack of

socioeconomic opportunities; marginalisation and discrimination; poor governance; human rights abuse; a type of rule of law practised by a country; protracted conflict, and radicalisation process while in prison.

3. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (NAPPCVE): SELECTIVE COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

National Action Plan (NAP) are public policies, working papers, action programs that are based on targeted areas of interest that are carried out nationwide (Smith & Williams, 2008). The NAP is important as it could assist the policymakers to produce a plan that will pre-empt and coordinate action, targets, goals and track progress in their respective field of planning. The plan is subjected to the field that they are designed in order to achieve the objectives and goals of the policy-makers. It is also a strategy to achieve improvement or betterment in specific fields in order to further elevate the nation's wellbeing.

The strategy that can be implemented in order to counter violent extremism is by the National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE). One of the specific method that can be utilised to counter violent extremism is by identifying and addressing the main drivers of violent extremism (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). Some governments have the inclination to use military or enforcement agencies as the form of intermediaries or tools for counter-terrorism (Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011). These government usually use their internal resources to counter threats. Internal sources can be utilised through the use of government forces such as education ministries that are trained to educate the public on the drawback and impact of violent extremism (Novelli, 2017). At the same time, a country may outsource external supports through intelligence cooperation, regional or international organization's financial support, or foreign countries' training program to enhance its efforts and strategies (Patel & Koushik, 2017). Table 2 shows examples of some countries that are among the first that initiated and introduce the NAPPCVE. The UN and some regional organizations as well as international non-government organization also provide technical supports and assistance to countries that in need to formulate their NAPPCVE.

Table 2. Initiation of NAPPCVE by regional organisations and country

Year	Country or Organisation	Title	Reference
2002	Czech Republic	National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism	https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-90-481-2342-1_7
2011	APEC: Philippines	APEC Counter-Terrorism Action Plan	
2016	G7	G7 Action Plan on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism	https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000160278.pdf
2017	International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)	National Action Plans on Preventing Violent: Extremism A Gendered Content Analysis	https://www.icanpeacework.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GSX-2017-PVE-NAPs-Analysis-1.pdf
2018	Global Center on Cooperative Security	Framework to Develop and Evaluate National Action Plans to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism	Feve, S., & Elshimi, M. (2018). (Rep.). Global Center on Cooperative Security. doi:10.2307/resrep20336
2014	Pakistan	National Action Plan, 2014	https://nacta.gov.pk/mandate/
2018	United Nation	Towards a Comprehensive Implementation of UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia	https://unreca.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/final_astana_report_eng_1.pdf
2019	Finland	National Action Plan for The Prevention of Violent Radicalisation And Extremism 2019–2023	https://rm.coe.int/finland-action-plan-2019/16809ea382
2020	Turkmenistan	Strategy	Turkmenistan Adopts National Action Plan For 2021-2024 On the Implementation of The PVE And CT Strategy

2020	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Monitoring National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism	https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/PVE-Monitoring-National-Action-Plans-EN-2020.pdf
2021	The Hedayah Centre, UAE	National Action Plans to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism. Assisting 19 countries in formulating their NAPPCVE	https://www.hedayahcenter.org/programs/preventing-and-countering-violent-extremism-national-action-plans-task-force/
	ASEAN National Action Plan Information	Unofficial Text · Centre For International Law at www.cil.nus.edu.sg 2018. ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2018-2025)	https://cil.nus.edu.sg/databasecil/2018-2025-asean-plan-of-action-to-prevent-and-counter-the-rise-of-radicalisation-and-violent-extremism/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2018-2025-ASEAN-PoA-PCRVE.pdf
	Central Europe	Counterterrorism policies in Central Europe	https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11871674.pdf

Generally, western developed have developed their NAPPCVE in the aftermath of the September 11 incident. Nevertheless it has been observed that developing countries like Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Iraq and Lebanon have also introduced their own version of NAPPCVE since 2018 (Please see Table 3). This is as a result of the UNs General Assembly resolution, which calls for concerted international efforts to counter violent extremism. Those that are at the forefront of the initiative are also struggling with and exposed to the various issue of violent extremism.

The action plan is indeed an important component of government policy not only to provide a sense of readiness but also to guide government machineries with a clear strategy and standard operating procedure in dealing with the possibility of threats. It can be argued that the action plan is also part of strategies to maintain and safeguard the wellbeing of their citizens. Merely all governments are concerned with the impacts of violent extremism. This can be seen in the Nigerian case where the government is struggling to mitigate the threats posed by Boko Haram for decades. Boko Haram's threats have destabilised the government and placed the country socio-economic development in disarray. The effects of violent extremism could also affect neighbouring regions in terms of political and economic stability. For instance the 'Arab Spring' was viewed by some western countries as a form of strengthening Islamic extremism that considered as a threat of undermining the stability of the Middle East (Dannreuther, 2015). The phenomenon, which started in Tunisia has spill-over effects on all Arab countries. Egypt, Yemen and Libya have seen their leaders deposed and their major cities engulfed with civil unrest due to the events and influence of 'Arab Spring' (Kienle, 2012).

Table 3. Listing of strategic approach by country

Country	Title	Strategic Approach	Source
Czech Republic (2002)	National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and analytical area • Systemic provision for combating terrorism • Protection of information systems; information and media policy • Control of exports and imports of military arms and equipment and goods and dual use technology • Suppression of the financing of terrorism • More stringent security standards at airports and on board of aircraft • Civil defence and the area of crisis 	https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-90-481-2342-1_7

		management and integrated rescue system	
Turkmenistan (2020)	National Action Plan For 2021-2024 On the Implementation of The PVE And Counter-Terrorism Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration, asylum and customs area • Using the Pillars I and IV of the Strategy for the Joint Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia 	https://www.un.org/es/terrorism/ctitf/pdfs/1st_expert_meeting_bratislava_eng.pdf
Azerbaijan (2018-2021)	Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights • Rule of Law • Democracy 	Website: www.coe.int/cm
Cyprus (2017)	Countering Violent Extremism and Youth Radicalisation: Using the European Youth Card to Promote Peaceful Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Role: Connected Program • Social boost of the youth card 	REPORT 29-31 January 2017, Nicosia, Cyprus, Council of Europe
Indonesia (2011-2012)	Indonesia's National Plan of Action of Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard Approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Law enforcement ○ Intelligence Operation ○ Training and Capacity Building • Soft Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Counter radicalisation ○ De-radicalisation ○ Protection 	Andhika Chrisnayudhanto, Director of Regional and Multilateral Cooperation, Indonesia
Iraq (2014-2018)	National Action Plan For Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of women in decision-making processes 	National Action Plan, Iraq

	Of The United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace And Security (2014-2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection, Security and Prevention • Promotion of women's rights • Social and economic empowerment • Legislation and law enforcement 	
Lebanon (2018)	National Strategy for Preventing Violent Extremism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and Conflict Prevention • The Promotion of Good Governance • Justice, Human Rights and the Rule of Law • Urban/Rural Development and Engaging • Local Communities • Gender Equality and Empowering Women • Education, Training and Skills Development • Economic Development and Job Creation • Strategic Communications, Informatics and Social Media • Empowering Youth 	Presidency of the Council of Ministers
Sri Lanka (2011- 2016)	National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil and Political Rights • Economic Social and Cultural Rights • Prevention of Torture • Rights of Women • Labour Rights • Rights of Migrant Workers • Rights of Children • Rights of Internally Displaced Persons 	Website: www.hr.actionplan.gov.lk

Austria (2018)	The Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security, the penal system and resocialisation • Politics and democratic culture • Co-operation and resources • Education, labour market and resilience • Social responsibility and health • Science and Research • Internet and the media • Gender 	"National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation" (BNED)
Denmark (2016)	Preventing And Countering Extremism And Radicalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more coordinated and knowledge-based prevention effort • Enhanced effort in the police districts and municipalities • Combating extremist propaganda and preventing online radicalisation • Hard line against foreign fighters • Targeted intervention in criminal circles • Stricter measures to stop radicalisation in prisons • Systematic effort in day-care facilities, primary schools and youth education programmes • Involvement of local communities • Enhanced international effort 	The Danish Government: October 2016
Finland (2019-2023)	National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism 2019-2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing violent extremism and radicalisation locally • Strengthening the participation of young people in the prevention 	Ministry of the Interior Finland

of violent extremism and radicalisation

- Identifying and combatting recruitment into the activities of violent extremist groups
 - Combatting terrorist propaganda and punishable hate speech
 - Promoting the safety and security of religious communities and their participation in efforts to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism
 - Taking into consideration the gender viewpoint in the prevention of violent radicalisation and extremism
 - Preventing radicalisation in prisons and reducing threats connected with released prisoners
 - Developing training and competence
-

Formulating a comprehensive national action plan has its own challenges. Policymakers need to design the plan in the most holistic way by taking into account the structural variables at the external level, such as the global and regional environment, as well as at the internal level such as country's historical formation, societal structure, ideology, and political belief. The societal issues that need to be address are democracy, human rights, fundamental rights, language, culture, social standings and many more issues. Those structural variables and ongoing issues are not mutually exclusive and need to be addressed concurrently in framing the plan. Past reports, studies and scientific investigations have shown that there was no single approach in dealing with violent extremism (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011; Kessels & Nemr, 2016; Novelli, 2017; Patel & Koushik, 2017). Each country has its own uniqueness and different social-structural variables. Henceforth, the strategies

or approaches are different from one country to another. Therefore, framing an effective national action plan on violent extremism is complex as these mentioned variables of challenges makes it hard to design an effective countermeasure (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011). Yet, the action plan is needed to create peacefulness environment and political stability in a country.

One key element on the national action plan, as being observed based on the listing in Table 3, is the preventive mechanism. Prevention is one of the ways to mitigate and reduce the risks of future attacks in the country or government. Prevention is associated with ‘stopping something from happening or someone from doing something’ (Online Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). The countries highlighted in Table 3 have implemented various youth and educational programs, which are designed to protect the younger generation’s involvement in violent extremism (Thomas, 2010; Hussin, 2018; Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier, 2019). These countries also employ prevention mechanisms such as targeted programs in reducing inmate exposure to violent ideas and action while in prison and engaging specific groups to improve social stability in the community through empowerment programs (Christmann, 2012).

It is also observed that governments have used different methods of enforcement in placating violent threats. Suppressing the influence of violent extremism in terms of ideology requires vast resources and a country needs to pull their resources together to mitigate such issue (Virta, 2013; Niemi, Benjamin, Kuusisto, & Gearon, 2018). Finland, for example, used education as a form to counter extremist ideologies in promoting the set of orientations or influence approach by the general society in Finland (Niemi et al., 2018). While in Indonesia, due to its inexperience with religiously inclined violent extremism, initially used force to suppress violence. The country however has used a more soft and progressive approach in its national plan like what Finland has done.

Finally, many countries under this study do acknowledge the role of digital technologies in spreading extreme idea that resulted in violent actions. In this 21st century, many countries understudied are cognizance with the fact that the digitalization world facilitates violent extremism. Digital technologies

have been used to relay misinformation and radical ideas. It has been an avenue to launch physical attacks against certain targets. Therefore the government, needs to most feasible strategies as countermeasures to such distribution methods. This aspect is one of the crucial elements of the national action plan in preventing and countering violent extremism. (Bertram, 2016). Some examples have shown that terror movements like Daesh have used digital platform not only to recruit cadre but also to solicit donations from their supporters. This new age of information must be properly monitored and be part of NAPPCVE planning.

4. CONCLUSION

The major focus of this article is to understand various countries' approach in formulating their National Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism or NAPPCVE. There are many lessons learned from the experiences of those countries in producing the action plan document. Firstly, NAPPCVE is an important document to guide a country in countering violent extremism. It is systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions of the issue. Secondly, there should have be a comprehensive understanding of the country's fundamental structural problem and social-political issue in defining what constitutes extremism. Some extremist political, social or religious ideas may not produce violent action. Thirdly, prevention is the key approach in every national action plan. Finally, this article concludes that digital technologies are the conduits for violent extremism. It should be focused as one of the important strategies for the policymakers when they formulate the NAPPCVE.

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