A DECADE LOST

Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism

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A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• An official narrative holds that terrorism is caused by the presence of extremist ideology. Extremism is defined as opposition to British values. To prevent terrorism, according to this narrative, the government should intervene to stem the expression of extremist opinions and demand allegiance to British values.

• Over the last decade, this narrative has been repeatedly promoted by government ministers. Yet, as an account of what causes terrorism, it does not stand up to scholarly scrutiny. A growing body of academic work holds this position to be fundamentally flawed.

• Policy based on this narrative is at best partial and at worst counter-productive. A better account of the causes of terrorism would acknowledge that radical religious ideology does not correlate well with incidents of terrorist violence and that terrorism is best understood as the product of an interaction between state and non-state actors.

• The factors which lead someone to commit acts of terrorism are complex and cannot be reduced to holding a set of values deemed to be radical. There is little evidence to support the view that there is a single cause to terrorism. Accepting this analysis has significant implications for the development of policies to reduce the risk of terrorism.

• Rather than a broad policy that seeks to criminalise or restrict extremist opinions, a better approach is to focus on individuals who can be reasonably suspected of intending to engage in a terrorist plot, finance terrorism or incite it. The best way of preventing terrorist violence is to widen the range of opinions that can be freely expressed, not restrict it.

• In light of this more authoritative understanding, the government should end its Prevent policy. This will help to avoid nurturing a new generation of antagonised and disenfranchised citizens. Ultimately, Prevent-style policies make Britain less safe.

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, counter-terrorism is once again a major focus of national attention in Britain. A raft of new initiatives are being announced by government ministers while journalists and commentators placed the issues of radicalisation and extremism firmly on the media agenda. At the centre of this process is the fear that foreign fighters returning from Syria and Iraq might engage in terrorist violence within the UK.[1] For many, the atmosphere is reminiscent of the early years of the War on Terror. But, in this renewed round of high-profile counter-terrorism policy-making, have the lessons of the post-9/11 years been learnt? To some extent, over the last five years, policies have been subjected to ongoing critical scrutiny and reform. For example, the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme that seeks to stem radicalisation and extremism has developed through a number of iterations in response to challenges from various constituencies. On a fundamental level, though, while the legacy of policy failures in the first six years after 9/11 is well documented, there has been little attempt to link those failures to flaws in the underlying analytic model that shaped how the UK government responded to the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings, particularly in relation to domestic counter-terrorism policy. As such, the assumptions that underpin policy-making on radicalisation and extremism are very much the same today as they were in 2006 when Tony Blair's government introduced PVE. In this report, an attempt is made to assess those underlying analytic assumptions with a view to providing the impetus for a rethink of how radicalisation and extremism are understood. In particular, the report identifies an *official narrative on the causes of terrorism*, which, it is argued, is not based on solid evidence but rests upon the assumption that "extremist" speech and beliefs are the most significant factors in causing terrorism. The evidence to support this assumption is weak and policies based upon it are flawed. Moreover, the official narrative distorts public discourse, legitimizes the erosion of civil rights and fosters social divisions.

1. THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE ON THE CAUSES OF TERRORISM

The development of an effective counter-terrorism policy necessarily begins with a compelling and coherent account of what causes terrorism to exist. An accurate understanding of the factors that give rise to terrorism is essential to developing a holistic policy response, in which measures are aimed not just at responding to terrorist attacks with police investigations and military actions but also at preventing terrorist attacks from taking place in the first place. After 9/11, discussion of the causes of terrorism was limited. It was assumed that to offer explanations that reached beyond the intentions of the perpetrators risked diluting the moral condemnation the events warranted. The causes of terrorism were usually not analysed systematically but understood through slogans that referred to the "evil mindset" of the perpetrators or an "evil ideology" of terrorism.[2]

But analytic models were necessary to the War on Terror's policy-making process. For the neoconservatives, who dominated US policy-making on counter-terrorism in the early years of the War on Terror, terrorism was analyzed as a product of Islamic culture. Orientalists like Bernard Lewis, a key advisor on the Middle East to the George W. Bush administration, argued that Islam had a cultural propensity to totalitarian rejections of modernity. 9/11 was, he argued, ultimately rooted in this Islamic anti-modernism. So deeply embedded was this anti-modernism in the Middle East, argued neoconservatives, that only war could overturn it and bring about a cultural transformation in the region. Tony Blair accepted much of this neoconservative analysis and his support for the 2003 war on Iraq rested largely on this basis.

The disastrous consequences of the Iraq war soon became apparent and, by 2005, counter-terrorism policy-makers were looking for new models that could help them understand not just 9/11 but also how to prevent bombings carried out by European citizens, such as those that took place in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. At this point, the concept of radicalisation became central to the emerging analysis of the causes of terrorism in national security circles. The aim was to develop models that could explain the process by which ordinary people, including members of European societies, became willing to carry out acts of mass violence, even against their fellow citizens.[3] Peter

Neumann, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at Kings College, London, described the value of the concept of radicalisation as follows:

> Following the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, however, it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the 'roots of terrorism', which some commentators claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians. Even so, it seemed obvious (then) that some discussion about the underlying factors that had given rise to this seemingly new phenomenon was urgent and necessary, and so experts and officials started referring to the idea of 'radicalisation' whenever they wanted to talk about 'what goes on before the bomb goes off'. In the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks, it was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again.[4]

These radicalisation models were then drawn on by policy-makers, intelligence analysts and law enforcement officers in crafting strategies to prevent future attacks.

Following the neoconservative paradigm, models of radicalisation tend to assume that extremist religious ideology drives terrorism. In addition, as with the neoconservatives, they focus overwhelmingly on acts of violence carried out by Muslims and rarely address political violence and terrorism more generally. Most analysts of radicalisation, however, focus less on what neoconservatives regard as the extremist core of Islam and instead start from the assumption that some extremist versions of Islam – usually defined as "Islamism" or "Salafism" – are capable of capturing the minds of Muslims and turning them into terrorists. The challenge is then to understand the process by which extremist religious ideology takes hold among Muslims.

For some radicalisation analysts, the role of extremist religious ideology in this process is akin to a "conveyor belt" that mechanically pushes an individual into terrorism.[5] This implies that, once someone has adopted the extremist ideology, terrorism is likely to follow sooner or later. For others, this process is more complex and depends not only on ideology but also on psychological factors, such as the experience of a recent traumatic event. Whatever nuances are added to the picture, the underlying assumption in radicalisation models is usually the same: that some form of religious ideology is a key element in turning a person into a terrorist.

This analysis has underpinned counter-terrorism policy-making in the UK since 2006 and led to viewing certain forms of religious ideology as an early warning sign of potential terrorism. "Counter-radicalisation" policies, such as PVE, have been developed to stem an ideological process that, the models claim, brings about terrorism. Today, this analysis of radicalisation remains as influential as ever and constitutes an official narrative on the causes of terrorism.

The December 2013 report of the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism illustrates that there remains an assumption that al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism is caused by particular kinds of religious ideology, what it calls a "poisonous extremist ideology that can lead people to violence".[6] The report also makes clear that the government remains committed to the development of policies that seek to reduce terrorism by preventing extremist ideology from circulating and intervening in the lives of those who have adopted it.

Another linked argument, made consistently by governments over the last eight years, is that the extremism underpinning terrorism is encouraged by a failure to celebrate and promote the values upon which British society is seen as resting. A positive defence of such values is regarded as a necessary part of the "battle of ideas" against extremism in Britain. Lack of allegiance to these British values creates, according to the official narrative, a cultural environment in which extremism, and therefore terrorism, is more likely. It follows that there needs to be a public campaign to promote British values. This might involve the requirement that new citizens declare an oath of allegiance to those values or requiring that immigrants pass tests of their values before being admitted. More generally, though, this is an appeal to commentators, journalists, academics and the general public to become

more forceful in defending Britishness. The chief barrier to such a celebration of British values is thought to be the doctrine of multiculturalism.

This argument – linking terrorism to questions of values and identity – received its definitive statement with Prime Minister David Cameron's "muscular liberalism" speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2011. There, he stated that behind Muslim terrorism lay "a question of identity"; that "the passive tolerance of recent years" had to be abandoned in favour of a much more assertive defence of British values against "Islamist extremism"; that British Muslims had to privilege their Britishness over their global allegiance to other Muslims.[7] In fact, essentially the same argument had been made on multiple occasions by ministers of the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown governments.[8] In the 2011 revised Preventing Violent Extremism policy (known as "Prevent"), extremism is explicitly defined in terms of the absence of British values:

> Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.[9]

The report of the 2013 Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism also includes a definition of "Islamist extremism" which it describes as:

> an ideology which is based on a distorted interpretation of Islam, which betrays Islam's peaceful principles, and draws on the teachings of the likes of Sayyid Qutb. Islamist extremists deem Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries as a "war on Islam", creating a narrative of "them" and "us." They seek to impose a global Islamic state governed by their interpretation of Sharia'ah as state law, rejecting liberal values such as democracy, the rule of law and equality. Their ideology also includes the uncompromising belief that people cannot be Muslim and British, and insists that those who do not agree with them are not true Muslims.[10]

It is unclear whether all or some of these beliefs are necessary to be classified as an extremist. The implication in the official literature is that the holding of these beliefs is what causes terrorism and that an effective way of opposing these beliefs is to promote values described as British.

There is a wide range of domestic policies whose introduction has been significantly encouraged by acceptance of the official narrative on the causes of terrorism. They include:

• Surveillance of the political and religious lives of Muslims to identify indicators of radicalisation, for example through Schedule 7 stops at airports;

• Requiring teachers, youth workers and health workers who work with Muslims to share information on perceived risks with police counter-terrorism units;

• Using powers under anti-terrorist legislation, such as the glorification of terrorism clause in the Terrorism Act 2006, to criminalise individuals for expressing extremist opinions;

• Aggressive removal and denial of entry to foreign nationals thought to be a radicalising influence;

• Funding selected Muslim leaders to promote an ideological message against extremism on behalf of the government;

• Requiring suspected extremist individuals to undergo "de-radicalisation" programmes;

• Removing online content deemed extremist;

• Financial restrictions on Muslim individuals and charities thought to be involved in extremism;

• Public pressure on Muslims to declare their allegiance to British values.

In later sections, the consequences of some of these policies will be examined; in particular, it will be argued that these policies foster social divisions, undermine civil liberties and counter-productively make terrorism more likely.

2. WHAT CAUSES TERRORISM?

Initially, policy-makers focused on community settings, such as mosques, as the locations where extremist ideology had to be blocked; later, they turned to prisons and universities; more recently, the focus has been on the circulation of extremist ideology through social media. Even as the settings for policy implementation have changed, the arguments made for such policies have been constant over the last eight years.

Use of the term "radicalisation" and its associated conceptual framework are products of the post-9/11 period. Before then, scholars of terrorism did not use the concept in their attempts to develop models of terrorist causation. For example, the most influential pre-9/11 academic study of the causes of terrorism is Martha Crenshaw's 1981 paper "The causes of terrorism", in which she argues for a three-level account, involving factors of:

• Individual motivation and belief systems;

• Decision-making and strategy within a terrorist movement;

• The wider political and social context with which terrorist movements interact.[11]

Today's radicalisation models in effect neglect the second and third of these levels and focus all their attention on the individual level. The study of radicalisation, ostensibly an investigation of the causes of terrorism, is in practice limited to a narrower question: why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence? As historian Mark Sedgwick argues in a critical reflection on radicalisation models:

> The concept of radicalisation emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider circumstances – the "root causes" that it became so difficult to talk about after 9/11, and that are still often not brought into analyses. So long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals' declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a "rebel without a cause".[12]

In the official narrative, the political context and the internal decision-making within an insurgent social movement are largely irrelevant in explaining why terrorist violence occurs. Instead the official narrative implies that, once an individual has adopted an extremist religious ideology, terrorism will result, irrespective of the political context or any calculation on the part of an organisation or social movement. Advocates of this approach argue that, since the 1990s, there has been a transformation in the way terrorism works – what scholars refer to as the "new terrorism" thesis – so that the intellectual tools used to analyse political violence in the past are no longer applicable.[13]

As argued in the following section, the policies that result from such models, which ignore much of what causes terrorism to occur, are bound to be partial and ineffective. There is little evidence that a radical break has occurred with earlier patterns in the history of terrorism and what causes it, even if terrorist groups nowadays sometimes use a religious ideology to articulate their claims and establish an identity.

In conclusion, the factors which lead someone to commit acts of terrorism are complex and cannot be reduced to holding a set of values deemed to be radical. There is little evidence to support the view that there is a single cause to terrorism. Accepting this analysis has significant implications for the development of policies to reduce the risk of terrorism.

3. THE ORIGINS OF THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

In late 2005, the US neoconservative Francis Fukuyama warned that European Muslims were as serious a threat to the US as Muslims in the Middle East. Europe's multiculturalist policies had failed to assimilate the Muslim population, he argued.[14] He later commented: "Europe's failure to better integrate its Muslims is a ticking time bomb that has already contributed to terrorism."[15] Around the same time, Robert Leiken of the Nixon Center and the Brookings Institution wrote in *Foreign Affairs* of Europe's "angry Muslims", who were "distinct, cohesive, and bitter" and "eligible to travel visa-free to the United States".[16] One of the most influential analysts of national security policy in the US, Marc Sageman, wrote in 2008 that the "individuals we should fear most" are "homegrown wannabes – self-recruited, without leadership, and globally connected through the Internet," mostly living in Europe, whose "lack of structure and organizing principles makes them even more terrifying and volatile than their terrorist forebears".[17] As these comments indicate, from 2005, the question of how Muslims in Europe could be brought to identify more closely with European nation-states was a hot topic in Washington national security circles.

British-based think-tanks played an important role in channelling such US concerns and framing them within a narrative on the causes of terrorism that held religious ideology to be the central problem. Two organisations, the Quilliam Foundation and Policy Exchange, were especially significant in this respect. The Quilliam Foundation was established in April 2008 by Ed Husain (author of the best-selling *The Islamist* published a year earlier) and Maajid Nawaz, both of whom had been activists in Hizb ut-Tahrir before becoming disillusioned and embracing the government's PVE agenda. The apparent credibility of these two "formers" was crucial to the Foundation's success in legitimising the official narrative on the causes of terrorism. Husain and Nawaz made regular appearances in the media and at conferences, arguing that the root cause of terrorism was the ideology of Islamism. Adopting the "conveyor belt" metaphor, they maintained that Islamism was inherently violent, even when

it appeared to take non-violent forms. The Foundation launched an extensive program of "radicalisation awareness" training sessions for thousands of police officers and officials working in local authorities around England and Wales, promoting this argument. With backing from government ministers, it also advised schools on the behaviours that could indicate a young person is being radicalised.[18] In its first two years, the Quilliam Foundation received over £1 million of government PVE funding.[19]

Policy Exchange began its work on radicalisation earlier. From 2006 to 2009, it published a series of influential reports that focused on alleged extremism among young Muslims, in mosques and in the Muslim Council of Britain.[20] A recurring theme was Britain's supposed failure to assert the superiority of its national values because of a flawed concept of multiculturalism. One of these reports was criticised by a BBC Newsnight investigation, which suggested that book receipts collected by researchers at mosques had been faked. The author of one of the reports, Martin Bright, then political editor of the *New Statesman*, noted the importance of the extremism issue for Cameron's "modernised" Conservative Party and the "signs that the reformist Cameron wing of the Conservative Party" would pursue them if elected to government.

The chairman of Policy Exchange at the time was Charles Moore, a former editor of the *Telegraph* and *the Spectator*. In March 2008, he gave a speech outlining a "possible conservative approach to the question of Islam in Britain". The government, he argued, should maintain a list of Muslim organisations which, while not actually inciting violence, "nevertheless advocate such anti-social attitudes that they should not receive public money or official recognition" – in this category would fall any groups with links to the Muslim Brotherhood or the Jamaati-e-Islami, as well as individuals, such as Tariq Ramadan, the Swiss philosopher and fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford.[21]

Former education minister Michael Gove was a founding chairman of Policy Exchange and regarded by other Conservative Party leaders as an expert

on Muslims in Britain. In his 2006 book *Celsius 7/7*, he called for a new Cold War against Islamism, which he defined as an ideology similar to fascism. He states that in the war against Islamism, it will be necessary for Britain to carry out assassinations of terrorist suspects in order to send "a vital signal of resolution". More generally, a "temporary curtailment of liberties" will be needed to prevent Islamism from destroying Western civilisation.[22]

Policy Exchange's research director during this period was Dean Godson, who has strong links to neoconservatives in Washington, DC. He wrote in 2006: "During the Cold War, organisations such as the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office would assert the superiority of the West over its totalitarian rivals. And magazines such as *Encounter* did hand-to-hand combat with Soviet fellow travellers. For any kind of truly moderate Islam to flourish, we need first to recapture our own self-confidence."[23] Again, the argument was that a defence of British values was a fundamental element in the fight against extremism. (The magazine *Encounter* was covertly funded by the CIA in the early Cold War as part of a cultural strategy of discrediting communism.)

Similarly, in 2008, a group of British former generals, senior diplomats, and intelligence services officers wrote a widely publicized essay that claimed multiculturalism was undermining national security. They stated:

> The United Kingdom presents itself as a target, as a fragmenting, post-Christian society, increasingly divided about interpretations of its history, about its national aims, its values and in its political identity. That fragmentation is worsened by the firm self-image of those elements within it who refuse to integrate. This is a problem worsened by the lack of leadership from the majority which in misplaced deference to "multiculturalism" failed to lay down the line to immigrant communities, thus undercutting those within them trying to fight extremism. The country's lack of self-confidence is in stark contrast to the implacability of its Islamist terrorist enemy, within and without.[24]

4. LIMITATIONS OF STUDIES ENDORSING THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

Over the last ten years, scholarship on terrorism has increasingly challenged the radicalisation models that have informed counter-terrorism policy-making in the UK, finding them to be reductionist and insufficiently grounded in empirical evidence. It is clear that the ole of ideology in driving terrorism was exaggerated in the early years of the War on Terror. Yet, among counter-terrorism practitioners and policy-makers, there remains an unwarranted faith in this now discredited analysis.

Scholarship on the causes of terrorism inherently involves an attempt to establish correlations between incidents of terrorist violence and potential causal factors. Analysts who locate the origins of terrorism in religious ideology, even if coupled with other causal factors, are therefore obliged to back up their claims with empirical evidence of such a correlation. While correlation does not imply causation, because there may be other hidden factors that are more significant, it does at least suggest a prima facie connection. To establish a correlation, a potential causal factor not only has to be generally present in the lead-up to terrorist incidents but there also needs to be a control group of situations in which terrorism does not occur and where the potential causal factor is found not to be present.

Significant resources have been made available in the US and the UK over the last decade for the study of radicalisation. Benefiting from this, analysts based in academia, think-tanks and law enforcement agencies have attempted to find empirical evidence to support the claim that religious ideology is a key causal factor in the existence of terrorism. Yet a rigorous assessment of such studies finds that the evidence is weak.[25] Some of the most significant studies of this kind are:

• Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the US and UK: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process*

This study by a neoconservative think-tank in Washington, DC, is an empirical examination of 119 homegrown "jihadist terrorists". Based on this

data, it claims that the most significant factor associated with terrorism is religious ideology. However, the study does not use a control group to test whether the same indicators of religious ideology might also be associated with people who are not terrorists. Even according to the study's own data, radical political views appear to be more significant than radical religious views.[26]

- Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: the Homegrown Threat*

Published by the New York Police Department's Intelligence Division in 2007, this study claims that "jihadist ideology" is the key driver of terrorism. The radicalisation process is described as having four stages, conceived as a "funnel" that individuals pass through as their religious beliefs become more radical. In stage one, they are an "unremarkable" person yet to begin the radicalisation process. In stage two, they begin to display indications of radicalising, such as "wearing traditional Islamic clothing", "growing a beard" or "becoming involved in social activism and community issues". The study bases its analysis on eleven plots that took place in the US, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Canada and Australia, each involving a handful of perpetrators. There is no control group in the study to examine whether the behaviours claimed to be associated with terrorism could also be found among individuals who do not become terrorists – as is clearly the case. The claimed correlations are asserted in an arbitrary and impressionistic way and without a sufficiently large sample.[27]

- Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*

This 2004 study by a former CIA operations officer and psychiatrist offers one of the most influential and elaborate accounts of radicalisation. Based on a database of hundreds of persons he says are "linked" to the 9/11 attackers, he argues that radicalisation begins with relationships established through social networks but then involves an ideological component that transforms Muslims into terrorists. On this account, radicalisation involves both a group dynamic and an ideological dynamic.

While this offers a more nuanced picture than a straightforward "conveyor belt" model, it still maintains the assumption that violence is rooted in religious ideology. It is "Salafi ideology" that determines the choice of terrorism as a tactic. Again, the study has no control group of individuals who adopt a Salafi ideology but do not become involved in violence or a consideration of individuals who are involved in terrorism without having first adopted a Salafi ideology.[28]

- Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising*

The author, who later served on President Obama's National Security Council, spent a number of months in London in 2002 conducting ethnographic fieldwork with al-Muhajiroun, the radical Islamist group founded by Omar Bakri Muhammad. The study seeks to answer the question of why "thousands of young Britons are attracted to the panoply of radical Islamic movements with bases or branches in the United Kingdom, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, Supporters of the Shariah, al-Muhajiroun, and al-Qaeda". Al-Muhajiroun is taken as a case study. Like Sageman, he emphasizes the importance of social networks and refers to the importance of psychological crises in which previously accepted beliefs are shaken and an individual becomes receptive to radical views and perspectives.[29] But the individuals studied by Wiktorowicz are radical activists not terrorists, a distinction that gets lost in the attempt to construct a model of radicalisation. Most of al-Muhajiroun's activities were ideological but the group supported violence in certain contexts and individual activists and former activists have been involved in violent actions. Wiktorowicz offers little reflection on what factors legitimise or delegitimise the use of violence within the group. Instead, the question of what causes people to adopt radical religious beliefs becomes a proxy for the question of what causes violence. As Wiktorowicz himself acknowledges at the end of his study, the social psychological process by which individuals become active in radical Islamist groups is not all that different from moderate, non-violent Muslim groups or from non-Islamic social movements, even if the content of the ideology differs; it therefore becomes impossible to use his account of that process to credibly explain why terrorism occurs.

5. THE EVIDENCE AGAINST THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE

In opposition to these studies, there is an increasing number of scholars sceptical of the concept of radicalisation and its implication that radical ideas produce terrorist violence. Marc Sageman, for example, has moved away from his earlier emphasis on religious ideology as a significant factor in causing terrorism. In 2013, he suggested that governments should "stop being brainwashed by this notion of 'radicalisation'. There is no such thing. Some people when they're young acquire extreme views; many of them just grow out of them. Do not overreact – you'll just create worse problems."[30]

Another prominent terrorism expert who has highlighted problems with the notion of radicalisation is John Horgan, director of the International Center for the Study of Terrorism at Pennsylvania State University. He comments that: "The idea that radicalization causes terrorism is perhaps the greatest myth alive today in terrorism research … [First], the overwhelming majority of people who hold radical beliefs do not engage in violence. And second, there is increasing evidence that people who engage in terrorism don't necessarily hold radical beliefs."[31]

Scott Atran, a sociologist at John Jay College, New York, testified to the US Senate in March 2010 that:

> Entry into the jihadi brotherhood is from the bottom up: from alienated and marginalized youth seeking out companionship, esteem, and meaning, but also the thrill of action, sense of empowerment, and glory in fighting the world's most powerful nation and army. … popular jihadi Internet Imams, like Anwar al-Awlaki, are important not because they brainwash, command, or even guide others to actions and targets. Rather, popular radical Imams serve as "attractors" whose message and presence draws into line a searching soul who has already pretty much chosen his own path.[32]

This suggests that religious ideology gives coherence to a group of individuals who are already engaged in terrorism but is not what drives them into becoming terrorists in the first place – which has more to do with a desire to join others in the adventure of fighting a dominant power.

A 2010 study conducted by Jamie Bartlett and colleagues at the Demos think-tank is one of the few to include a control group in its design. It specifically set out to examine the difference between violent and non-violent radicals – a distinction that is routinely blurred in the official narrative and yet is crucial to any effective counter-terrorism policy-making. The study, *The Edge of Violence*, compared the cases of 58 individual terrorists in Europe and Canada with 28 individual radicals not involved in terrorism. It found that "al-Qaeda inspired terrorism in the West shares much in common with other counter-cultural, subversive groups of predominantly angry young men".[33] From this perspective, specific kinds of extremist ideology associated with Islamism appear incidental rather than essential to the turn to violence. Having a belief in "extremist" Islam, however defined, does not correlate with involvement in terrorism. There are many good reasons for objecting to reactionary interpretations of religion but the idea that religious ideology mechanically causes terrorism is not one of them.

This is a view shared by the French sociologist Olivier Roy, a widely respected authority on European Muslims. Whereas the official narrative tends to blur the distinction between propensity to violence and radical religious ideas, Roy argues that "the process of violent radicalisation has little to do with religious practice, while radical theology, as salafisme, does not necessarily lead to violence." The "leap into terrorism" is not religiously inspired but better seen as sharing "many factors with other forms of dissent, either political (the ultra-left), or behavioural: the fascination for sudden suicidal violence as illustrated by the paradigm of random shootings in schools (the 'Columbine syndrome')".[34] Salafi ideology is likely to be part of the way that violent networks articulate their narrative but this by itself is not evidence that religious ideology is causing violence; rather that, within this milieu, theological references provide a veneer of legitimacy. Religious ideology seems to play at most an enabling role in cohering a group, rather than being the underlying driver of terrorism.

Donatella della Porta, a leading scholar of social movements and political violence, has argued that radicalisation has to be understood as a process that is *relational* and *constructed*. By this she means that it is a process involving not only the beliefs and actions of oppositional groups but also of the states they

are in conflict with: violence is the result of the interaction of the two and their constructed perceptions of each other's actions, not just the product of one side's ideology.[35] Whether a social movement or network makes the leap into using a particular form of violence or not cannot be reduced to the question of its ideological content. It is necessary instead to examine how states and social movements have mutually constituted themselves as combatants in a conflict – in this case, between "the West" and "radical Islam" – and address under what conditions each has chosen to adopt tactics of violence, in response to the political circumstances they find themselves in. It is the interaction between these different state and non-state actors that produces a situation in which violence becomes acceptable. This relational aspect requires us to investigate the ways in which Western states themselves "radicalised," as much as "Islamist" political movements, both becoming more willing to use violence in a wider range of contexts. By analysing the interaction between the different parties in the conflict and how each constructs an interpretation of the other's actions, it becomes possible to coherently explain the violence of the last decade.[36] This line of thinking returns the current debate on radicalisation back to the older work on the causes of terrorism, such as that of Martha Crenshaw, which regarded political context and organisational decision-making to be as important as individual motivation and ideology.

Applying this approach to patterns of terrorism in Britain over the last decade illustrates its greater plausibility in comparison with the official narrative on the causes of terrorism. According to Home Office figures, the number of people convicted of terrorism-related crimes in Britain more than doubled between 2003 and 2006, before halving again by 2009.[37] It would be overly reductionist to claim that this increase in the number of incidents of attempted terrorist violence is entirely due to the British government's decision to participate in the Iraq war in 2003. But that decision created the political context within which, for a small number of radicals, violence against fellow citizens appeared legitimate. Turning to specific networks of radicals, we can trace how the changed political context shifted some activists from opposing violence within Britain to supporting it. For example, in January 2005, Omar Bakri Muhammad cited the intensifying War on Terror and the pressures it was putting Muslims under in Britain as reasons for saying the "covenant of security" he had followed since the 1990s no longer held.[38] For the first time he encouraged his followers to join al-Qaeda, with the

implication that acts of violence within the UK were now acceptable. What is significant is that this shift occurred not because of any change in religious ideology, as would be expected according to the official narrative, but because of a transformed political environment.[39] In producing the turn to violence, more relevant than Islamist ideology was the news from Iraq of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians following the US and UK military occupation.

In this light, recent threats of terrorism inspired by al-Qaeda are not exceptional but fit a longer historical pattern. The structure of causation of al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism in Britain is not all that different from that of the anarchist bombers of the late nineteenth century or the Provisional Irish Republican Army from the late 1960s, even though the goals and organisational structures of these various groups differ significantly. In all these cases, understanding the roots of violence requires recognising the way that oppositional movements decide to turn to violence in the face of state violence: for the anarchists, it was the violent suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871, in which tens of thousands were killed, that triggered the turn to dynamite and assassination across Europe; for the Provisionals, it was the British army's violent suppression of the nationalist civil rights movement in Northern Ireland; for the 7/7 bombers, it was the images of mass violence and torture in Iraq. Likewise, the recent flow of foreign fighters to Syria is likely to be linked at least as much to images of repression of the opposition movement by President Bashar Assad's regime as to adherence to any kind of extremist ideology. The "new terrorism" thesis tends to obscure these connections by assuming that, since the 1990s, religious ideology has begun to directly cause terrorism, independently of political and social contexts. But as terrorism scholars Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson note, the behaviour of those labelled "religious terrorists" is often indistinguishable from their secular counterparts. For example, Hamas' violence against Israeli civilians cannot be adequately explained by religious ideology. After all, religious arguments are used by Hamas to legitimise its ceasefires as much as they are used to legitimise its violence. Its decisions to adopt violence as a tactic at any point are determined by the organisation's perceptions of the actions of the Israeli government in the context of a military occupation – just as for secular Palestinian groups.[40] Religious ideology provides a vocabulary and a cohering identity but politics provides the impetus.

6. HOW THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE DISTORTS PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Advocacy of the official narrative on the causes of terrorism has had a significant polarising effect on public discourse in Britain, contributing to a climate of systematic hostility to Muslims. This has happened in two main ways:

• The term "extremism" is used selectively and inconsistently to construct Muslims as a suspect community and to discourage the expression of radical opinions;

• The debate on multiculturalism is securitised so that a series of distinct issues involving Muslims in public life are interpreted through the lens of clashes over identity that can only be remedied by demands for assimilation.

Extremism

The concept of extremism has become central to counter-terrorism policy-making in Britain over the last few years. The ill-defined term "violent extremism", favoured by the Blair government, has been abandoned. Although government literature has offered a definition of extremism, in practice the term is vague and nebulous. If it is simply to be used to refer to the rejection of a set of liberal values, then it would be hard to substantiate the term's systematic association with terrorism: many people in British society from all communities hold opinions that are anti-democratic or illiberal and there is little reason to think such views have any connection to terrorist violence. Like the concept of radicalisation, the notion of extremism selectively blurs the distinction between belief and violence.

As the concept of extremism is actually deployed in policy-making and public discourse, it is used primarily to refer to Muslims who are perceived to make radical criticisms of Western culture or politics. Charles Farr, the head of the Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism within the Home Office, gives the following account of extremists:

> people who feel a degree of negativity, if not hostility, towards the state, the country, the community, and who are, as it were, the pool in which terrorists will swim, and to a degree they will be complicit with and will certainly not report on activity which they detect on their doorstep. We have to reach that group because unless we reach that group they may themselves move into the very sharp end, but even if they do not they will create an environment in which terrorists can operate with a degree of impunity that we do not want. … That is to a degree what Prevent is all about.[41]

Those who express opinions that are unlawful – such as incitement to violence – can be criminalised by prosecuting them through the courts. On the assumption that extremist ideology is a driver of terrorism, a set of expressive activities wider than incitement has also been criminalised, for example under the Terrorism Act 2006. These are considered in the next section.

As Charles Farr's comment illustrates, the aim of government policy is also to reach beyond expressed opinions that are unlawful. In effect, extremism represents a new category of speech that can be lawful but is considered by the government to be illegitimate. The 2011 Prevent strategy implies this when it states that "the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem; legitimate religious belief emphatically is not" and that "preventing terrorism will mean challenging extremist (and non-violent) ideas that are also part of a terrorist ideology."[42] Obviously, the government is entitled to challenge ideas it disagrees with. However, it is a different matter when policies are introduced that seek to systematically prevent certain non-violent ideas from circulating, even if these opinions are not directly criminalised by legislation. One of the liberal values that the government says defines British society is freedom of expression, which means governments not deciding that certain ideas are too dangerous for citizens to express. There is an additional problem when

these lawful but illegitimate beliefs are associated exclusively but arbitrarily with one section of the population defined racially or religiously. In practice, Cameron's muscular liberalism is not all that liberal.

It is worth noting that the term "extremism" has long been used as a way of denouncing political dissent. In British political discourse, the term was first used in colonial police reports in India at the beginning of the twentieth century to describe militants who supported full independence; those whose demands were limited to administrative reform were dubbed "moderates". From English-language newspapers in India, the terminology spread to the British press.[43] In the US, Martin Luther King was described as an extremist by other Christian leaders who objected to his policy of civil disobedience. In his letter from Birmingham jail, he wrote:

> But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

Extremism is a vague concept that is easily manipulated to demonise anyone whose opinions are radically different. Moreover, use of the term is selective. Words like "dissenter" or "radical" are routinely used to refer to non-Muslims whose opinions place them on the ideological margins. But Muslims who express dissenting opinions are labelled extremists. On occasion, even the expression of a mainstream opinion can lead to the accusation of extremism. Anti-war campaigner Salma Yaqoob, for example, has been described as an extremist for expressing opinions on foreign policy that are widely held across British society. The choice of labels is significant: "extremism" suggests a fanatical mindset rather than just a possibly misguided opinion. The only other groups that are categorised in this way are racists and neo-Nazis.

One of the consequences of all of this is that, for young Muslims in Britain, there is little space to express strongly worded criticisms of foreign policies that have led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands in the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa. Those who passionately denounce such policies are dubbed extremists and seen to be on a pathway of radicalisation rather than as fellow citizens exercising their right to dissent. That is bad for civil liberties and bad for countering terrorism: without a legitimate outlet for political grievances, violence is more likely.

The use of the language of extremism has also produced a skewed image of threat with a disproportionate focus on Muslim populations as the only significant source of terrorist violence. In fact, between 1990 and 2012, at least 249 persons were killed in incidents of far-Right violence in Europe, compared to 263 killed by al-Qaeda-inspired violence, indicating that both threats are of the same order of magnitude.[44] Moreover, whereas political violence committed by Muslims is interpreted as symptomatic of a wider clash of values and identity, political violence from the far Right has been downplayed and interpreted as a matter of "lone wolves" operating outside of any broader enabling environment.

The June 2011 Prevent policy review recognised the existence of a far-Right threat but added there had only been a "small number of relevant cases" and there was no "extreme right-wing terrorist organisations and formal groups".[45] Yet groups like the English Defence League (EDL) have inflicted organised terror on British society. At a demonstration on 3 September 2011 through the largely Muslim area of Tower Hamlets, east London, EDL leader Tommy Robinson told the crowd:

> We are here today to tell you, quite loud, quite clear, every single Muslim watching this video on YouTube: on 7/7, you got away with killing and maiming British citizens. You got away with it. You better understand that we have built a network from one end of this country to the other end. We will not tolerate it. And the Islamic community will feel the full force of the English Defence League if we see any of our citizens killed, maimed or hurt on British soil ever again.[46]

This incitement of violence against all Muslims in Britain translated into action following the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in May 2013. The EDL stepped up its street activity around England to capitalise on the incident, leading to

racist attacks against Muslims and arson and bomb attacks on mosques in Grimsby, Muswell Hill, Walsall and Tipton.[47]

Yet there has been a reluctance by many officials and advisors to recognise the EDL as presenting a significant threat of violence. In April 2011, Adrian Tudway, the police's National Co-ordinator for Domestic Extremism, wrote in an email to Muslim groups:

> In terms of the position with EDL, the original stance stands, they are not extreme right wing as a group, indeed if you look at their published material on their web-site, they are actively moving away from the right and violence with their mission statement etc.[48]

In January 2011, Douglas Murray, the associate director of the Henry Jackson Society, which influences the government on national security policy, commented on the EDL that:

> If you were ever going to have a grassroots response from non-Muslims to Islamism, that would be how you'd want it, surely.[49]

There is no objective reason why al-Qaeda-inspired violence should be considered a strategic national security threat and interpreted as a deeply embedded problem of extremism among Muslim populations, while far-Right violence is seen as no more than a public order problem.

7. THE ATTACK ON MULTICULTURALISM

In his 2011 Munich speech, David Cameron spoke of the need to end policies of "state multiculturalism", which he claimed had been overly tolerant of cultural difference and thereby led to extremism. In fact, there have long been multiple meanings to multiculturalism in Britain. For some, it represented a rejection of the notion that African-Caribbean and South Asian populations were obliged to undergo a process of cultural assimilation before they could be considered equal citizens. For others, it meant the creation of a layer of unelected community representatives who would act as power brokers between these populations and government; a strategy of multicultural representation was seen as an effective way of managing and countering the radicalisation of young people that was thought to lie behind the large-scale urban disturbances in the early 1980s. This version of multiculturalism has long been criticised as fostering ethnic division and acting as a sop that distracted from deeper structural reforms to tackle institutional racism.[50] Those criticisms began to attract greater attention following disorders in Oldham, Burnley, Leeds and Bradford in the summer of 2001. In its most progressive forms, the new policy agenda of community cohesion sought to implement a more grassroots approach to integration and anti-racism.

The Prevent agenda, with its near total focus on Muslims, in practice undermined the best elements of the new cohesion policies and returned local authorities to engaging with select community leaders who were seen as the best way of embedding government policy within communities. Efforts to bridge communities and overcome ethnic fragmentation tended to be neglected with Prevent's focus solely on Muslims. As Prevent evolved under the Blair, Brown and Cameron governments, it increasingly emphasised the demand that Muslims declare their allegiance to British values.

The criticism of multiculturalism embedded in the official narrative on extremism is thus quite different from that of the earlier cohesion agenda and appears more like a return to demands for cultural assimilation. Moreover, the failure to assimilate to British values is now presented as a national security threat, adding an unprecedented intensity to questions of identity. The

attempt to impose a particular version of national identity on fellow citizens in an aggressively top-down way is counter-productive. To tell young Muslims, who already feel British but on their own terms, that they need to somehow change their basic values to adjust to a society they were born into, is bound to appear undemocratic and alienating. Muslims in Britain have as much right to define the meaning of Britishness as anyone else.

It is no coincidence that, in 2014, while there was renewed government attention on Muslims as presenting a potential problem of radicalisation, media outlets constantly harangued Muslims with accusations, not directly related to terrorism, but nevertheless reflecting an underlying framework of identity conflict. The Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham's schools, for example, raised genuine issues about school governance. However, media reporting of the story was generally placed within the official narrative of extremism that the government was promoting, feeding into a wider sense that Muslims are generally at odds with the cultural make-up of British society. For example, an article by David Cameron in the *Telegraph* of 16 August 2014 stated:

> We are in the middle of a generational struggle against a poisonous and extremist ideology, which I believe we will be fighting for the rest of my political lifetime.[51]

The picture presented is not one of a small number of individuals traveling to Syria but of a deeply embedded cultural and ideological problem across an entire generation. Not only does this depart from the facts of the matter; it also contributes to a deepening feeling of alienation among Muslims that risks creating the very divisions counter-extremism policy ostensibly seeks to overcome.

8. HOW THE OFFICIAL NARRATIVE UNDERMINES CIVIL RIGHTS

A range of policies that undermine the civil rights of Muslims in the UK have been encouraged by the official narrative on the causes of terrorism. The assumption that stemming the circulation of religious ideology should be a significant part of counter-terrorism policy has led to the criminalisation of the expression of certain opinions by Muslims and the aggressive use of legislative powers to criminalise individuals thought to be radicalisers or extremists.

The British civil rights lawyer Gareth Peirce had already noted in 2008 that more and more people were imprisoned in the UK based on their possession of pamphlets or videos, or the records of their internet use, any of which could be cited as evidence of "encouraging" or "glorifying" terrorism. "Previously accepted boundaries of freedom of expression and thought have been redefined and are now in effect being prosecuted retrospectively," she wrote.[52] More recently, the possession of books has also become a potential crime. In December 2011, Ahmed Faraz was convicted in Birmingham of possessing and distributing "extremist" books, including *Milestones* by the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb. He was sentenced to three years in prison and, after a year, his conviction was quashed at the Court of Appeal. In sentencing, the judge described the book as Manichean, separatist, and excessively violent.

Social media use is also a focus of criminal prosecutions. In March 2012, 19-year-old Azhar Ahmed of Dewsbury posted a comment on his Facebook page bemoaning the level of media attention British soldiers killed in Afghanistan received in comparison to civilian victims of the conflict. He concluded his post by stating: "All soldiers should die and go to hell! The lowlife fokkin scum!" He was labelled an "Islamist extremist", charged with sending a grossly offensive communication and ordered to do 240 hours of community service. A police spokesperson said: "He didn't make his point very well and that is why he has landed himself in bother."[53]

The recently announced Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill will, if adopted, likely further curtail freedom of expression. Among its powers is a measure to allow the home secretary to impose restrictions on universities and schools to prevent the expression of opinions deemed to be "extremist." Individuals expressing such opinions will also be subject to compulsory, internal relocation in the UK without the need for them to be convicted of a crime through a court process.

Finally, the Bill imposes a general duty on local authorities to participate in Prevent policy and the Channel de-radicalisation project. The Channel project operates separately from the regular investigations carried out by MI5 and police counter-terrorism units, which are supposed to be directed at individuals involved in potential terrorist plots. The purpose of Channel, on the other hand, is to identify a wider group of individuals not involved in any criminal activity but seen as potentially radicalising. As well as the police identifying such individuals, non-policing professionals, such as youth workers, teachers and health workers are also encouraged to spot signs of extremism and make Channel referrals. Having identified such a person, detailed information about the individual's life and the social networks they are a part of is collected and a multi-agency panel led by the police recommends a course of action, such as a programme of mentoring or religious instruction designed to transform the person's ideology away from extremism. To date, the Channel project has been formally voluntary, although participants may have felt they have little choice to engage with it once a police counter-terrorism unit has identified them as at risk of radicalisation.

There is little public information on how someone is identified as a radicalisation risk for the purposes of Channel. One case that has been documented involves a teenager in Manchester who was identified as potentially requiring de-radicalisation after attending a peaceful protest against the Israeli deputy ambassador.[54] The official guidance on Channel lists "expressed opinions" as one of the potential indicators of radicalisation. Since 2007, when Channel was introduced, 153 children under 11, another 690 aged 12–15 and 554 aged 16–17 have been referred to the programme. A further 2,196 adults have also been assessed as potential radicalisation risks.[55] The overwhelming majority of these children and adults have been Muslims.

It is appropriate that the police and intelligence services place individuals under surveillance where there is a reasonable suspicion of their involvement in plotting terrorist acts, inciting terrorism or financing it. It is also right that non-policing professionals are able to provide information to the police where there is a suspicion of criminal intent. But the concerns with the Channel project are that it widens the definition of suspicion beyond criminality to much vaguer notions of extremism and radicalisation; that it seems to treat expressed non-violent opinions as indicators of a radicalisation risk; and that it focuses heavily on children.

Combining its new counter-terrorism powers and the Channel project, the government would have a set of powers that could be used to prevent certain opinions from being expressed, without the need for scrutiny of those powers in a criminal court. Together with the criminalisation of the ownership of books and strongly worded social media comments, the government is in danger of generating a mood of political self-censorship among Muslims that would be both counter-productive and damaging to democracy.

9. EVALUATING THE SUCCESS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM POLICIES

Defenders of the official narrative on the causes of terrorism have one final argument left after the absence of supporting empirical evidence, the narrative's conceptual flaws and the damaging consequences of the narrative have been pointed out. They argue that, whatever other problems there may be in the narrative, at least the policies that have flowed from it have been effective in reducing the risk of terrorism. A number of potentially devastating terrorist plots in Britain have been intercepted since 7/7 by the intelligence services and police counter-terrorism units, they say. The broad analysis that has informed counter-terrorism policy-making must, then, be valid.

It is true that a significant number of plots have been successfully intercepted over the last decade. According to the director general of MI5, Andrew Parker, thirty-four plots targeted against the UK were disrupted by the intelligence services and police between 2005 and 2013.[56] These plots have varied in their scale and sophistication but the agencies involved clearly have a strong record of success. The difficulty of detecting plotters and bringing them to justice should not be under-estimated. However, it is far from clear whether the official narrative on the causes of terrorism has helped or hindered the detection and prevention of terrorism.

There are two aspects to this question. First, in cases of actual plots that have been detected, was it conventional law enforcement practices – such as tracking sales of materials potentially usable for making explosives, community tip-offs and monitoring the communications of known active terrorists – that led to detection? This kind of clearly focused investigative work is not dependent on acceptance of any narrative on the causes of terrorism. Effective deployment of these practices is likely to have been the key factor in most of the interceptions that have occurred.

Second is the question of measures aimed at prevention, such as the Prevent

policy. In this area, the aim is to intervene earlier in the presumed radicalisation process; therefore assumptions on the causes of terrorism have to be made. If it could be demonstrated that the UK's Prevent policy, for example, had led to a reduction in the number of attempted plots, that would constitute reasonably good evidence supporting the narrative on the causes of terrorism that underpins the policy. However, there is no reason to think that the policy has been associated with any such reduction.

Evaluating the effectiveness of preventative policies is particularly tricky because they aim at producing a "non-event" – the absence of terrorism; deciding whether something has not happened because of a policy requires the proving of a negative.[57] To even begin to answer the question of whether the current level of attempted terrorist plots is the product of a successful preventative policy or the result of failing preventative policies, one would need a baseline of comparison, which does not exist in the flow of real world events. In practice, evaluations of preventative policy will themselves assume a "theory of change" that makes assumptions about how policies connect to desired outcomes.[58] The official narrative on the causes of terrorism therefore tends to be embedded as itself an assumption in the evaluation process.

For example, measuring attitudes of Muslims in the UK towards Britishness is one metric that the government has used in an attempt to assess the progress of its Prevent policy.[59] But this itself assumes a "theory of change" in which rejection of British values is seen as a driver of terrorism – according to the official narrative. The empirical data generated by such studies is of no use in validating the narrative itself.

Another approach is to look for a causal relationship between the introduction of a policy and changes in the number of terrorist plots. The number of people charged with terrorism-related offences declined from 76 to 19 between 2006/7 and 2010/11.[60] Does this significant decline reflect the success of the Prevent policy that was introduced in 2006? To reach that conclusion,

one would first have to assume that the declining number of charges reflects a declining number of active plots. Then, one would have to go beyond a correlation between the policy and the number of plots and demonstrate an actual causal relationship. But the data is also consistent with other interpretations in which the number of attempted plots declines for reasons that have nothing to do with the introduction of Prevent policy – for example, that after an initial upsurge of plots by people who were angered at the Iraq war from 2003, the rate of attempted plots declined of its own accord. Which of these various interpretations will appear plausible depends, in part, on one's understanding of what causes terrorism.

Finally, the available information on attempts by government agencies to conduct their own evaluations suggests the results have been inconclusive. At least two internal evaluations of the Channel project have been conducted.[61] Neither evaluation study has been published but a publicly available slideshow produced by the Home Office in 2010 noted that "hard evidence of intervention projects capability not yet established," suggesting that there was insufficient evidence to associate Channel interventions with reductions in the threat of terrorism.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

• End the Prevent policy in light of a more authoritative understanding of radicalisation. Clarify that information about risks of radicalisation should be shared with authorities only once it crosses the line to incitement to violence, financing of terrorism or an intention to commit acts of violence.

• Focus the government resources available to counter-terrorism on investigating individuals who can reasonably be suspected of intent to commit acts of terrorism, incite it or finance it. The significant government resources that have been made available to bring about a broader ideological transformation among British Muslims are more productively redirected to this purpose.

• Publicly defend freedom of religion, even for individuals who choose to adopt religious beliefs deemed extremist.

• Publicly acknowledge that British identity is continually reshaped by those who reside in the UK and that all sections of society have an equal right to contribute to that process.

• Publicly acknowledge that foreign policy decisions are a significant factor in creating political contexts within which terrorism becomes more or less likely.

• Enable spaces for wide-ranging discussions of religious ideology, identity and foreign policy, particularly among young people who feel excluded from mainstream politics. Those spaces should not be undercut by the fear that expressions of radical views will attract the attention of intelligence agencies and police counter-terrorism units.

• Fund independent research to present an objective picture of the experiences of foreign fighters in conflict zones such as Somalia, Syria and Iraq. This is likely to be a far more effective way of discouraging young people from engaging in such activities.

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