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REPORT



ISPU

PURSUANT TO PREVENT:

British Community Counterterrorism Strategy: Past, Present, and Future

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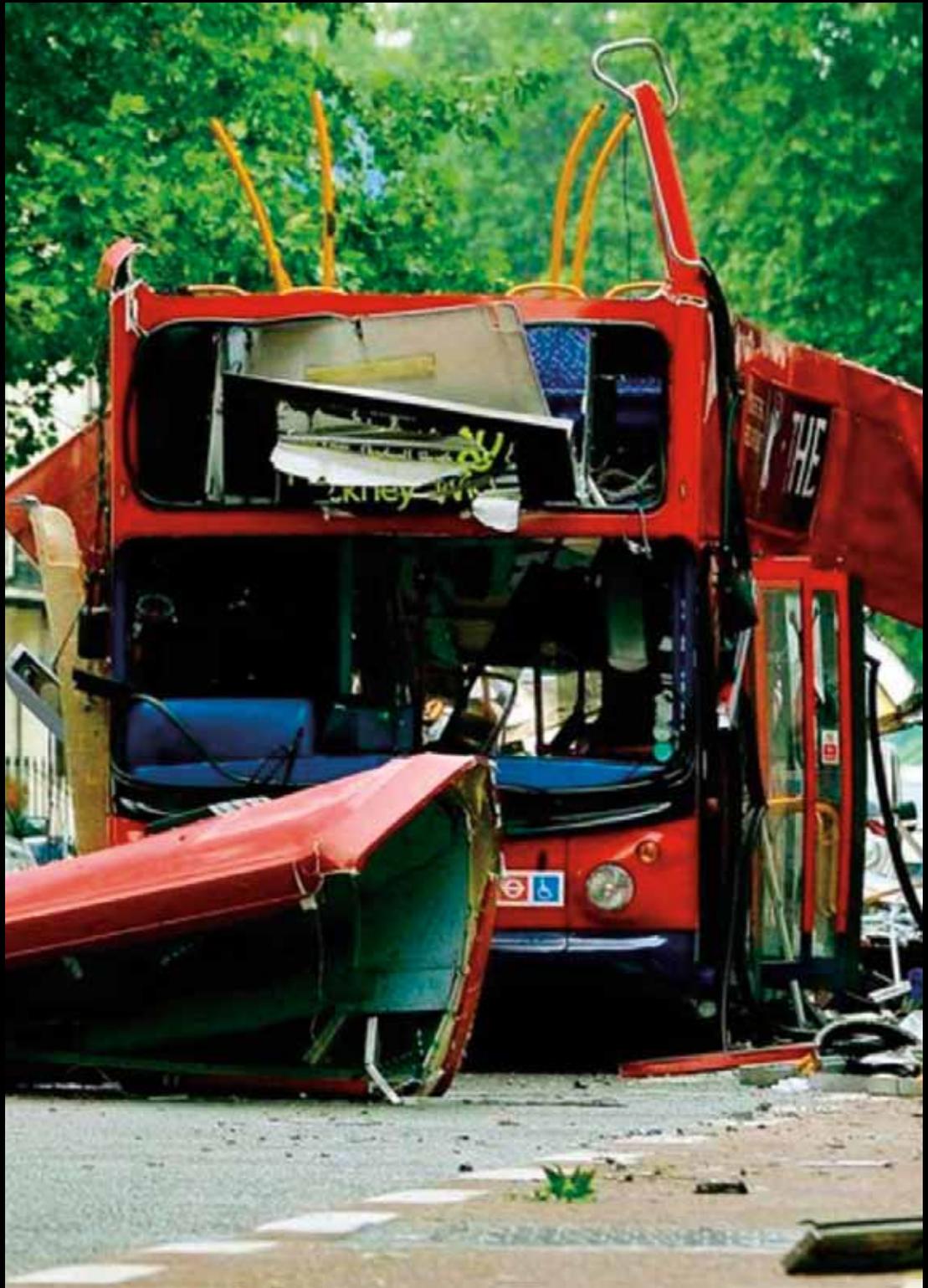
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Introduction

“The rules of the game have changed.”

– Tony Blair, *British Prime Minister*

[August 2005, a few weeks after the 7 July bombings]

On the 7th of July 2005

As I expect most people in the United Kingdom do, I clearly remember where I was and what I was doing when I heard the news of the attacks on London on the 7th of July 2005: at my desk on the Warwick University campus taking a well-deserved break. A month earlier, I had defended my doctoral thesis, an analysis of various issues around Muslim European communities, and was looking forward to taking up a regular academic post. In my work, I had chosen the British Muslims for a case study of European Muslim communities on the basis that the UK had proven to be of great interest for European partners and elsewhere with regards to integrating Muslims. After all, it has one of the oldest and demographically significant Muslim presences in the West.

On the 7th of July 2005, however, all of that changed. I could not have foreseen how much more interesting the UK would be after that day, and certainly for less enviable reasons than the UK might have wished. Nor could I have predicted that my own work, which had been started for purely academic – even esoteric – reasons, would suddenly become relevant to a much wider and more policy-oriented audience.

I was not the only person in this regard. Many of my academic colleagues who had been involved in studying various individuals within the UK’s different Muslim communities, found themselves suddenly drawn into the corridors of power in Westminster to provide specialist opinion on diverse issues. Indeed, Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) went beyond speaking to experts who had a strong background in the area. To the detriment of the entire counterterrorism effort, the state began to consult individuals who had little or no expertise in any truly associated area, whose main qualification was their ability to reach people in positions of power.

While the Security Service had warned about the emergence of a domestic terrorist threat prior to 7/7, until that day in July 2005 few seemed to have taken it particularly seriously.

And people in those positions certainly had good reason to be especially concerned about the 7/7 attacks. Since Britain had been bracing itself for an attack on its shores for quite some time, the fact that it had finally happened was not particularly shocking or surprising to people within the policy establishment or to the wider public.¹ One key aspect, however, definitely took the country by surprise: the identity of the attackers. This is what brought people like myself, who had previously not been involved in security affairs, into the arena.

While the Security Service had warned about the emergence of a domestic terrorist threat prior to 7/7, until that day in July 2005 few seemed to have taken it particularly seriously. When it emerged that four young Muslim Britons had attacked the UK, the nation was shocked.² It was one thing to come up with policy initiatives designed to target terrorism overseas carried out by foreign nationals – after all, Britain had been doing that for years, both before and after 9/11, as had its various partners across the Atlantic and in Europe. But it was quite another matter to consider that a terrorist menace existed domestically – and moreover, from Britons themselves.

Suddenly, questions began to arise: What was this Muslim community? What was going on in it that could have transformed these young men into terrorists? What had we, as a society, failed to miss? We needed to learn as much as we could about this community in order to ensure that Britons would never again be responsible for attacking the UK.

One set of questions sought to understand this community so we could ensure that we, as a society, had not failed. Another set of questions, however, boiled down to a single query: Who could we engage with, within the Muslim community, to combat the forces of violent extremism and radicalization that produced the 7/7 bombers? Who could we work with to gather accurate intelligence to appropriately intervene in existing plots?

These two sets of questions were indelibly linked, for the latter could be answered only after the former had been dealt with sufficiently. As such, academics and researchers who had worked on the Muslim community, such as myself, were brought into the counterterrorism arena. But in order to properly formulate and execute a “community-based approach”³ to counterterrorism, this community’s inner workings needed to be understood as much as possible.

Prior to 7/7, the government had already accepted that community engagement for the purpose of counterterrorism was a worthwhile endeavor; however, it was still not emphasized. This changed radically after 7/7, and the ensuing consequences still dictate how the UK engages in strategies relating to community cohesion and counterterrorism.

In that respect, it is important to note that the UK's own counterterrorism strategies also impinge upon the formulations of other country's strategies in the same area. For example, the United States and Canada observe its movements in this area very closely and often with a great deal of interest.⁴ Individual European countries also engage with it on these issues, as do Australia and various Muslim and non-Muslim countries. As such, the importance of the UK's approaches to counterterrorism extends far beyond its own evaluation of them.

After the 7/7 bombings, a full and engaged community counterterrorism strategy was developed. Eventually entitled "Prevent" in 2006, it sought to prevent any indigenous Muslims from embracing violent extremism. Community engagement, whether done by the police, the Home Office, the Foreign Office, or the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), was vital. Yet the strategy itself was constantly fraught with changes, debates, and discussions about the "proper direction" to be pursued. Between July 2005 and May 2010, the ruling Labour government was divided over the best approach to these matters. Once a minister was changed (e.g., the Minister for the DCLG), the strategy could take an entirely different direction. As the fifth anniversary of the 7/7 bombings drew near, it was clear that Prevent had become so controversial that unless crucial changes were implemented, its very existence could not be guaranteed.

Change remains in the air in this respect. In May 2010, the British people elected a new coalition government made up of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats. This coalition is an entirely new experiment, for the country has not seen a coalition government for decades, and certainly not a coalition government made up of such different parties. The left-leaning Liberal Democrats and the right-leaning Conservatives have more often than not been at loggerheads with each other on political issues.

While these election results made a coalition the most attractive option for both parties, they have left British counterterrorism strategy in something of a flux. It is still not really clear where

the UK is headed, for a government governed by a single party can often be divided on a critical issue. This was clear with regard to the Prevent strategy during the Labour years. But within a coalition made up of even more diverse viewpoints, it becomes even harder to identify just what the overarching strategy actually is.

Nevertheless, some trends can be discerned. The new government has already carried out some actions that point to some key assumptions and theories that underpin its thinking. I hope to contribute to a better understanding of these trends by exploring their meaning. In other words, what lessons can we learn from our past and present in order to effect good for our country in the future? Such lessons remain deeply important not just for Britons, but also for the many other countries that also learn from our experiences.

The UK's Muslim Community

The Muslim community's engagement with the government can be grouped into several historical periods. The first of these began in the 1960s, when large-scale Muslim migration to the UK began.⁵ In the aftermath of the Second World War, the UK encouraged migration from the Indian subcontinent to overcome a desperate labor shortage. France did the same with North Africans, and Turks were "guest workers" in Germany. Along with these immigrants came smaller groups from other Muslim lands as well. These migrants, predominantly from the Indian subcontinent, were primarily members of the working class seeking a better life via blue-collar jobs in the UK. Initially, this quest was essentially for themselves, with no plan to settle down and raise families. Muslims had always been the "Other" without for Europe, but now they became the "Other" within.

The First Generations and British Society

Populations of people with specific cultures and a faith that spread among indigenous Europeans entered the country along with these small isolated ethnic or national minority groups. Being faced with cultural pluralism is difficult enough for relatively heterogeneous societies, but Muslim communities proved to be particularly problematic. Most migrants assumed that they would eventually return to their homelands, an assumption that was shared by the British population at large and the British state. For a country that was suffering from a labor shortage, migrants from these recently independent British colonies who had no plans to remain permanently in the UK were welcome. But as time went on, it became clear that the "myth of return" was exactly that – a myth. These communities were here to stay, and thus would irrevocably change the makeup of British and other European societies.

When these Muslims arrived, they were not envisaged as permanent constituents of European identity formation. Unlike the Canadian or American experiences, they were assumed to be temporary, to provide a limited service that would eventually end. The largely rural Muslim migrants shared this latter view. If the post-Second World War rural Pakistani migrants had gone to Karachi or Lahore, they would have felt out of place. So they went to Bradford and Birmingham, where their different economic status was amplified by their distinct cultural heritages. They were not white Caucasians; they were brown and black, and thus were perceived primarily through those prisms of reference. Europe has always been very class-conscious and race-conscious – and not in a positive sense. Worse still, these migrants could

Most migrants assumed that they would eventually return to their homelands, an assumption that was shared by the British population at large and the British state.

not have come from a more problematic region for the modern European psyche: they were uncomfortable reminders to a continent that had buried a part of its own memory. Even more problematic, they were Muslims, followers of a religion that had often served as the “Other” in pre-modern Europe and had simultaneously stimulated its development while providing a counter-civilization against which Europe could define itself.

Thus, in all of these countries and across the EU, the greatest challenge to the emerging definitions of pluralism (a historically uncomfortable European issue) and to coping with it invariably came from the Muslim community, although pluralism had not yet been identified as specifically a “Muslim” issue. This was about race, culture, class, and history, and the Muslim migrants made mainstream society very uncomfortable in each of these areas. Quite apart from issues surrounding counterterrorism and radicalization, integrating this community proved rather difficult, for its members came from very different cultural areas to a continent that was historically poor at accommodating difference. As such, social alienation was a certainty. The community’s ethnic and religious heterogeneity was remarkably challenging for a Europe based on a sense of homogeneity. This challenge proved to be a consistent problem across Europe, particularly as twentieth-century secular Europe was far less concerned with the idea of religion as a whole, let alone a religion such as Islam, with which it shared a history of tension as well as harmony.

The revival of religion in the Muslim world’s public sphere affected the Muslim community in Europe. The emergence of a political identity based on religion clashed with European notions of secularism, particularly in places like France, where French Republicanism had developed a strong anti-religion current. This can be seen in the *foulard* (headscarf) debate that has been ongoing since the 1980s. Incidents such as the Rushdie Affair of the early 1980s suddenly reminded Britain that a large section of its population took religion very, very seriously.

If the Muslim migrants had been rich, white, non-religious, or of Christian heritage, integration might not have been as difficult, provided that Europe was willing to integrate them. Even so, the first generation’s alienation was not considered to be exceptionally problematic in the European psyche; after all, Muslim communities were known for being law abiding, and generally minded their own business as they went about making better lives and setting up peaceful (if distinct) subcultures for themselves. Their numbers, as well as the nature of their

migration to specific geographical areas, made this settlement pattern very possible (unlike in North America, where settlement was generally dispersed). As mentioned above, many Muslim immigrants were consciously in Europe as temporary sojourners and hoped to return to their homelands with the means to ensure a better future for themselves. In reality, however, they settled down permanently, a fact to which future generations would attest.⁶

The second generation started to come of age in the 1980s. Unlike their parents, who tolerated the realities of discrimination and non-acceptance, these Muslims were less inclined to accept the status quo. The first generation had come of age back home and matured through various ways that need not be mentioned here. Their children, however, witnessed the social (and often legal) discrimination that characterized their parents' lives and were unwilling to accept it. But they could not change the nature of the societies within which they lived; they could only endure it. They had no other option.

Unlike their parents, who sought refuge in their self-created subcultures, the next generation could not relate to these subcultures. While they may have been of Turkish, Arab, or Indian sub-continental extraction, they were not Turks, Arabs, Pakistanis, Indians, or Bangladeshis; rather, they were born and raised in Europe and thus could not easily become part of these subcultures. In the United States, Canada, or similar societies they might have sought assimilation. But the European understanding of assimilation differs from that of its North American counterparts. In addition, the cultural community's leadership provided no alternative avenues for the youth as they became adults, and the religious teachers whom the parents had imported from back home could not relate to them due to their very limited cultural adaptability. The result was stagnation. No role models emerged, as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. had done during the African-American community's civil rights struggle.

The challenge of internal integration continued, causing some commentators to portray Muslims in Europe as impossible to incorporate, except in a way that would bring chaos. During the late 1990s, Greek Metropolitan Damaskinos orchestrated demonstrations against new mosques in Kimmeria and Pelekiti,⁷ even though Greece was a religious country. In the Netherlands the anti-Muslim politician Pim Fortuyn was quite active. Evidently there are differences between the two countries. Greece is the quintessence of the Orthodox Hellenic ethnic national group, which is Orthodox Christian. As long as this remains the case, genuine integration will be

hindered. Damaskinos was only exhibiting a logical, if rather zealous, example of that thinking in practice. Fortuyn, on the other hand, represented a different type of anti-Muslim sentiment, one that was more hostile to Muslims as the carriers of Islam, which he considered a threat to Dutch culture. German policies toward its Turkish residents may not have pushed them to send their dead back to Turkey (as Turkish Germans frequently did), but they certainly did not assist or encourage integration on the basis of any form of pluralistic liberalism. In Sweden, it could be said until recently, that “the formula according to which Sweden was governed was: ‘One nation, One people, One religion’”.⁸ In other words, Sweden could not accommodate its Muslim migrants.

The second and third generations thus found themselves severely alienated twice over: from both their parents’ subcultures and the mainstream culture. Their need to find a way to belong created a void, a void that many struggled to fill. Unfortunately, a vocal minority filled that void by listening to the arguments put forward by Islamist revivalist movements.

Political Islamism in the UK

The first generation of migrants left their homelands at a difficult time. The 1960s and 1970s were periods of upheaval within the Indian subcontinent: Pakistan had been independent only for a short time, and by 1971 Bangladesh had seceded from it. Political movements were extremely active. Among them was the Jammāt-e-Islāmī (JI), one of the world’s first (and still) significant political Islamist movements.

The JI was overrepresented, due to political repression back home, among the migrants who came to the UK. This group also had the advantage of being well organized. As a result, JI members formed many of the budding community institutions when the Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani migrants became demographically significant. Although ethnic and racial rivalries prevented the formation of a cohesive block, the JI managed to diminish nationalistic tendencies by emphasizing Islam as an overriding, overarching identity.

Other political Islamist groups within the UK shared the same concern with identity formation, among them the Muslim Brotherhood, which originated in Egypt in the late 1920s. Members of these groups eventually formed bodies and institutions that initially owed their intellectual

identity to political Islamism, but over time began to focus more on the UK than on the politics of their homelands.

None of this history can deny that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the UK, whether originally from the Indian subcontinent or elsewhere (including a significant indigenous population) were not political Islamists. During the 1960s and 1970s, they were generally far more concerned with their homelands' non-political activities and trying to improve their economic situation. Most of their political activity, if any, had to do with building links with local government. For example, the Labour Party's engagement with the Muslim community dates back to this period. Being the party of the "working class" and distinct from the right wing and often nationalist Conservative Party, Labour seemed to be the natural choice for migrants with modest economic backgrounds.

Nevertheless, political Islamism did have a strong voice within the community, as the political Islamists had originally focused on building up identity politics. However, it was not Islamism in terms of political movements that played the strongest role in identity politics, but history itself. Opposition to the Iranian revolution of 1979 and western support for Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinian Intifada that began in 1988 caused Islamist movements to identify the West as the source of opposition to Muslim autonomy. In the wake of the Iraq War of 1991, American troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, the land of Islam's holiest sites, which spurred anti-western sentiment. When, in the early 1990s, young British Muslims saw on their television screens the white Muslims of Bosnia being subjected to genocide, they considered this even more evidence that Muslims could not belong to the West. That the United States eventually intervened was widely and cynically dismissed as part of a larger geopolitical strategy to extend American hegemony.

The generation saw the rise of a politicized Muslim identity, and saw in it a way to belong, even though a majority of Muslims did not join it. In the Muslim world, revivalist movements were formed with only a minimal contribution from Islam; mainstream religious authorities were generally not part of the process because they had compromised their credibility by establishing relations with the state. There was some engagement, but all across the Muslim world the *'ulama* (religious scholars) separated themselves from the Islamist movement. (This is in stark contrast to earlier political movements, in which they were heavily involved, such as

in the Libyan resistance to the Italian occupation.) Nor did European Muslims quite buy into Islamism, which was specifically aimed at political action in the Muslim world. In the absence of any other credible alternative, however, a non-religious (as it developed without religious input) “*ummah* nationalism” became the basis of a politicized Muslim identity, one that went beyond the Islamists. The concept of *ummah* (global community) has always been a deeply rooted concept in Islam, and as Muslim communities, even if only nominally so, they demanded that its members’ sentiments be expressed in a religious vocabulary.

Thus it came to a pass that a particular sense of belonging emerged in part of the UK’s Muslim community, one that is quite distinct and separate from mainstream Islamic thought for several reasons. Among these reasons is the absence of religious authorities in both the Islamist movements and in the community as a whole, and that is powerful enough to claim a significant portion of the political identity of second- and third-generation Muslim youth. This sense of belonging became more potent when individual Islamists actually arrived from the Muslim world; none of them were necessarily violent, but they had very anti-establishment views considering that these views had been developed in the face of significant political repression back home. This anti-establishment identity proved immensely attractive to the second- and third-generation Muslim youth who confronted social barriers to integration. Thus Muslim identity politics, particularly in the UK, was born in the 1980s. Although only a small number would join Islamist-based groups, it would nonetheless affect how the overall community would develop its political consciousness.

As time went on, these groups, which saw their ideological origin in political Islamism, recognized that they needed to establish institutions and eventually develop an outward-looking group to engage with the state if they were to be effective. In this regard, both parties shared a common goal. Just as the Jews had a “Board of Deputies” through which the government could engage with the Jewish community, Muslims needed to establish a similar body with which to engage with the state.

In 1994, some fifty or so Muslim community organizations formed the National Interim Committee for Muslim Unity (NICMU). Meeting at regular intervals, one year later it decided to set up an umbrella body to deal with the concerns of many British Muslims who were dissatisfied with the ongoing lack of unity, coordination, and representation. In late 2007 the Muslim Council of

Britain (MCB), which owed much of its support to groups rooted in political Islamist organizations, was formed. The MCB became the organization of choice for the Labour government to engage with and, for eight years, commanded an almost total monopoly in this regard.

None of this received much attention at the time. Given that these ideology-based groups were the ones most concerned with political engagement from within the community's religious section, it was understandable that they would dominate the community's internal politics. Nevertheless, this chapter of Muslim British history would prove to be quite controversial in the years to come.



Community Engagement in Counterterrorism in the UK in the Prevent and Proto-Prevent Years

In 2005, before the July 7 bombings, government actions designed to engage with the Muslim community were already underway. Domestically, government institutions were engaging with the MCB and its affiliates for a variety of purposes. New Scotland Yard had formed a “Muslim Contact Unit” to focus primarily on preventing and tackling crime. Other institutions, among them the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), existed for other police purposes. Overseas, as far back as 2003, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s “Engaging with the Islamic World” (EIW) program had the declared objective of supporting constructive engagement with the Islamic world and promoting peaceful political and economic reform in Arab countries.⁹ It is important to note that there was a separate program for counterterrorism, the “Global Opportunities Fund Counter-Terrorism” program, which drew its funding from the same Foreign Office “pot” as the EIW program. As such, EIW had a wider ambit than just counterterrorism. Nevertheless, it did complement and coordinate project work with the counterterrorism program. (After 7/7, this cooperation intensified to such an extent that staff working on the EIW program were eventually reassigned to explicitly, and solely, counterterrorism-related duties.)

Nevertheless, the predominant thinking behind the EIW and other programs with a community-based component that linked with counterterrorism strategies was associated with foreign threats. That such engagements would have to consider local, domestic groups in the UK was not generally emphasized.

After 7/7, of course, that changed dramatically. The UK recognized that it was facing a form of terrorism aimed at Britain from *within* and that any future counterterrorism strategy would have to involve its Muslim community. Although there were varying perspectives on how deeply the community should be involved in such a strategy, all parties envisaged some sort of engagement. This assessment, which has never been questioned, remains true today.

The first type of engagement, rather unsurprisingly, involved the government reaching out to different, prolific members of the community in a public fashion. On 19 July, less than two weeks after the attacks, Prime Minister Tony Blair invited members of the opposition political parties to a meeting at 10 Downing Street. In addition, he invited some of the community’s more prominent members: MPs, journalists, religious leaders, community lobbyists, and so forth. At the end of that meeting, he announced something a little more surprising: the establishment of a government-mandated task force to combat Muslim extremism.¹⁰

The UK recognized that it was facing a form of terrorism aimed at Britain from within and that any future counterterrorism strategy would have to involve its Muslim community.

More than five years have now passed. The taskforce went through a few name changes before becoming known as the “Preventing Extremism Together Working Groups” – later shortened to “PET.”¹¹ At the time, it was a rather ambitious idea – more than 100 experts, policymakers, and community lobbyists, predominantly (but not exclusively) drawn from the Muslim community, would discuss various issues and then recommend certain areas upon which both the government and the community should act upon. These seven quite comprehensive working groups would focus on the following themes: Engaging with Young People, Education, Engaging with Muslim Women, Supporting Regional and Local Initiatives and Community Actions, Imams’ Training and Accreditation and the Role of Mosques as a Resource for the Whole Community, Community Security – Including Addressing Islamophobia, Increasing Confidence in Policing and Tackling Extremism, and Tackling Extremism and Radicalization¹².

After consultations, about one-third of the roughly sixty-four recommendations were directed at the government to enact, and the remainder were for the Muslim community to implement, with government assistance if necessary. And thus the subsequently named “Prevent” program was born. Muslims were asked to take the lead on tackling the radicalization and extremism within their communities, and the government would be of help where needed and listen closely to what the community and the experts had to say.

In August 2005, when the PET groups were convened, the community showed a great deal of willingness to cooperate fully with the government. The government had stretched out a hand of cooperation, and community institutions as well as the grassroots, which had traditionally been suspicious of the government and of forming close ties to it, had responded in kind. This represented a great opportunity, one that could bring the community into the mainstream and have a serious impact upon the traditional problems of exclusion, as well as simultaneously strike at the heart of the forces of extremism that had attacked London.

However, many members of the groups later expressed concerns about the exercise. From the outset, the criterion used to assign members to specific groups was unclear. For example, a significant number of Labour party members happened to be Muslim but had no strong track record of involvement within community affairs. There was strong representation of Muslim lobbyists, from different groupings – several of whom had some standing within the community, while others had only a minimal or no standing at all. In general, the majority of the members’

political allegiances and political agendas were associated with either a political party or a Muslim lobby group. Moreover, far fewer seemed to be independent and have any expertise in the areas being discussed. During the consultations, the tabloid press began to ask about the selection process, for all indications were that a small number of government personnel had chosen members of their own networks to populate the working groups, and had done so without independent verification or audit.

The process itself was also incredibly rushed. Formed in August 2005, the working groups met in total no more than three times, including a residential weekend. When the final reports were completed, they might have had a huge number of names attached to them; however, each person's input could not have been equal, considering the speed with which the process had been conducted. Adding to the restrictions in this regard was the fact that all of them were expected to contribute their time without compensation. In other words, only so much time could be given under the existing circumstances.

The groups' organic nature also came under question. When the media discovered that a certain government official had fed at least one key recommendation that was later accepted and adopted, the "scholars road show," into a working group, the group's independence was called into question.

All of the working groups' conveners and deputy conveners agreed upon one recommendation: a public inquiry to discover precisely what had happened on the 7th of July and to prevent it from ever happening again. Home Secretary Charles Clarke strongly endorsed, in principle, this inquiry when the working groups delivered their recommendations on 22 September 2005.¹³ But in the end, the government rejected this recommendation, a decision that remains contentious even today. Beginning in 2005, the opposition Conservative Party called for an inquiry and even made it part of its 2010 election manifesto – but once in power it did little in this regard. Muslims saw this rejection, which has not been forgotten, as a sign that the whole PET experiment was more of a public relations exercise than a genuine attempt at community engagement.

Perhaps the experiment's most critical failure was the dynamic it set into play. From that point on, the community and the government were locked into a relationship that relied heavily on

“gatekeepers” within each party. The resulting monopolization of this relationship by a very small set of individuals did not help the community develop the capacity building needed to move its proposals forward; on the contrary, it led to a dependence on the government that was entirely new. For a society that so strongly emphasized the need for “social cohesion,” this was not a good sign for the future, for government injections could not substitute for developing the community’s need for capacity building.

One Year Later: The Beginning of Social Engineering and the Realignment of the Government’s Policies

As the PET experiment came to an end, the government began to help enact several of the proposed recommendations. Two key ones were the “scholars’ road show,” designed to highlight and showcase the teachings of mainstream Islamic religious authorities and intellectuals from around the world, and the “Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board” (MINAB), which sought to improve the administration of mosque-related organizations. The road show was taken forward by a new organization, “The Radical Middle Way,” which initially chose to be discreet about its significant amount of government funding. Prominent within it were individuals associated with *Q-News*, a Muslim magazine that had spent years propagating an interpretation of Islam that was supportive of Sufism and critical of Wahhabism and Salafism. They had built up a track record of arranging lectures and events with mainstream religious authorities). Given their existing connections with government departments, particularly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, it came as no surprise that they were given this brief. The organization had “buy in” from Mahabba, the Young Muslims Organization (YMO) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS). Nevertheless, Mahabba was composed of *Q-News* staff and YMO was far less active than it had been in the past, while FOSIS allowed Mahabba to take the lead.

MINAB, on the other hand, was a wholly new initiative that had Salafi (modernist Salafism, via the Muslim Association of Britain), Shi’i (Al-Khoei), Barelwi (particularly through the British Muslim Forum), and Deobandi community (via the Muslim Council of Britain) representatives. Such a grouping had never been able to sustain itself before, yet MINAB remains in existence today, even if progress vis-à-vis their goals goes slowly.

The enactment of several recommendations made it clear just how much the government relied on a small selection of Muslim organizations and interlocutors. While the Home Office had been advised that some of PET's recommendations would be best served by relying on expertise as opposed to dividing up the spoils among community organizations, right from the outset the government chose to operationalize the recommendations by engaging with the previously identified interlocutors. As a result, many recommendations were simply left on the proverbial shelf.

Another interesting development took place, however. The government made it clear that it was willing to fund a variety of projects under the aegis of counter-radicalization efforts. But such funding required the existence of institutional setups, for money would only be given to organizations. As such, new organizations were launched and pre-existing ones were built up. The hitherto unknown Sufi Muslim Council (SMC) suddenly came to the forefront, claiming to be the voice of the "silent majority." In one respect they were, for most British Muslims come from historically Sufi backgrounds. Nevertheless, it was difficult to see how the SMC had managed to gather the support of all Sufi brotherhoods (*turuq*) in the UK. It appeared to be composed primarily of supporters of a single branch of one Sufi order, the Naqshabandiyyah of Shaykh Nazim of Cyprus, and most often those members who were led by Shaykh Hisham Kabbani. Despite the SMC's denial, Muslim and even Sufi-inclined groups frequently accused it of working against other Muslims to ingratiate itself with the government. This accusation ultimately destroyed its popularity and credibility. Its case was not helped when it became clear that the SMC was predominantly (if not solely) funded by government, which led to charges of "not independent" and "compromised."

The British Muslim Forum (BMF) also came to the fore in the aftermath of PET, although it had been around before the 7/7 bombings. While it could not begin to approach the amount of support that the MCB had mustered since 1997, the BMF certainly spoke to a large swathe of the UK's Barelwi community. This was its strength as well as its weakness. The Barelwis made up around half of those Muslims who originally came from the Indian subcontinent. The Deobandis generally made up the other half, and other ethnic groups had no truck with either of them. Clearly, the BMF was a British Barelwi, as opposed to a British Muslim, organization.

The SMC gradually collapsed, even though the driving force behind it went on to lead a counter-extremism consultancy called CENTRI. The press continued to focus on the fact that even though it had received government funds, no noticeable change could be seen within the community. What did not disappear, however, was a certain type of internal rift that occurred. Until the 7/7 bombings, religious organizations had been comfortable in their anti-establishment and anti-engagement attitudes. But after 7/7, mainstream religious Muslims who were comfortable with Sufism, whether Barelwi, Deobandi, or neither, began to draw dividing lines. At one end was the SMC, which was totally comfortable with being intimately intertwined with a government agenda. In this they were supported by Hisham Kabbani, the Sufi shaykh the SMC followed. At the other end were large swathes of the community that advocated critical engagement (thus maintaining a certain distance from government) and remaining fiercely independent. However, they also accepted that engaging with the government of the day could benefit everyone. That section, which probably accounted for the vast majority of the religious mainstream, had the support of its own religious authorities. Nevertheless, one section remained severely anti-establishment and vigorously rejected all such engagement and public funds. This rejection was sometimes interpreted as an attack on those who did engage. This type of open rift, which couched itself in religious discourse, had not been evident prior to 7/7.

Some divisions were sowed; others were healed. The three most prolific and strident propagators of the Wahhabi/puritanical Salafi message within the UK changed quite dramatically after 7/7. Abu Muntasir, Abu Aaliyah, and Usama Hasan all underwent what can only be described as a “transformation.” They no longer accused other Muslims of *bid’ah* (unsanctioned religious innovations [sic]), as they had been doing in the 1990s (particularly against the Sufis), or engaged in endless diatribes against the West. In effect, they reformed both themselves and their huge numbers of followers by bringing them pretty much within the wider, and far more Sufi-tolerant, mainstream. The effect that this new development had on the UK’s puritanical Salafi community should not be underestimated. Within the UK policy community at large, labeling and distinguishing between “good Muslims” (Sufis) and “bad Muslims” (Salafis) was becoming deeply embedded. This practice would have repercussions for how the government and society at large would engage with the community.

Another development that would define this engagement was the newly created Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which would take over the Home Office's dealings with the community. Thus engagement became a full-fledged policy within a national counterterrorism strategy: the "Prevent" policy within the "Contest" strategy. This policy would prove to be one of this strategy's most controversial strands, and would remain a subject of discussion for years.

Two Years Later: The "Ex-Islamist" Phenomenon and Its Political Alignment

In 2007, a new phenomenon was born: the "good Muslim"/"bad Muslim" dichotomy. This discussion was already thoroughly underway in the public sphere – and it was clear in which direction it was headed. In addition to political Islamists of all shades, Salafis, Wahhabis, Deobandis, and Tablighis were all "bad Muslims," whereas Sufis, liberal-minded Muslims, and non-practicing Muslims were generally "good Muslims." These not particularly helpful distinctions had a clear origin: the security agenda was being increasingly conflated with the social cohesion agenda. Members of the generally socially conservative first group were the supposed "bad Muslims," which meant they were also considered as possible security threats, while members of the second and "socially liberal" group were, by definition, the "good Muslims."

In the end, it seemed clear that conflating these two separate agendas (social cohesion and security) contributed very little to a proper understanding of the community's complex nature. For example, members of the Tablighi Jammats were socially conservative but could hardly be described as precursors to violent groups, considering their avowedly apolitical stance. Sufis were often just as conservative and strict on matters relating to Islamic law as Salafis, and many of them were Deobandis as well. Moreover, many Salafis were often at the forefront of reigning in al-Qa'eda-style Muslims.

By early 2007, however, this discussion had acquired another type of "good Muslim": the "ex-bad Muslim" – in particular, the "ex-Islamist." The first one to be showcased in the media was "Hassan Butt" a former member of al-Muhajiroun, perhaps the most extreme Islamist organization known in the UK. Banned shortly after the 2005 bombings and seeing its leader (Omar Bakri Muhammad) flee to Lebanon, it later re-emerged under a series of new names,

with each new incarnation inviting controversy as its spokesmen's public discourse horrified the UK public (which was likely the point). Already best known as an al-Muhajiroon spokesman, by 2007 Butt had rejected his affiliation and started to preach an anti-Islamist message with a great deal of media attention. The media also spotlighted Muhammed Mahbub Husain (who then became known as "Ed Husain"), who published *The Islamist* (2009), a chronicle of his flirtations with Islamism. Others, including Shiraz Maher and Maajid Nawaz (perhaps the ex-Islamist who had the most history within Islamism), came to the fore and provided a fascinated public with "insider knowledge" about Islamist groups.

This phenomenon initially received a mixed reception from the Muslim community. On the one hand, a significant constituency still had ideological links to Islamism and thus did not support these ex-Islamists. On the other hand, many Muslims who had seen that the Islamist groups' activities on university campuses in the 1990s had not helped the community's internal cohesion; rather, it had caused rifts among families and various communities. As such, they were at first at least neutral to this new group.

This dynamic changed fairly quickly. As the ex-Islamists became more visible in the media, they began to form alliances and find support among right-wing elements within the media and the political establishment. Such right-wing commentators had traditionally been unpopular with Muslims for their anti-multicultural stances, criticism of Muslims in general, and support for Israel against the Palestinians. As ex-Islamists began attacking other Muslim groups deemed to be insufficiently "anti-Islamist," their support base within the community was critically damaged – and remains so today.

Two of the more prolific ex-Islamists, Maajid Nawaz and Ed Husain, founded the Quilliam Foundation: a counter-extremist think tank that received large amounts of public funds. They were hugely successful in making a media splash and influencing policymakers. Due to their funds and the prevailing public mood that privileged ex-Islamists for their assumed insights, they were granted an unprecedented role. The downside of this, however, was their corresponding failure to garner sufficient support among ordinary Muslims, who viewed them as compromised owing to their close association with the right wing and the government¹⁴.

Again, it appeared to be a lost opportunity for the community after the 7/7 bombings. These ex-Islamists had had genuinely important experiences that should have been able to inform the community of the excesses for which parts of the political Islamist movements were responsible, particularly in terms of the divisive on-the-ground politics found in the community. But due to their public alignment with right-wing figures in the UK press¹⁵ and the political establishment,¹⁶ all of which were quite unpopular among Muslims for their views of Muslims in the UK, the Muslim world, and Islam, the positive reception of their message was handicapped.

Moreover, many of them focused on criticizing most contemporary Muslim activist organizations and lobby groups in the UK for their ideological roots in political Islamism. Few organizations escaped this onslaught. While it is true that most Muslim lobby groups have their historical roots in political Islamism, they have generally moved far beyond those roots and now can be described as being almost “post-Islamist.” As such, the positive reception of Quilliam and other ex-Islamists was always going to depend on their having a positive relationship with such groupings, or at least a neutral, non-engagement one. A degree of antagonism developed due to their acceptance of a direct correlation between political Islamism and terrorism. While this view made them quite popular within certain mainstream sectors of the public sphere, it made them decidedly unpopular within most Muslim communities.

Three Years Later: Prevent

In 2003, the UK government launched CONTEST, a multidimensional counterterrorism strategy with four priorities: *Pursue*, *Prevent*, *Protect*, and *Prepare*. The concern in this particular work is the second strand, *Prevent*, which was designed to “stop radicalization, reduce support for terrorism and violent extremism, and discourage people from becoming terrorists.”¹⁷ In 2003 it was the most underdeveloped element,¹⁸ owing to the focus on protecting the public from an “immediate threat to life [...] rather than understand[ing] the factors driving radicalization.”¹⁹ But by 2008, it had become a cornerstone of the government’s counterterrorism strategy. Its funding rose accordingly: from a paltry £6 million (approximately \$10 million) per year in 2006 (already a significant increase from when it was launched in 2003) to £140 million in 2008-09 (approximately \$227 million).²⁰ With increased funding, however, came increased controversy.

By 2008, it was clear that *Prevent* was a sorely needed initiative; between 2001-08, more than 200 Muslims had been prosecuted for terrorism-related charges. Few could seriously doubt that there was indeed a problem, however small, within the community. The controversy around *Prevent* was not the problem's existence, but *how* it was to be tackled.

A House of Commons Select Committee reviewed *Prevent* in 2010. The results, which are too expansive to be included here in full,²¹ pointed to several key issues endemic within how it had been operationalized from 2005 until that point.

First: While the government certainly engaged more with the community after 2005 than it had before, its strategy was not always clear. Invariably it interceded, or at the very least was perceived to intercede, on behalf of particular ideological groups within the community based upon the minister in charge (and they did change) and his/her advisors on the community. As such, it was always difficult to identify a clear, consistent, and principled strategy of engagement; it came across as arbitrary at best, and as opportunistic at worst.

Second: This intervention came with government funding, which affected how Muslim civil society in Britain operated. Prior to 2005, the minimal funding meant that little work took place, a situation that actually ensured the independence and dynamism of those civil society organizations trying to do good work in and for the community. In 2005, the easy acquisition of funding essentially cut away a great deal of that dynamism and caused the organizations to become dependent. While financial dependency may not necessarily result in a lack of independent thought – in fact, much evidence suggests that the government remained “hands-off” in terms of deciding the direction and vision for the groups that they did fund – the existing dynamism was always endangered when such funds were received. Many of these organizations set themselves up to be crippled, for eventually the money would stop coming. When this finally happened, they were less dynamic because they had not prepared themselves for the end of large-scale public funding.

Third: The conflation of community cohesion-related activity with security concerns led to both agendas suffering incredibly and brought no tangible benefits. The *Prevent* strategy, as implemented, meant that almost anything to do with the community was viewed through the prism of security, thereby stigmatizing an entire community that needed to be brought on board

for both security and community cohesion considerations. The community's "securitization" was now complete and total, even though both community cohesion experts and counterterrorism analysts agreed that proceeding along this route was entirely counterproductive. It destroyed the program's credibility and made it appear devoid of any genuine concern for the community at large, which meant that it could not win the hearts and minds of the very people who were vital to its success.

Fourth: The government's method of dealing with the community created a culture of gatekeepers within both parties. To some extent this is natural, but in this case it led to expertise, or even democratic representation, being devalued as the core consideration when deciding how to partner with Muslims to pursue Prevent's objectives. Projects were set up and promoted based on the advice of a close-knit, self-referring set of community and government cliques. Eventually members of the right-wing media were set upon parts of these cliques, not because of their representative value or expertise (which some of them actually had), but because of their sometimes imagined links to Islamism.

Fifth: Prevent's interventions disturbed and reset the community's internal sectarian dynamics in a way that did not help community cohesion or security concerns. With the government taking a far more invasive "social engineering" line than ever before, it became clear to the wider UK population the preferred Muslims were "Sufis" (e.g., the SMC and, to a lesser extent, the BMF) and such "counter-extremism Muslims/ex-Islamists" such as Centri or the Quilliam Foundation. Those Muslims destined to be marginalized and sidelined were the "enemies" of the preferred Muslims – including the Muslim Council of Britain, Salafi groups, and others. None of this categorizing was particularly useful or even accurate within the context of promoting Prevent's goals. For example, as previously mentioned, some Salafi groups were pivotal in the struggle against al-Qa'eda-type groups, and their degree of social conservatism was nearly identical to that of many Sufis. While the MCB could not be considered the UK community's main voice, it was an influential one that had far more grassroots support than the SMC. Some groups were clearly closer to Labour's political vision and others were further away; however, the secular British state has a long tradition of non-involvement in religion, except in the unique case of the Anglican Church, which is the state religion. As such, the dividing line for any government-Muslim community engagement should be whether or not that Muslim community group is breaking the law, not on their ideological or liberal/conservative bias.

By ignoring this traditional attitude, government widened sectarian divides within the community – a policy that benefited neither party. One example is the backlash against the Radical Middle Way by sections of the Sufi contingent of the Muslim community, which should have been its natural stronghold, given the former’s perceived closeness to government. In fact, the Radical Middle Way was one of the few independently audited initiatives.²² Moreover, its work was vital for long-term counter-radicalization work as well as community cohesion. The negative reaction from parts of the Sufi contingent hurt its ability to work.

Finally, the entire Prevent program was suspected of being a covert government surveillance operation. Once such a suspicion began, it was difficult to shake off. As a result, the success of Prevent’s worthwhile aims was incredibly hindered.²³

The Coalition's Approach

As the waning of the Labour government ensued, so did the rise of the UK's two other main political parties: the Conservative Party, led by David Cameron (the current prime minister) and the Liberal Democrats, led by Nick Clegg (the current deputy prime minister). These two parties had fairly different ways of looking at the Prevent program, and such differences would likely lead to new governmental policies.

Signs and Lessons while in Opposition

While out of government, the Conservative Party appeared to be split on the issues arising out of the Prevent program. One contingent in the Shadow Cabinet, led by Michael Gove, Liam Fox, and Pauline Neville Jones, leaned heavily toward the right and neo-conservatism. It generally advocated an even more interventionist line for Prevent-related activities, whereby engagement would continue to be defined primarily by security concerns. Another contingent, primarily led by Dominic Grieve and Sayeeda Warsi, came more from the Conservative Party's centrist and libertarian wings. While insisting that there was a security problem, they advocated an engagement based more on respect for civil liberties, common values, and bringing the Muslim community on board for Prevent.

While in opposition, it was unclear where David Cameron fit in vis-à-vis these two contingents. For some time he appeared to vacillate between the two. Nevertheless, the Conservative Party was fairly united on the desire to ban Hizb Ut Tahrir, a non-violent radical political Islamist group, and insisting on a public inquiry into the 7/7 bombings. Both of these demands were in its 2010 election manifesto.

The Liberal Democrats appeared to be far more interested in working with the community, as opposed to allowing it to be problematized by identifying them with a security problem; however, their election manifesto gave few hints as to what this would mean if they ever took office.

After May 7: Coalition Government

The May 2010 election delivered a startling result: a Conservative Party–Liberal Democrat coalition government. As often occurs with coalition governments, the two parties combined their manifestos. Thus the ban on Hizb Ut Tahrir was shelved²⁴ and a more libertarian line

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was proposed. The public inquiry was also shelved²⁵ and the culture of gatekeepers, whether inside or outside the community, was altered. This was hardly surprising, as many of them were deeply linked to the defeated Labour Party. Indeed, a lot of pressure was brought to bear within the civil service on various individuals.

Within the first 100 days, it was clear that it was not going to be business as usual. In June 2010 Home Minister Theresa May banned two overseas Muslim speakers, Bilal Philips and Zakir Naik, from entering the country. Not generally known for supporting groups such as al-Qa'eda, they were banned for engaging in unacceptable behavior when commenting on Bin Laden and violence.²⁶

The move caused splits within British governmental departments, where it was clear that Charles Farr, director general of the office for security and counterterrorism, had been against the exclusion of Naik in particular. One of his senior officials, Sabin Khan, was suspended for attacking the exclusion order as a "huge error of judgment."²⁷ Some suspected that the ban was linked to the fact that both speakers were considered antipathetic to Shi'is and Sufis, for members of these two groups publicly endorsed it.²⁸ If this were the case, then the social engineering, interventionist line within government had won, a result that would not necessarily have positive results in the future. Government involvement in religion was something that many had hoped would end with Prevent's review; the fear was that if sectarian rather than purely security concerns motivated this ban, it could signal a new strategy: governmental involvement in essentially sectarian disputes.²⁹ In any case, this move also showed that the split within the government and the civil service was very real³⁰ and potentially damaging.

In regard to Prevent as a program, the government did not show all of its cards from the outset. Nevertheless, rumours surfaced one month after the election that Prevent was due to be severely reduced in size. Moreover, in that same month the government-funded Quilliam Foundation briefed the government on which groups within the community should be dealt with and which should not. This list, which became public in August, became the subject of a serious controversy on whether the government would stigmatize huge swathes of the community on the basis of a recommendation from a group that was controversial among the Muslims themselves.³¹

Decisive action began to take place on 13 July, when May announced that all counterterrorism activities, including the Prevent program, would be completely reviewed.³² In November 2010, she declared that Lord Carlile of Berriew QC would oversee the review and that the revised Prevent strategy would “separate work to prevent terrorism from work to promote integration,”³³ the latter of which would be led by the DCLG. In this regard, it seemed that the Select Committee’s early 2010 report was quite significant, as it had been particularly strong on the need to disaggregate the two strands.

The government’s thinking on the particulars of these issues remained unclear for some time. After the announcement that Prevent would be reviewed, there were reports that as far as parts of the civil service was concerned, Hizb Ut Tahrir was “not a gateway to terrorism” – a claim that was at the heart of the effort to ban it.³⁴

The initial signs were somewhat confusing. At first, it seemed as though the home secretary would take a more interventionist line against community engagement, as was indicated by her banning two overseas figures who were not connected to violent groups. When news surfaced that there was a strong current of thought within the civil service that Hizb Ut Tahrir was probably not going to be banned, the consistency of any unfolding strategy was thrown into question. More interesting was the report that Quilliam, which had consistently supported the discourse that non-violent political Islamism led directly to terrorism and had received substantial public funding, found itself having to lay off some 80% of its staff. The reason, as reported, was that government funding for its domestic activities was being cut.³⁵

Shortly thereafter, and seemingly complicating matters further, were Cameron’s statements that the people of Britain must ask themselves if they “are allowing the radicalization and poisoning of the minds of some young British Muslims who then contemplate and sometimes carry out acts of sickening barbarity.”³⁶ He went on to state that “the overwhelming majority of British Muslims who detest this extremism must help us to find the answers together,” a statement that seemed to indicate that the community still had a key role, as a *community*, in helping the state fight violent extremism. None of this was a surprise, for it had been clear for years that a radical and extreme ideology was targeting young Muslims and that the community could help to deconstruct it. In the context of the Prevent review, however, such statements seemed to lend more weight to those Conservative Party members who advocated a more

interventionist line within the community in the interest of counterterrorism, than to those who placed the community firmly within the broader British citizenry and largely directed counterterrorism activity toward the security services. One line would end the community's securitization, whereas the other would modify it slightly but still accept the basic premise of the Labour years: the community is made up of only extremists or anti-extremists.

More complicating still were the statements by Lady Sayeeda Warsi, then Chairwoman of the Conservative Party, who declared in January 2011 that Islamophobia was now "socially acceptable" in Britain.³⁷ Considering that the Conservative Party had long criticized multiculturalism as harmful to the UK, it was surprising that its chairwoman would make such a claim. After all, one of this policy's key assumptions was that racism and bigotry remained active in the UK and that multiculturalism was needed to combat it. Moreover, she criticized how large portions of the media divided the community into "moderates" and "extremists," thereby implicitly attacking the previous UK government for having labeled sections of the community on liberal/conservative grounds (rather than security grounds) in order to justify working with only certain sections in security policies and community cohesion.

Warsi's comments did not go unchallenged within the Conservative Party. Large portions of the media, as well as many Conservatives themselves, questioned her basic message that "Islamophobia is the new racism in the UK". Some observers wondered if she was testing the waters for the government. It became clear that this was not the case when the prime minister distanced himself from her comments fairly quickly by having his spokesperson declare that Warsi was only expressing her own views.³⁸

"Muscular Liberalism"

The final certain signal came a few weeks later when Prime Minister Cameron outlined the basis of his government's complete anti-terrorism strategy at an international security conference in Munich. This was to be published later in 2011. In it,³⁹ he was strikingly clear about his departure from the previous Labour government as well as those sections in his own party that might have preferred a more conciliatory attitude. One observer described it as a "securitization of race policy,"⁴⁰ for Cameron took the opportunity to attack multiculturalism as a political project

and declare his insistence that the British state be more “muscular” in its liberalism (which would have consequences for the funding of community groups).

The place chosen to deliver this speech was almost as relevant as its content. One key criticism of the previous government had been its conflation of the counterterrorism strategy with its community cohesion policy, which led to both being damaged. Cameron chose to deliver this particular summation of his government’s view on both of these at a forum dedicated to international security, thereby implicitly linking the basis of the government’s community cohesion policy with security concerns. He then did so explicitly by declaring that multiculturalism fostered extremism and was contributing directly to homegrown Islamist terrorism.⁴¹ That he did so in Germany, where Chancellor Merkel had recently attacked multiculturalism and where a prominent German politician had already been accused of deeply held prejudices against Muslims and Jews was significant.⁴²

Moreover, he signaled how this government would or would not engage with community groups, *regardless* of their support for violence or radicalism, on the basis of “muscular liberalism.” If Muslim groups failed to “endorse women’s rights or promote integration,” they would lose all government funding. In other words, those groups applying for funding will be judged on the basis of their political commitments (in a non-partisan way), rather than on what they can deliver. This was possibly the most radical declaration of social engineering given by any modern sitting British prime minister and implicitly suggested that the Muslim community did not actually accept the basic principles of a liberal society, something that populist far-right wing opinion around Europe was constantly suggesting.

The reaction was predictable. Much of populist opinion was firmly behind him, while those that worked with the community were harshly critical. The founder of an interfaith group argued that, “Finger-pointing at communities and then cutting social investment into projects is a sure-fire way of causing greater resentment. It blames some communities while his Government slashes social investment.”⁴³ The timing of the speech could not have been worse, for at the same time the radical far-right Islamophobes of the English Defense League in the UK were marching in predominantly Muslim communities in Luton to protest Islam and Muslims in general.

“Muscular liberalism” had different interpreters within government, however. Deputy Prime Minister Clegg had a somewhat different outlook to his Prime Minister. A few weeks after Cameron’s speech in Munich, Clegg spoke in Luton, where far-right extremists from the English Defense League as well as radical Islamist extremists of the then defunct al-Muhajiroon group had both marched. While he agreed with some of Cameron’s sentiments, he showed a marked difference with his senior coalition partner in other ways. In fact, his speech made it clear that the new government was a coalition – i.e., that it was made up of rather different viewpoints.

He chose to emphasize that the existing evidence suggested that radical Islamist extremists who turned to violence had a shallower understanding of Islam than those who did not, which was enthusiastically received by the country’s Muslims. He also showed his sympathy for Lady Warsi by echoing her claim that Islam was compatible with core liberal values and that the community was very diverse. In other words, he essentially supported her trend over those Conservatives who favored more interventionist policies.

Implicitly taking issue with the subtle claim that multiculturalism and integration were directly related to the rise of extremism, he argued that such identity issues were part and parcel of a “lethal cocktail” made up of a variety of factors. Moreover, he stated that social policy and security policy had to be distinguished from each other, properly and appropriately separated, but agreed that “taking the argument to the bigots” was a duty in British society. He also agreed with members of Labour, now the opposition party, by bringing up the statements of well-known Labour members that promoted his point of view.

Interestingly, he also pointed out that while public funds should not be diverted to organizations that supported violence, those religious organizations that might not be entirely in line with “essential liberal values” should be engaged. While Cameron’s Conservatives had ruled out funding or other methods of talking with non-violent Islamist groups, Clegg stated that such groups should be engaged, instead of left to their own devices, or proscribed, which should be a “last resort” only. Again, this was not going to be music to the ears of many of his coalition partners.

Reconciling the Different Signs

The coalition government's strategy might have appeared quite scattered and rather inconsistent, but when considered against the backdrop of broader British politics it is not particularly difficult to see how it has fared. After the 2010 elections, the state was clearly in financial turmoil: cuts needed to be made, regardless of ideological tendencies vis-à-vis the Prevent agenda. In that regard, it is understandable how many projects lost their funding. Even if the government had wanted to fund them, it could not justify such spending.

If funding was always going to be cut, then the government could easily kill two birds with one stone: it could save money and score political points with its right-wing and populist support base at the same time by overemphasizing how different it was vis-à-vis its predecessors when it came to Muslim groups. Whether groups were “muscularly liberal” or not, it is doubtful whether they could be funded in this current climate. As such, the government could not really influence them to do very much anyway. If that were the case, then tacking its direction to its more populist base would be more strategically savvy.

All of this is speculative, of course. But it is also extremely likely that Cameron was always more attuned to his party's interventionist line on an ideological level, and certainly this was far more popular in his party than the likes of Dominic Grieve or Sayeeda Warsi.⁴⁴ Even those who had been more concerned with civil liberties and engagement remained concerned about reports of non-liberalism from within the community and would not have strongly resisted a policy that stigmatized the community on that basis.

Moreover this is a coalition government, a coalition between two parties that contain different views within themselves as well as between parties. Naturally, the government had to account for this in its statements prior to the review's publication.

Coming to the Sixth Memorial of 7/7: The Prevent Review's Publication

Several commentators argued that Cameron and Clegg had to agree to disagree on two issues: the proposed change of the country's voting system and its strategy for preventing radical Islamist extremism within its borders. Their different perspectives were displayed in their

speeches, delivered within weeks of each other. The disagreements, which reflected a split within government, the civil service, and the coalition's two parties, appear to have delayed the review's proposed delivery by six months.⁴⁵

In the end, it seemed one side beat the other. The final Prevent review,⁴⁶ delivered on 7 June 2011, a month before the seventh anniversary of 7/7, contained little of Clegg's views. It was not a coalition consensus document, despite the fact that a Liberal Democrat was tasked with overseeing the review; rather, it was clearly a Conservative policy informed by Cameron's (and his supporters') more interventionist strand.

Up until the review's publication, it seemed plausible that the state would deal with a range of Muslim groups to counter violent radicalization, including, if appropriate, those that adhered to a non-violent form of Islamism. The Liberal Democratic leadership, particularly Clegg, who was supported by a wide range of academics and counterterrorism practitioners, championed this approach.

And yet there was always a strand of thinking, one particularly represented by several right-wing think tanks, which disagreed. They generally promoted the "conveyor belt theory": any non-violent form of Islamism was only the first step toward violent forms of Islamism, because it would inculcate a common Islamist worldview that, supposedly, was at odds with British values. The subsequent undermining of these values would interfere with the government's tactics vis-à-vis integration and social cohesion.

This latter strand served as the philosophical basis behind Prevent's review. The review laid down the principle that the state should only engage with those Muslim groups that met a certain standard of integration first and were far removed from Islamism – whether violent or non-violent.

In this regard, the review has a key challenge, that of devising definitions so that Prevent's implementation will not be confused and befuddled. First, what exactly is "Islamism"? Are Muslim groups that claim to adhere to the *shari'ah* (Islamic jurisprudence) Islamist? If so, then how are they different from Jewish groups that adhere to the *halakhah* (Jewish canon law)? Initial community reactions indicated a fear that any Muslim who opposed British foreign policy

or held conservative religious views on any issue at all might be lumped together with groups that advocated violence overseas. The review contains no clear statement on this issue; indeed, it seems that no implementation will have a clear direction in this regard. The definition will not be a part of the review; rather, that particular gap will be filled in by policy experts in various government departments or by a government-appointed overseer. As a result of this confusion, it is hardly surprising that no names were offered vis-à-vis problematic groups or institutions, even though the Tories have long advocated that groups like Hizb Ut Tahrir be proscribed.

Second, what exactly are “British values”? This question is part of a much larger debate in the UK, just as it is around the EU in terms of nationally held values. The answer, if it is to be sustainable, has to be constructed and continually reviewed as a consensus-building exercise among citizens. But again, such a definition is not part of the review and thus represents a huge gap. While it may become part of a second strategy published later in the year by the DCLG on integration, the controversial nature of any such definition is equally likely to render it rather unclear as well.

Third, what is ‘extremism’, and without a thorough definition, why does the Prevent review focus on it? Is doing so in favor of counter-terrorism, or does such an emphasis present a hurdle in terms of formulating a successful strategy? One commentator put it thusly:

“Everyone is against violent extremism, right? But what about plain extremism? That is the question at the heart of the government's review of its Prevent policy—the pre-emptive strand of Britain's counter-terrorism strategy.

The signs are that the remit is to be extended. “One of the things we were very clear about here at the Home Office”, Theresa May explained this weekend, “was we needed to look at extremism, not just violent extremism”. They may be clear about it in the Home Office, but there are many voices within Parliament and within the coalition who worry where this policy may lead.

When a committee of senior MPs reported on the Prevent policy last year there was a clear warning. ‘Holding extreme views is not illegal and Prevent should clearly focus on violent extremism’ the MPs said. They worried that by marginalising ‘radical’ but non-violent

opinions, Government effectively pushes those groups beyond the democratic process. "No organisation, unless proscribed," the committee concluded, "should be excluded from debate and discussions."⁴⁷

This concern is well placed. One cannot deny that non-violent extremist views present a collective challenge to the UK – but is that a challenge best solved through a counter-terrorism strategy? Or does it create a dynamic that is counter-productive, engendering a suspicion among the Muslim community that it is being further stigmatised?

The early signs are not encouraging. A joint article by a counter-terrorism practitioner and academic mirrored a wide swathe of opinion in the Muslim community:

“By saying that terrorism is the result of Islamism, he [Cameron] betrays a lazy indifference to the theological, geographic, political and contextual differences that mark a hugely diverse range of groups and movements, from the millenarian to the worldly political, the non-violent to the extremely violent. It is the equivalent to saying that any form of right leaning politics succours fascism, and not bothering to disaggregate the historical trajectories of organisations such as the Tory Party, the US Republican Party, France’s Front Nationale and Mussolini’s Black Shirts.”

The authors might be right or wrong in their assertions – but this is, in the final analysis, immaterial. What is direly important to ascertain is whether or not the Muslim community perceives this policy as impacting them negatively or positively? If they do not perceive it positively, the fear is that they will not engage with it – which damages a key pillar of any counter-terrorism policy: community buy-in.

There is a crucial distinction between non-violent and violent extremism, and the importance of that distinction should be plain to see. The views of non-violent extremists may be abhorrent; but part of living in a free society is the right to hold variant opinions. Criminalising people for holding distasteful views does not only run counter to the principle of a democratic state, it also undermines the very purpose of the scheme, by alienating non-violent extremists and pushing them further and further away from the mainstream.

Recommendations

The year 2011 will probably go down in counterterrorism strategy history as a watershed one. In January, Ben Ali of Tunisia fell not due to an Islamist terrorist overthrow, but due to a popular, non-violent revolution. In February, after eighteen days of protest, Mubarak of Egypt also fell – and again, not due to an Islamist terror campaign, but due to a popular, non-violent revolution. Soon thereafter, Arabs around the region rose up – and again, not due to an Islamist terror campaign.

None of this could have made the pro-violence radical Islamists particularly optimistic about their future. Ever since 9/11, they have tried to curry favor with the Muslim masses. In fact, part of the strategy behind 9/11 was to create a wedge between Muslim communities everywhere and the West, with Muslims closing ranks behind radical Islamism.

Yet when dictatorial Arab regimes finally began to fall, the banners of Islamism were nowhere to be seen. Some Islamists, particularly the youth, did participate, but this was almost in spite of their Islamism, not because of it. These revolutions were for dignity, not for a restored caliphate or for any of al-Qa'eda's aims and purposes. What is more, al-Qa'eda and its cohorts knew this. Some tried to take responsibility for these uprisings, even though the Arabs marching in the streets did not choose radical Islamism. Neither did they quite choose democracy; that may come later. Instead they chose dignity, which they felt had been taken away from them by decades of dictatorial rule. This was certainly a religiously acceptable choice, even by al-Qa'eda's reasoning, and yet they were not driven by a political Islamist ideology while pursuing it.

Al-Qa'eda and its cohorts may have hoped to exploit the situation at a later stage. But if so, their plans were likely disrupted by the death of their most famous leader, Osama Bin Laden, in May 2011. First they were becoming irrelevant, and then their most significant claim to relevancy was reported dead. Bin Laden had acquired something of a mythical status to his followers, owing to his seemingly superhuman ability to avoid capture by the world's sole superpower.

It is too early to predict what al-Qa'eda's response will be, not to mention that of the larger radical violent Islamist network. But the following seems likely:

There are not likely to be many reprisals against the regimes of predominantly Muslim countries in the Arab world (this might not hold true further afield in Pakistan or Afghanistan). The so-

In fact, part of the strategy behind 9/11 was to create a wedge between Muslim communities everywhere and the West, with Muslims closing ranks behind radical Islamism.

called “near enemy” seems to be falling down, and any destabilization by radical Islamists will certainly not encourage public support. On the contrary, it could make populations even more opposed to their ideology. Al-Qa’eda probably realized this years ago, and has even more of a reason to believe it now.

Western countries, especially the US and the UK, that have interests and institutions abroad should remain on high alert, for revenge attacks are extremely likely.

Perhaps the most likely possibility is that radical Islamists will carry out violence against western countries from *within*. They have probably never halted plans in this regard; after all, such events have been the most successful tool in establishing al-Qa’eda’s reputation. In recent years, given the rise of general anti-Muslim sentiment in the US and Europe, al-Qa’eda-style operatives may try to exploit the feelings of marginalization within the West’s Muslim communities. As such, we should expect them to focus more on the “far enemy” (viz., the US and other western countries) than on targeting regimes in the Muslim world.

Moreover, targeting the West may serve as another al-Qa’eda tactic to further provoke a civilizational conflict between the West and the Muslim world, just as 9/11 was designed to be.

As such, while 7/7 and 9/11 might have happened a fair number of years ago, they remain relevant for the future. Attacks on the UK in particular and on western societies in general remain possibilities, as per the warnings of different security agencies:

“To be blunt it means that an attack is highly likely and could occur without warning at any time... Osama bin Laden led an organisation which is responsible for the injury and death of thousands of people worldwide in the name of an extreme and perverted ideology, committed to the use of terror and murder to achieve their aims. However, one man’s death does not mark the end of an ideology and we must remain alert to the continuing threat from al-Qaida, its affiliates and those acting alone.”

– Sir Paul Stephenson, *commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, May 2011*⁴⁸

As such, a version of the Prevent policy that addresses its flaws and ensures that it remains flexible enough to take note of changing on-the-ground realities remains necessary. Currently, the policy suffers from a strong cut in funds, as do many other government-funded initiatives. But it also suffers from another problem: the perception that Prevent-empowered groups were not in tune with certain types of liberal sensitivities (otherwise portrayed as “British values”).

As such, Europe’s negative reaction to multiculturalism, perceived as having provided fertile ground for radical ideologies to take root, has been conflated with critiques of current counterterrorism initiatives. In February 2011, it was reported that major counterterrorism projects worth millions of pounds “faced the axe” as part of an effort to end multiculturalism.⁴⁹ In light of the prime minister’s speech in Munich in early 2011, as well as the final Prevent review in June, it is likely that other initiatives will follow. In fact, a great deal of funding has already been cut away.

Some of this is likely to be positive, for many initiatives were simply being funded by the wrong governmental sector. For example, initiatives involved in community capacity building should never have been funded from counterterrorism funds. These two very different agendas should have remained separate, for their conflation has resulted in a deeply suspicious attitude among Muslim communities of the UK.

Nevertheless, work has to be done – but in a way that appropriately limits expectations.

“In recent years we appear increasingly to have imported from the American media the assumption that terrorism is 100% preventable and any incident that is not prevented is seen as a culpable government failure...This is a nonsensical way to consider terrorist risk and only plays into the hands of the terrorists themselves. Risk can be managed and reduced but it cannot realistically be abolished and if we delude ourselves that it can we are setting ourselves up for a nasty disappointment.”⁵⁰

These are the words of Jonathan Evans, head of MI5 (the British internal intelligence service), who believed that there is no way to obliterate terrorism completely. We can only manage the risk involved and minimize it as much as possible. In this ongoing struggle, a form of the

Prevent policy will remain, for no government can ignore the real risk that extremist groups may indoctrinate Muslims to gain recruits to their cause.

Thus in light of recent British experience, any future Prevent strategy can, and should, be based on the following key points:

The community cohesion/integration strand of public policy has to remain completely disengaged from the counterterrorism/counter-radicalization agenda. This recommendation has been made several times in recent years, beginning almost immediately after 7/7; however, it seems to have remained controversial within the government. Some governmental sectors seem sympathetic to the idea that those who might not be appropriate partners for the community cohesion debate within community organizations should be barred from the counterterrorism one. This is not, however, a foregone conclusion.

We may have to work with those who might not agree with our other goals to ensure that our key aim, protecting British citizens, is fulfilled. This minority viewpoint may be the most controversial aspect of Prevent's implementation. But if the state is to influence and eventually change the views of those who oppose its aims, it must talk to them – whether for community cohesion or counterterrorism purposes.

Furthermore, when dealing with security strategies we should work with anyone who renounces violence. This must be our key red line, and we should not conflate any other red lines with it. Ultra-conservative Salafis or Islamists may not be entirely positive movements in a wider arena, but they are certainly preferable to al-Qa'eda. If they have proven abilities to draw people away from al-Qa'eda, then they should be worked with within carefully defined limits, even if doing so does not involve funding them or considering them as representatives or lobby groups. As it stands, the lack of specificity on this point places an insurmountable burden upon institutions across British society, which is rightly concerned about extremism.

Those limits can only be laid down by agreeing on definitions, particularly for “extremism” and “integration.” Such agreed-upon definitions do not exist, and are not likely to exist in the present climate. As any consensus-building exercise has to be robust and comprehensive, all

sectors of society have to be involved. In addition, due consideration must be given to the fact that minorities have a certain degree of autonomy within their community on deciding what their religion does or does not stipulate. Moreover, if the definitions indirectly hint at or are even perceived as being explicit declarations that extremism is akin to opposing the state's foreign policy, they will be rejected by British society at large.

In the future, an institution or establishment that clearly expresses what Islam does or does not say, one that is accepted by the overwhelming majority of British Muslims, may emerge. But that day is not here yet and will not be brought forward by any government involvement. In fact, such involvement is likely to increase a damaging sense of exclusion among Muslim Britons, who remain a key front line against extremism. If they then become the subject of internal community discussions as to what are appropriate interpretations of religion within the UK, the government should keep its distance from the community – as the Select Committee declared in its review in early 2010, 'Government interference in theological matters must be avoided.'

Since funding is extremely scarce and likely to remain so, we should focus on providing funds to "hard" initiatives, those delivered by proven actors in the field of security. For far too long, the British establishment has been perceived as taking sides in internal community dynamics. This is not something it can do effectively or, on the basis of principle, should do. Many communities have "disconcerting" social views; however, as long as they do not break the law they must be considered off limits for direct government intervention. Communities must be left alone to tackle such issues on their own terms.

Counterterrorist strategies are by nature a process of continual evaluation. And that process should, and must, continue. It will have to be done carefully and in conjunction with all stakeholders, who must perceive themselves as stakeholders rather than targets. Then, and only then, will they perceive themselves to be partners in the ongoing struggle against terrorism and avert a repetition of the 7th July bombings or worse.





Appendix

Submission of Evidence

From:

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Email: h.a.hellyer@warwick.ac.uk

To:

Communities and Local Government Select Committee, House of Commons

Subject:

Review of DCLG's policies on PREVENT

Date:

7th November 2009

Introduction

The author was appointed by Her Majesty's Government (HMG) to be Deputy Convenor of the Working Group on 'Tackling Extremism and Radicalisation' of the 'Preventing Extremism Together' Working Groups (PET) in August 2005.

An academic at the University of Warwick and founder of a research consultancy on Muslim world – West relations (the Visionary Consultants Group (www.visionaryconsultantsgroup.com)), he has been associated with think tanks in the US and the UK on issues pertaining to counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation, including the Brookings Institution & the International Institute of Strategic Studies.

He has provided expert advice to different departments within the UK and US governments, including the Department of Homeland Security (US), the Home Office (UK), the Department of Communities and Local Government (UK), and in 2007-8 was ESRC Placement Fellow at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as an independent Warwick University academic looking at Muslim European communities.

Summary

1. Assessing the PREVENT agenda is difficult, as over the past 4 years the ‘aims and goals’ have been redefined several times.
2. It is vital that the civil service be concerned foremost with effectiveness and accountability – not ideological agreement.
3. The diversity of the Muslim British community must be recognized, with these problems being viewed as challenges facing British society as a whole.

Recommendations

- I. Take steps to assess PREVENT's success beyond DCLG – other government departments must be investigated.*
- II. Recognise that PREVENT is in danger of being considered a part of PURSUE, and take steps to remedy.*
- III. Make a clear distinction between PREVENT work, and the integration/community cohesion/ common values discussion.*
- IV. Violent extremism remains a threat; it is motivated by a variety of factors, and HMG, in partnership with all our communities, must tackle each of those factors.*
- V. HMG must make clear that it has no desire to engage in ‘religious engineering’ by promoting certain groups over others owing to their support of HMG policies. If such groups break the law, they are held to account like everyone else – but state-community engagement activity should not be done with the aim of inducing ‘reformation’ or other such ill-advised notions. This is not the role of the British state.*
- VI. Lobby groups or representative bodies should be dealt with on the basis of effectiveness – if they are able to induce positive change for the public good (good governance, increased capacity, and so forth), they should be assisted through the same processes as any other community group or NGO.*

- VII. HMG must re-evaluate how it deals with newly created 'experts', who may have no background in these issues. Bad expertise is often worse than no expertise.
- VIII. HMG must create new ways to liaise with the professional academic community, and professional expertise in order to benefit from their expertise, on the basis of their knowledge.
- IX. HMG must take steps to re-professionalise how the civil service deals with all non-HMG actors, and investigate any claims of cronyism or unjustified preferential treatment.
- X. HMG must also be careful about considering specific gate-keepers into the Muslim community as 'the' gate-keepers, and be aware that the large majority of the Muslim community are very localised, and outside the realm of national organisations.
- XI. Current PREVENT initiatives that are in the public interest, but are more appropriately part of the community cohesion agenda, should be funded separately from PREVENT.
- XII. All PREVENT initiatives that can be self-sustaining should be encouraged to be so, and provided with training and resources to be so for the long-term.

Introductory remarks

1. Post-7th July, HMG had a clear opportunity to win the total support of Muslim communities in a counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation effort.
2. This was a lost opportunity. While many parts of HMG used PREVENT as a way to continue the good work they were doing pre-7th July, the PREVENT agenda has become discredited, for huge numbers of the Muslim British community – its main target audience.
3. This is the case not only in the UK but beyond – PREVENT is not simply a DCLG affair, but also falls within the purview of other government departments and ministries, particularly the Foreign Office.

RECOMMENDATION: Take steps to assess and evaluate PREVENT's success beyond DCLG – other government departments must be investigated.

Overall perception and credibility

4. PREVENT has a number of different focal points – some of which are properly left within DCLG, but whereas others belong solely to the security services.
5. Many around the country and internationally perceive PREVENT to be part and parcel of one large security apparatus that stigmatises and problematises Muslim communities entirely as a security risk. In this regard, PREVENT is in danger of being considered “‘PURSUE’ in sheep’s clothing”.
6. This increases anti-Muslim sentiment (commonly referred to as ‘Islamophobia’) across the country, and may in part be why the British National Party’s vitriolic discourse against Islam and Muslims has become so acceptable to large numbers of the wider British public.
7. PREVENT has also suffered by poor explanation to and reception by some of the tabloid media.
8. This is most vividly evident in the recent media coverage that claimed PREVENT was being used to conduct espionage; the perception alone is damning (and was strengthened by the moral validation of such a perception by a PREVENT funded lobby group).

*RECOMMENDATION: **Recognise that PREVENT is in danger of being considered a part of PURSUE, and take steps to remedy.***

*RECOMMENDATION: **Make a clear distinction between all PREVENT work, and the integration/community cohesion/common values discussion.***

Violent Extremism

9. Violent extremism is still a reality and a threat to this country, our European neighbours, and perhaps most of all, the Muslim world.
10. It is important that a strategy exists from HMG to empower Muslim communities, whether domestically or internationally, to take the ‘battle of ideas’ to violent extremists.

11. This should be done with important caveats. Firstly: it is rarely strictly religious motives that are the main source of violent extremism: it is usually more through a combination of social and political circumstances. PREVENT runs the risk of ignoring such individuals, at the peril of our national security.
12. Nevertheless, there remain a select & small group of violent extremists who are directly influenced by a radical theology that justifies violent extremism – that radical theology must also be counteracted through a ‘battle of ideas’.

RECOMMENDATION: Pay attention to the fact that violent extremism remains a threat, that it is motivated by a variety of factors, and that HMG, in partnership with all our communities, must tackle each of those factors accordingly.

‘Religious engineering’ and the ‘pseudo-representational model’

13. The second caveat: HMG is not in the business of dictating what is or what is not religion – such dogmas are left to religious communities themselves, within the confines of British law.
14. Nevertheless, it has become widely perceived that HMG is engaging in ‘religious engineering’ through remote proxies that are perceived to be ‘more true’ or ‘more British’. The perception is that these ‘more true’ or ‘more British’ interpretations of religious dogmas are thus so due to their being ideologically more in tune with HMG policies, by being liberal/conservative/non-radical/etc.
15. The pseudo-representational model of pre-7th July, where one Muslim community organisation was deemed to be the sole and legitimate representative of the entire Muslim British community, quickly came to an end after the 7th July bombings. In one respect, this is positive, for no one organisation could not hope to represent all Muslims in the UK.
16. However, PREVENT also led to HMG dealing with a plethora of other organisations that were even less representative. The initial intention notwithstanding, this led to a suspicion that HMG was engaged in unwarranted ‘religious engineering’ within Muslim British communities – supporting other non-violent voices over others, despite having no competency to do so.
17. HMG must make absolutely clear that it neither seeks, nor already has, any role whatsoever

in engaging in ‘religious engineering’. As long as they do not break any law of the land, any religious interpretation is tolerable within British society.

18. The funding of any activities of any of these groups must not be perceived to be the result of HMG favoritism due to their being perceived as more pro-HMG, domestically or internationally. HMG must make very clear its non-interest in encouraging certain types of legal religiosity over others, owing to a perceived synergy of ideology – whether Sufi over Salafi, Salafi over Sufi, Sunni over Shi’i, Barelwi over Deobandi and so forth.
19. Community organisations and lobby groups should be engaged with on the basis of effectiveness, not on the basis of media attention. Politicians should be also very careful before characterising organisations they may like as laudable without giving due thought to how such organisations are actually perceived on the ground.
20. Community lobby groups and representative bodies are important to deal with – and they should all be dealt with, as long as they have broken no law. Nevertheless, the bottom line must be – how effective are they in creating change in particular communities on the ground?
21. Where faith groups are actively involved in counteracting practices or ideas that are illegal according to British law, such activities should be vigorously supported through PREVENT funds *if and only if* they are shown to have sufficient grounding within the community they intend to influence. Other activities conducive to the public good, should also be funded but not through PREVENT.
22. In this regard, HMG would be empowering communities to counter-act illegal groupings; but HMG has not been consistent in its testing the grounding of all activities it supports within the Muslim British community through PREVENT. This has led to further claims of ‘religious engineering’, as unqualified and non-rooted actors are empowered far beyond their ability to influence.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must make it clear that it has no desire to engage in ‘religious engineering’ by promoting certain groups over others owing to their support of HMG

policies. If such groups break the law, they are held to account like everyone else – but state-community engagement activity should not be done with the aim of inducing ‘reformation’ or other such ill-advised notions. This is not the role of the British state.

RECOMMENDATION: Lobby groups or representative bodies should be dealt with on the basis of effectiveness – if they are able to induce positive change for the public good (good governance, increased capacity, and so forth), they should be assisted through the same processes as any other community group or NGO.

‘Religious engineering’ and the ‘pseudo-expert model’

23. HMG has taken the step of privileging certain non-representational organisations or individuals over others to further its replacement of the ‘pseudo-representational model’. Unfortunately, such organisations or individuals have not always been vetted through objective avenues, and a widely held perception is that they have been so privileged (often with funding) owing to their popularity, rather than their (pseudo-)expertise.
24. The media is partly responsible for creating a pseudo-background for many of these cases, but politicians and all actors relating to PREVENT need to take responsibility for this state of affairs, where overnight, previously unknown individuals or groups become ‘experts’.
25. HMG’s terminology in describing the problematic groups within Muslim communities has a troubled background, and often, much confusion could have been avoided by relying less on ideologically based ‘think-tanks’ and more on professional expertise.
26. In this regard, the Economic and Social Research Council’s efforts in arranging placements for members of academia to go into HMG departments and HMG officials to enter university departments on secondments (through the Knowledge Transfer program) is a good example of a model that should be replicated.
27. PREVENT’s first major initiative could be considered to be the formulation of the 7 working groups set up after the 7th of July. The proposals and recommendations from those groups have generally been ignored. Moreover, by and large, members of those groups, many

of whom were career professionals in the areas most directly needed by HMG, were not invited to contribute to what became the PREVENT agenda. Instead, a new set of gatekeepers emerged in this regard.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must re-evaluate how it deals with newly created ‘experts’, who may have no background in these issues. Bad expertise is often worse than no expertise.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must create new ways to liaise with the academic community, and professional expertise in order to benefit from their expertise, on the basis of their knowledge; not on the basis of their friendly attitude towards the powers that be.

PREVENT’S gatekeepers

28. One destructive side effect of the PREVENT agenda is the creation of ‘gate-keepers’ between HMG and Muslim communities. These ‘gate-keepers’ are to be found on a national level and international level, within HMG itself, and might be Muslim or non-Muslim.
29. The creation of such ‘gate-keepers’ has meant that rather than a professional civil service being called upon to deal with such issues, with the neutrality and objectivity that represents, we often have individuals who may have particularly narrow political agendas involved. Such individuals may promote their own notions, without oversight, and use their positions as ‘gate-keepers’ to award, or indeed punish non-HMG partners. Such actions may be as insignificant as invitations to HMG events or forums, or as significant as participation in HMG-funded initiatives. This has resulted in a degradation of how professional civil servants are meant to conduct themselves, and is potentially conducive to corruption and opportunism.
30. ‘Gate-keepers’ also act within the Muslim community. HMG has to resist the temptation to cut corners, by referring to a small and select number of individuals and groups as the equivalent of local tribal leaders.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must take steps to re-professionalise how the civil service deals with all non-HMG actors with regards to PREVENT – whether Muslim or not, and investigate any claims of cronyism or unjustified preferential treatment.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must also be careful about considering specific gate-keepers into the Muslim community as ‘the’ gate-keepers, and be aware that the larger majority of the Muslim community are very localized, and outside the realm of national organizations, let alone individuals or lobby groups.

Specific issue with credibility: PREVENT’s conflation of agendas

31. Although this review is primarily concerned with DCLG, and thus with national affairs, PREVENT also has an international dimension, such as through the Foreign Office abroad.
32. A number of officials have privately expressed reservations as to how their work has had to shift from being carried out in an ‘engagement prism’ to a ‘PREVENT prism’, domestically and abroad.
33. This has led to rather absurd results – such as arts festivals being funded through ‘PREVENT’ and ensuring that all engagement with Muslim communities domestically is permanently imprinted with a security veneer. At the moment, reports indicate that many community organisations are not accepting PREVENT money for this type of work, owing to the conflation of the ‘PREVENT’ agenda.
34. Abroad, the same sort of reservations can be felt, and in some cases more so. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in late 2007 restructured all its engagement work with Muslim communities abroad (including the appropriately named ‘Engagement with the Islamic World’ unit) to be subsumed under the new department of ‘Counter-Terrorism’.
35. This has led to many staff refusing to use new HMG-issued business cards that refer to ‘Counter-Terrorism’ or ‘PREVENT’, and instead using older cards, from pre-‘Prevent’ days, that are far more neutral, and do not problematise the Muslim communities they are interacting with.
36. The end result of all this means that the Muslim community as a whole is constructed as a ‘suspect community’. This is fundamentally counter-productive to any counter-radicalisation or counter-terrorism program, and is not what PREVENT was meant to achieve.

RECOMMENDATION: HMG must split and distinguish between ‘engagement’ activity, which must continue on a national and international level, and PREVENT activity. Conflating the two sets is counter-productive.

PREVENT’s initiatives

37. Grassroots PREVENT initiatives that are in the public interest, but not necessarily directly related to issues of security should continue. We may not see direct consequences of such efforts for some time to come, but in the long run, we would be well advised to consider such initiatives as far better than the mass production of violent, radical discourse.
38. Such initiatives must in the long-run become self-sustaining – and in the meantime, must remain as independent as possible from HMG political interference in order to maintain credibility.
39. But, it must be stated – if the proposed aim of the initiative(s) are for community cohesion, they should be directed through a separate and non-related process, as distinct from counter-terrorism as much as possible.

RECOMMENDATION: Current PREVENT initiatives that are in the public interest, but are more appropriately part of the community cohesion agenda, should be funded separately from PREVENT.

RECOMMENDATION: All PREVENT initiatives that can be self-sustaining should be encouraged to be so, and provided with training and resources to be so for the long-term.

Endnotes

1. H. A. Hellyer, "Engagement with the Muslim community and counter-terrorism: British Lessons for the West" (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2010).
2. Ibid.
3. Rachel Briggs, "Community engagement for counterterrorism: lessons from the United Kingdom," *International Affairs* 86:4 (2010).
4. In 2007, while a fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, and engaging heavily with different US governmental departments, it was clear to me that there was a great deal of interest in how the UK was moving in these areas. In Canada, there was a good deal of exchanging of views between the British Foreign Office and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, resulting in a conference in late 2007.
5. Much of what follows is based on what I have written elsewhere, most generally in Hellyer, *Engagement with the Muslim community and counter-terrorism*.
6. More of an analysis on the Europe's Muslim community, both past and present, can be found in H. A. Hellyer, "Muslims of Europe: The 'Other' Europeans" (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).
7. Stefano Allievi, "Relations and Negotiations: Issues and Debates," *Muslims in the Enlarged Europe: Religion and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 353.
8. Ake Sander, "The Status of Muslim Communities in Sweden," in *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*, ed. Gerd Nonneman, Tim Niblock, and Bogdan (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1997), 187.
9. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Global Opportunities Fund Report: 2003-2004* (2004), 53.
10. "Extremism task force to be set up," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4695275.stm>, accessed 17 August 2010.

11. "Preventing Extremism Together: Report and Government Response," <http://www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/communities/preventingextremismtogether>, accessed 17 August 2010.
12. This was perhaps the most controversial working group of all ("Tackling Extremism and Radicalization"), where the author served as deputy convenor.
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