



Report on Wilton Park Conference WPS06/5

TOWARDS A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO COUNTER-TERRORISM

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in partnership with Demos

and with the support of:

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Summary

1. How the current terrorist threat in the UK can be countered at a community level, through a “bottom-up” approach, as much as the more traditional “top-down” security response to terrorism was discussed at this conference held in partnership with Demos.
2. Since the London bombings in July 2005 much of the counter-terrorism (CT) response by the British government has focused on strengthening security and legislative measures. Yet terrorism legislation together with security and policing measures can at best contain the threat of terrorism and sometimes have the potential of doing more harm than good.
3. Whilst not enough is yet known about the process of radicalisation and where and how it takes place, Muslim communities in the UK are recognising that they can and should now provide many of the solutions in preventing further attacks and reducing radicalisation amongst certain younger Muslims; they have the most to lose from a tiny but powerful minority of radicalised individuals who are terrorising their own communities as well as the wider population. Understanding better the roots of extremism, so far as Islam is concerned (for example the group known as Khawarij), both amongst Muslims and non-Muslims, could help to remove misunderstandings, particularly within Muslim communities, which are then aggravated by misrepresentation in the media, and enable different communities to work together rather than in isolation.
4. The Muslim communities need to challenge the extremists directly by identifying them, and engaging with them through theology and politics in institutions such as Prisons

and Universities. Imaginative 1-1 programmes to de-radicalise individuals already supporting extremism, or those deemed “at risk”, can work within the framework of such institutions and could be replicated elsewhere.

5. Muslim communities also need to reverse the flow towards extremism, reducing both the vulnerabilities amongst younger Muslims who find themselves in a vacuum easily sucked into extremism and the wider tacit support for terrorism, prevalent in up to one fifth of the Muslim community in the UK according to public opinion polling. Strategies are therefore needed to capture those on route to radicalisation before the extremist “recruiters” can approach them; youth work with Muslim youngsters is critical, reaching out to those “at risk” at schools and on the street. Mosques are encouraged to increase their youth outreach work in addition to that undertaken by statutory and other local organisations.

6. There is also a need to explore the potential role of Muslim women and the wider family in countering extremism within their societies.

7. For the communities to be successful they need to be in effective partnership with government agencies, including the police, empowered by them to develop long-term solutions. Governments can support the actions of communities through the setting of appropriate policies and supporting community-led pilot projects which can be replicated and expanded. Tackling softer issues, such as education and provision of public services, can be important in making younger people less susceptible to engaging in terrorism. More could also be done to support teachers to moderate discussion with younger Muslims in schools. The role of local authorities is important; there is a greater need to change the tone of the relationship, build trust and bridge the gulf between authorities and communities.

8. A concerted political effort at the highest level is recommended to pull together both the hard and soft strands of CT policy in a parallel fashion to the political will which was created a few years ago to reduce street crime. As well as dealing with current threats government and the Muslim communities also need to identify issues that might be facing them in ten years time.

Threat assessment

9. The terrorist threat is nothing new; extremist actions have been undertaken in the name of Islam for generations. Many, including within the Muslim communities, argue that the current threat of extremism in the UK has existed for the past 15 years or so, for example with certain individuals disrupting communities through inflammatory language, but say little or nothing was done about it by the authorities. For example, the Muslim cleric Abu Hamza

al-Masri gave more than 100 talks across the UK in 1999 which were regarded by many Muslims as using highly inflammatory language¹.

10. The UK still faces a significant security threat. The 7 July bombings followed a series of attempted attacks and conspiracies since 2000; at least three additional conspiracies had been disrupted since. It is assessed that the frequencies of such conspiracies have increased although it is unclear whether this is because of more security resources uncovering plots or whether the threat is actually worsening. Security analysts estimate that hundreds of people are actively supporting violent activity spread across the country but many within the authorities admit that it is difficult to get a comprehensive picture of what is happening given the need to continue developing networks and understanding.

11. From recent polling there is assessed to be a significant circle of tacit support for terrorist activities, the so-called “soft-tail” of radicalisation or “tacit support networks”. This is demonstrated practically with one of those involved in the 21 July attempted bombings being provided with 3 different safe houses in London and helped to escape the UK before being arrested in Rome some days later. Such “safe houses” were not thought to be part of a highly organised support network, but rather people who were willing to turn a blind eye and not ask too many questions. In a recent poll of 500 Muslims in the UK: about 20% of UK Muslims felt sympathy with the “feelings and motives” of the July bombers; 1% felt the attacks were “right”². However care is needed that a myth is not built up around the “1%”, ie potentially 16,000 of the 1.6 million Muslims in the UK.

12. Over the past five years those involved are more likely to be second or third generation British citizens or more recent arrivals from areas of political turbulence. A significant minority of this extremist activity is initiated by converts from non-Muslim backgrounds. In all detected cases there are believed to have been international connections, but there is disagreement about the degree of organisation involved versus chance encounters and informal contacts. The threat may be bigger than perceived by many within the Muslim communities themselves; worse atrocities may still be to come.

What is causing extremism?

13. To create effective counter-terrorism strategies it is important to identify the causes of extremism? What motivates certain individuals to become such fanatical extremists that they feel propelled to engage in violence, become a suicide bomber or support a terrorist activity? What makes some younger Muslim men (it is mostly men) vulnerable and thus “at risk” to

¹ In February 2006 Abu Hamza was jailed for seven years for inciting murder and race hate.

² ICM Opinion Poll: Sunday Telegraph 19.02.06

political exploitation and/or likely to follow a path of extremism or terrorist activity? What are the drivers for radicalisation?

14. There is a general lack of understanding and awareness of the roots of extremism both amongst Muslims and non-Muslims. Background causes can help explain what might potentially propel someone towards grievance and, ultimately, violence, but no single factor could be considered 'causal'. A combination of factors is more likely to create a scenario that explains why there is an emergence of angry young men willing to blow themselves up, or at least maim or kill others.

15. Many of those who have become involved in terrorist activities in the last few years are "home-grown terrorists", born in Britain for whom the seeds of extremism were planted about 15 years ago in the early to mid 1990s and who were propelled into terrorist actions by the catalysts of actual or perceived injustice to the wider Muslim faith. Previously, most of those involved in supporting terrorism had been born overseas³. Meanwhile, elements of the wider Muslim community provide tacit support for terrorism and a talent pool for recruitment. Support for terrorism within the Muslim communities could be described as a 'funnel' with those few individuals already following extremism at the bottom, with a wider group at the top who could become extremists.

16. Whilst many of the vulnerabilities young Muslims face are similar to other youth who may become criminally involved it is recognised that there are certain "tipping points" for younger Muslims to commit violence in the name of Islam. Political grievance and marginalisation fired by religious justification "in the name of Islam" can be a potent mix. Political grievance largely stems from international events and foreign policy. There is much debate as to the extent that foreign policy influences younger Muslims to follow an extremist path or exacerbates existing vulnerabilities. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recognises widespread dissatisfaction for certain current foreign policies, not least relating to Iraq, Palestine, the wider Middle East, Bosnia etc. across British society and with concerns over perceived bias in favour of Israel. This dissatisfaction can be heightened in some young Muslims when they hear Al-Qaida (AQ) pronouncements objecting to the USA "in uniform" in what AQ sees as its own heartland. The global media is also regularly beaming pictures of pain and grief into households in the UK. For Mohamed Sadiq Khan, the suspected leader of the July 7 bombers, it is thought that foreign policy was a significant factor in his decision that action was needed in Britain in revenge for the UK's action in Iraq. He had watched

³ Statistics produced by Marc Sageman show that Al-Qaida activity is generally carried out by people outside their home country – relatively few carry out attacks at home, no matter where in the world they take place.

videos of Muslims suffering abroad, and had attended military camps in Pakistan interacting with Muslims from other countries. It is suggested that much more attention should be given to political drivers which have so far received little serious attention from government.

17. The marginalisation of Muslims, and perception of their marginalisation, not least through socio-economic indicators, can provide the conditions in which an ideology can take hold. Analysis of official statistics, whilst not necessarily collected on a religious basis, demonstrate amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities: high levels of deprivation; low male educational achievement and economic activity; low economic activity of boys; girls achieving at school but not entering into economic activity; large household size compared to the national average; and a high proportion living below the poverty line. Those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin (who make up 59% of British Muslims) are heavy users of public services (see annex).

18. The Muslim community is also a very youthful one; 37% of Muslims are aged 16-34 (and a further 34% are under 16). Where there is a larger than average youth component in a given community the risk factors for juvenile crime are traditionally higher. Whilst Muslims born in the UK are not yet significantly represented in the prison population by comparison to their white or black counterparts, the total numbers of Muslims in prison has almost doubled to 7,500, compared to four years ago. It is believed that there are a large number of foreign born Muslims in UK prisons⁴ creating a fertile site for the sharing of views between British Muslims and their co-religionists from around the world, as much as on University campuses. The numbers of Muslims who enter the UK each year on a temporary or provisional basis (not counting visitors) outnumbers Britain's total resident minority ethnic population⁵.

19. Whilst leadership of extremist groups is more likely to come from middle class backgrounds a proportion of the recruits may come from more deprived sections of the population which the leaders can identify with. They share a collective perception of being marginalised and victims of real or perceived injustice, whether local or global. For young Muslims this can lead to a siege mentality and sense of anger. They also fear becoming the victims of more stringent counter-terrorist measures put in place. This sense of victimhood can be fed by the media, particularly foreign media and videos reporting atrocities to fellow Muslims elsewhere. A young man in Luton may not be well versed in the Koran, or know where Damascus is, but is aware of a sense of global grievance.

⁴ Prison data is not currently available on religious grounds

⁵ There has been a big increase in Muslim students and those entering the UK on work permits.

20. Many younger Muslims also suffer from Islamophobia, itself media-fed, which can lead to real frustration and alienation from the wider community. A cocktail of experiences can result in certain attitudes and vulnerabilities. Many Muslims believe that life has got worse for them in the UK over the last few years: 53% believe this is because of the Iraq war; 28% believe growing Islamophobia is the cause.

21. In response to this frustration and anger many Muslim youngsters have become more politically motivated than their counterparts in the UK. They find they are not understood at school, by their parents or by local Imams and can only discuss issues amongst themselves. Second and third generations in particular find that they do not know how to belong or to be British with few to guide them. For Muslim boys this seems to demonstrate itself into anger, petty crime and becoming easily susceptible to extremist ideology. There are differing views as to whether women are more likely to cry when shown videos of Chechnya or Palestine, or turn to violence themselves, or actively support violence. There are now a number of cases of young women from the UK, Belgium and elsewhere becoming actively involved in terrorism.

How could a community-based approach work in practice?

22. Counter-terrorism has traditionally been led by the state using security and policing measures in particular. However this can at best contain the threat, at worst inflame it through heavy-handed action and intervention. The UK's current CT strategy, known as CONTEST, focuses on:

- preventing people being drawn into extremism;
- pursuing those who become involved in planning, supporting and conducting attacks through a traditional security based approach;
- protecting critical national infrastructure to reduce vulnerabilities and populations; and
- preparing to manage the consequences of attacks.

23. Preventing terrorism is perhaps the most important, yet the hardest, of these and the one most dependent on a non-security based approach for success. The Muslim communities, from whom the individuals come from, themselves can provide many of the solutions. They can help detect the threat at an early stage and can deter those most likely to "at risk" from radicalisation. A community-based "bottom-up" approach was supported by the seven Home Office-led working groups on "preventing extremism together" set up soon after the July bombings.⁶

⁶ To read the reports from the Home Office Working groups:
http://communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/raceandfaith/reports_pubs/publications/race_faith/255560

24. In leading a community-based approach to countering terrorism the challenge for the Muslim communities is to develop strategies that will ideally identify potential and real terrorists, prevent them from undertaking further terrorist activities, reduce the support for terrorism and remove the tacit support for terrorism amongst the wider Muslim communities. Such initiatives are likely to involve new members of the Muslim communities, not necessarily traditional leaders. They will have to have courage, take ownership and provide long-term commitment and leadership to sustain initiatives.

25. Civil society amongst Muslim communities is currently relatively weak, understandably so for a small and recent minority community. Building capacity will mean that the communities need to increase their self-confidence. They will need to recognise the internal problems within their own communities, some Muslims argue. They suggest, for example, that failure within mosques is a reflection of failure within the Muslim communities. They also need to recognise that their communities have very disparate views, rather than try and create a single voice; this is likely to increase when government money is at stake to fund projects.

26. The Muslim communities recognise that they cannot do this on their own. Partnerships are needed with government agencies, police and other communities recognising that this is a long-term project which depends upon trust and openness.

27. Some ask if, in the context of community-led approaches to countering terrorism, parallels with Northern Ireland are appropriate where there was a widespread collective community sense of injustice and thus support for the political and military aims of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. The Muslim communities recognise that they should avoid a similar situation whereby the IRA could count on wider community support for its activities.

Preventative community-led approaches

28. The aim for any preventative counter terrorist approach led by Muslim communities is to challenge those already radicalised, those at the bottom of the funnel, so to speak, whilst preventing those “at risk” from following extremism, at the top of the funnel, from slipping down. This will involve different strategies. But critical to any community-led strategy is engaging with Muslim youngsters. This is not easy however as many of those involved in extremism, or those who may be at risk from extremism are often disengaged from the wider Muslim communities they are living in. They may not go to a mosque. Ways therefore need to be found to engage with them at street corners and in cafes. Consultation with Muslim communities should include all strands of Muslim opinion, including many whose views may

be uncomfortable for the government and other official bodies, such as the police. Care is also needed over the language of extremism; someone may have extreme views, but not advocate the use of violence.

30. At the heart of a community-preventative strategy is the battle-ground for the hearts and minds of younger Muslims; they sit in between the ideology of “extremists” and the “mainstream” however these might be defined. This is particularly so for those younger Muslims who are second and third generation Muslims whose parents had little or no understanding of Islam apart from ritualistic aspects, who do not feel they belong in the UK and whose vulnerability can be exploited by radical groups misusing scripture and using particular Qur’anic and Hadith verses out of context. How can the Muslim “mainstream” in the UK therefore engage youngsters with what the Qur’an says, not what others say? How can their views predominate rather than allowing the radical “extremists” to define the territory with “their form of Islam”?

31. Given that no-one speaks for Islam as a whole this could entail detailed, hard and very difficult discussions about interpretations of the Qur’an and Hadiths; encouraging open fora for rigorous intellectual debate about Islam. This will need transparency and accountability on critical issues. Muslim communities are encouraged to welcome their diversity of views, recognising the different lines of thinking evolving from different geographical areas. There is also general agreement of the need to have more forums for religious discussions. Some recommend that any discussion about “reform” in the context of Islam should be separated from a focus on countering-terrorism.

32. Whilst there is no consensus about the nature of the links between religion and extremism there is agreement that religion is an important part of the solution. More thinking is needed to work out the best ways to use religion as a counter to extremists willing to use violence. Greater awareness of important historical aspects and developments within Islam could also be useful, for example understanding the group known as the Khawarij, a form of radical fundamentalism preaching uncompromising observance of the teachings of the Qur’an.

33. Extremists play politics in the name of religion, using ideology to generate political discussion about the role of the state in modern society and the use of violence to achieve this, not least to defend Muslim lands and establish an Islamic order with the ideal of a Caliphate. Some with experience of extremism recommend challenging extremists intellectually at a political as well as religious level, questioning where their political authority comes from. Effective arguments to challenge the extremists can be made around: using

other forms of protest such as political participation at local and national level; political dissent such as the Anti-War coalition, peaceable radicalism such as demonstrated by Hizb ut-Tahir, although what they say in private may be more anti-Western. Moral arguments are more difficult to make, and depend on religious authority whereby only qualified scholars may define what is legitimate jihad; and political authority when only a state may call for a jihad not vigilante groups.

34. Who is qualified to challenge the extremists? Opinion formers, scholars and leaders it is suggested, and especially those youth workers and others who are more in touch with youth at the grass roots level rather than traditional Muslim leaders or Imams. When and where? Not just in Islamic schools, or mosques schooling for children it is argued; many of those who have been involved in recent terrorist activities did not go to Islamic schools but were “converted” later in life. Thus debate needs to be had where the youngsters are.

35. For tackling those already holding extremist views more indepth discussion is recommended on theology and politics. That undertaken on a one-to-one basis 1-1 discussions in prisons and university campuses has been proved to be particularly successful.

36. Prisons provide an ideal recruiting ground for Al Queda supporters with a large group of disaffected young Muslim men with little to do, imprisoned often for petty crime, who are highly susceptible to voices of extremism. The access of foreign Muslims in prison is believed to be an important factor. Prison de-radicalisation programmes are a way forward, for example holding 1-1 discussions on theology and politics between carefully selected community representatives and prisoners identified as “at risk” held say 9-12 months before the latters’ release. Those leading such discussions need to have a clear message and be credible to the prisoners. After release this link with the prisoner needs to be maintained and assistance provided to the former prisoner to reintegrate into the community so that they are not rejected. Such an approach can successfully combine police CT expertise with experience of communities who are used to struggling with jihadists.

37. A similar proactive approach by moderate Muslims to challenge young extremists on University campuses can be a successful strategy, for example the work led by the Luqman Institute and undertaken in the Metropolitan University in London. The goal of such projects is to make the youngster to be a better Muslim through reading and understanding the Qur’an. The key is to identify the aspect of Islam followed by the student who is believed to be extremist, and their degree of commitment and to challenge their thinking.

38. At the top of the so-called 'funnel' much can be done to challenge Muslim youngsters who might be at risk of following extremism leading to terrorist actions. Youth workers, especially Muslim youth workers, can play a particularly important role, engaging with youngsters about their "Muslimness", challenging them to think about Islam, and dealing with more practical economic and social issues, encouraging a meaningful dialogue where young people can engage on issues and be listened to rather than just heard, and helping them to shape their ideas and pre-empt radicalisation. Having "street cred" they can help individuals build a bridge between being a Muslim and belonging to the wider British society. Youth work also connects youngsters with local statutory bodies. For many youth workers local gangs and drugs are the main issues young Muslims face; the role model for youngsters is more likely to be a local drug leader driving a BMW than the local Imam. More could therefore be done to support those working with youngsters to prevent them falling into a vacuum and into the possibility of crime, and/or extremism. Efforts to link those youth workers working with Muslim youngsters and to build best practice are also recommended.

39. Mosques are encouraged to play a more critical role in connecting with youngsters, not least to reduce the pool of those who may become susceptible to extremism. A youth wing attached to those mosques active in their local communities and the appointment of youth workers by mosques, parallel to the Church of England model of youth work, is recommended.

40. Other ways of preventing youngsters from starting down the road to terrorism have been developed to help channel their frustrations and anger productively. Large debates have been set up, for example by the Radical Middle Way which is running road shows with scholars to encourage theological, moral and ethical debate about everyday issues facing Muslims in the 21st Century as well as challenging extremist ideology. Some question the fact that the majority of the speakers for this initiative are from overseas and are concerned that the media does not portray this as an "imported version of Islam". Other initiatives include those by Forward Thinking, to provide space for young Muslims discuss critical issues; bringing Imams together to discuss issues of concern to young people. Schools can also play a particularly important role and more could be done, for example increasing the work of debating societies.

41. Discussion with young Muslims also needs to take place on the internet; after the Madrid bombings a lot of British young Muslims searched the web for a fatwa against the

terrorist attacks. In the event of a future attack the Radical Middle Way website would provide the opportunity for an instant condemnation of such an attack⁷.

42. Much that has been suggested so far is outside the traditional mosque structure. So what is the role of mosques in a community-led approach to terrorism? Mosques themselves can be part of the solution where they are a centre of the Muslim community, not least as a centre of instruction and learning about the Muslim faith. Many argue, however, including from within the Muslim communities, that in many ways mosques are part of the problem, lacking adequate governance and accountability, many excluding women, and lacking in Islamic rigour⁸. The lack of governance of mosques must be addressed they argue. Of the 600 mosques represented in the British Muslim Forum (out of an estimated 1200 in the UK) 80% are assessed by them to lack good governance and an ability to engage with young people appropriately. Steps are being made to improve this, for example with 25 mosques in the West Midlands now working together to improve their governance and be 'owned' by the whole community. In February 2005 a multi-agency approach to solve the various problems, including governance, at the Finsbury Park mosque was developed between the local Muslim community, supported by the local Council, police, Charity Foundation, Home Office and Foreign Office. This resulted in a new "management team" at the mosque. Such practical examples can be replicated. But it could take generations. It needs to be recognised that many mosques are just centres of worship and are not the best place to mobilise the wider community.

43. Whilst the Imam has a high status within the community many remain unskilled and poorly paid. Many mosque committees still rely on importing foreign Imams with no experience of citizenship in the UK. Training of Imams, including on issues of citizenship and contemporary society, whether those working in mosques or as prison or university chaplains is critical. Given the many different sects in Islam to find a single Imam to serve in prisons and universities is problematic.

44. Finsbury Park and Brixton mosques are examples of mosques now dealing with extremists "head on", in particular challenging their propaganda. This needs experienced and knowledgeable people with a range of skills. In many cases the most successful de-radicalisation is done on a one-to-one basis with experts challenging the views of extremist individuals.

⁷ www.radicalmiddleway.org

⁸ The Muslim Public Affairs committee telephoned 100 mosques after the 7 July bombings to ask if they would do anything differently as a result of the bombings; none expected to change.

45. Women within the Muslim communities could potentially play a much bigger role in reducing radicalisation within their communities and be at the heart of a community-led approach. Public debates within and among Muslim communities tend to be more dominated by men, with fewer forums for women to contribute publicly. Harnessing the talent of women and involving them in grass-roots non-government organisations and community organisations could be valuable. The wider family could also play a larger role. Mentoring of youngsters by successful young Muslims could be further developed⁹.

Policing and security

46. The police service can only work effectively in countering terrorism at the local level with the active support of Muslims. Their success will depend increasingly on the support of the Muslim communities as they try to: develop effective neighbourhood policing; build trust with local communities to support them with everyday policing issues; build up a picture of the threat from intelligence to disrupt conspiracies and prevent attacks; and investigate and manage the consequences of an attack.

47. To achieve this the Police service is working to increase numbers of Muslims within the police ranks (10% of London's population is Muslim whereas the Metropolitan Police Service is currently only 3% Muslims), especially in the Neighbourhood Police Units. Police officers at all levels need training to understand the complexities of policing in Muslim communities so that police actions are not counter-productive. The challenge is how to translate good practice promulgated from the most senior levels to the "bobby on the beat". Every CT operation undertaken by the Met police now has a community impact assessment and if arrests are made an affected family can have a family liaison officer. The Metropolitan police also works very closely with the Muslim Safety Forum. The Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) is another invaluable and effective way of increasing communications between Muslim community leaders and the police service. The MCU and its work needs to be replicated in other police forces.

48. Whilst the police and security services will continue to play an important role in countering terrorism care is needed if the security response is not to deepen existing or perceived grievances and become more of a problem than the solution, for example if policing is applied in a hard or unsympathetic way. Potential extremists are likely to go further underground if authorities are too heavy-handed.

⁹ Although it was not discussed in detail at the conference this will be the subject of future research by Demos over the coming year.

49. Policing for counter-terrorism is extremely hard. There are real tensions in managing the work of engaging with the community to gain their trust and the parallel need for intelligence, recruitment of sources and undercover work. Balancing this immediate imperative for intelligence-led counter-terrorism and the longer-term need to work with communities to combat lower-level crime etc is critical. This challenge was demonstrated after the 7 July bombings where police investigations in Beeston, where some of the bombers had originated from, led to a general “wall of silence” amongst the community. The police recognise that greater transparency is needed with Muslim communities. Lessons from Operation Trident in London to reduce gun crime amongst the Afro-Caribbean community could be useful. The searching policy under Section 44 of terrorism legislation is designed as a deterrent but can be perceived as antagonistic to many in the Muslim communities. The overall aim for the police service across the UK is to police within the communities not around them. To achieve this they will increasingly need to work with a variety of partners in the communities. This could include working alongside groups with unpalatable views; for example the police service should talk to Hizb ut-Tahrir (HBT), it is suggested, and need to access youth who are vulnerable to extremism who are not part of defined groups.

50. Care is needed to ensure that the security response to terrorism is not applied in a hard, and/or unsympathetic way, which could deepen existing or perceived grievances and mean that the security forces become more of a problem than a solution. Potential extremists are likely to go further underground if the authorities are too heavy-handed, or for example, if HBT is banned. Equally those who might be willing to support the policing work in their communities will not want to be too closely involved with them if there are allegations of them being informers or spies. A careful balance needs to be struck. Through the Association of Chief Police Officers (and in particular the Terrorism and Allied Matters Committee) the police have taken a leading national role in countering terrorism across the board. Some question whether this is too much responsibility for the police. However, many noted that there is little national leadership elsewhere with government (see para. 58 below).

Wider efforts to reduce tacit support and remove the causes of grievance

51. Changes to western foreign policy would undoubtedly remove some of the wider causes for tacit support for terrorism and direct involvement. Continued UK support for the US-led policy on War on Terrorism and action in Iraq is likely to be a key grievance for many younger Muslims for some time to come.

52. To influence government foreign policy Muslim communities in the UK are challenged to adopt more traditional paths of protest. The younger generation of Muslims may

understand how to use the system better than the older generation. A one-day march may not be enough to change policy; a consistent letter-writing campaign could have more impact. Equally, engagement with local politics is recommended given that elected political leaders can be influenced locally on foreign policy issues. Muslim communities need to find ways of challenging dissatisfaction into non-violent means; this is especially so for the second and third generations to get their voice heard.

53. At a local level Muslim communities are most likely to come into contact with the state through the public services they use, being disproportionately heavy users of these services, such as health, education and welfare and benefit support. These can help to alleviate the poverty and exclusion of many Muslims. A few poor statutory agencies or service providers at the local level can, however, reinforce negative attitudes towards the state. The role of these public services in countering terrorism per se is questionable; their neutrality is important, and if they were perceived to lose this it could lead to the disengagement of communities from public services which would have a serious negative effect.

54. Certain public services, such as education, have an opportunity to reduce the feeling of victimhood amongst Muslims. Teachers are on the front line in being able to respond to childrens' anxieties, for example after the London bombings or the Danish cartoons. Ways need to be found to support the teachers in their responses about such issues. A key question is who should co-ordinate this? The Department for Education and Skills and local councils could become more engaged, providing information in a campaign similar to that to reduce bullying. In the Netherlands, with close to one million Muslims out of a total population of 16 million, teachers in Amsterdam are being empowered to moderate discussion about key issues relating to integration, and to prevent young people from dropping out of school. Local information points have been established in cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam to exchange information about radicalisation and to share best practices, and in other cities such information points are being considered¹⁰.

55. The interventions of the criminal Justice system could also be used further to reduce risks of alienation and radicalisation not just in prisons but also with the probation service etc. There is a consensus about the need for continued and sustained support for young Muslims who come into contact with the criminal justice services.

56. Muslim opinion formers could work with media more to provide positive images of Muslims and Islamic values, reducing Islamaphobia. The broadcast media can be challenged

¹⁰ Demos plans further work in this area.

to: avoid making visual connections between the Koran and kalashnikov if portraying a suicide bomber; question inflammatory speakers such as Abu Hamza; and encourage greater media investigation of Muslim stories, quizzing scholars and clerics. Events such as that planned in July 2006 of Islam Culture in Alexandra Palace promoting a positive view of Islam need wider publicity. More could be done to ensure a more balanced view of the Islamic world.

57. Many argue that radicalisation of youth cannot be reduced without addressing the issue of identity of young Muslims. The current debates about Britishness and citizenship need to be addressed by Muslims. Muslim community leaders have built up the identity of their own community and are sometimes reluctant to broaden that view.

The role of government

58. If a community-based approach is to be successful communities recognise that they will need to work in partnership with, and receive support from, government. In developing policies around preventing extremism, social inclusion and reducing disaffection government actions can provide levers for action, support research and provide funding. Small-scale demonstration projects which are community inspired and led are being supported by the Home Office. This is most appropriate for new initiatives. Finding ways to evaluate 'what works' and to assess best practice so that projects can be replicated or scaled up will be a challenge; particularly given the likely scramble for new funding available and potential for sectarian rivalry. Whilst many communities want to remain independent from government 'handouts' a range of different groups are increasingly likely to compete for government favours and limited resources. Care is also needed not to concentrate on one group to the exclusion of others as this could create conflicts with other groups. There are also problems such as cooption associated with government interventions within any community.

59. The way that politicians and governments work with communities is critical. There is a call for greater humility, openness and the building of trust; government should not patronise communities. Many noted that Muslim communities have "consultation fatigue" involving feeling over-consulted, not listened to, and feeling disillusioned with government. It should be recognised that empathy from the Home Office, Foreign Office or Police say can only go so far, particularly when underlying policies such as conducting the war in Iraq continue. UK policy needs to demonstrate it is owned by the UK, not driven by the US and its policies, such as the War on Terror. Attention should be paid to strategies to encompass problems in West Yorkshire, say, as much as to London, and to avoid policies which will necessarily reinforce British Muslims sense of discrimination, injustice and victimhood.

60. Political engagement in tackling terrorism at community level is seen as sporadic and somewhat ill-conceived by some Muslims. Quick political fixes, such as working groups, need to be followed up by decades of work. For government to be more effective there needs a concerted political effort across government departments to pull together the various strands of counter-terrorism work, with one Cabinet Minister responsible, it is suggested.

61. For many other European Union countries, with newer Muslim populations, there are important lessons to be learnt in the UK approaches to community-led counter terrorism and vice-versa.

Conclusions

62. Preventing terrorist attacks led by certain individuals acting in the name of Islam and reducing the causes of extremism is extremely complex. Assumptions should not be made based on trends or a simplified model as this could at best hamper the response, at worst lead to the wrong response. Whilst security is not the entire solution it will remain a necessary part of the response particularly in dealing with those extremists who actively plan violent criminal acts. The Muslim communities can however play a much bigger role than currently in working with those who are already holding extremist views, whether in prison, university, on the street or those who might be vulnerable to extremism being sucked into action by those already involved. A key element in the strategy is to challenge the ideology and the political arguments. This needs to be done on both a one-to-one basis and in much broader debates across the Muslim communities. Larger socio-economic, political and international issues are also at stake which cannot be changed overnight. But small steps can be taken, especially by the Muslim communities, supported by government and police, to change the attitudes of the mainstream. This is a long-term project which needs political commitment from the highest levels of government, and the courageous will and energy of those in the Muslim communities, including many new players who would not have seen themselves before in the front line to counter-terrorism.

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Wilton Park Reports are brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of a conference. The reports reflect rapporteurs' personal interpretations of the proceedings – as such they do not constitute any institutional policy of Wilton Park nor do they necessarily represent the views of rapporteurs.

ANNEX

Muslims in the UK: facts and figures offered during the discussions:

- About 1.6-1.8 million Muslims in the UK (2.8% of the British population).
- In terms of ethnic composition 73% are Asian (43% Pakistani, 16% Bangladeshi); 6% black, 11% white (Central and Eastern European, Arab, Turkish etc)
- Nearly half are born outside Britain; 20% of these in Pakistan (2001 census).
- At any one time there are more Muslims in the UK on a temporary or provisional basis, not counting visitors, than British Muslims.
- The largest number of Muslims lives in London although London does not account for the majority of Muslims;. Bangladeshis are highly concentrated in London, Pakistanis in West Midlands, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire.
- The population of those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin will grow faster than other minorities given that almost 80% are under 45. More than 20% are in the 4-13 age group.
- Per household the average number of children in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households is higher than the average.
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi households contain the highest proportion of no adult earner. 17.5% of 16-25 year old Muslims are unemployed (OSI report)¹¹. In total 14% of adults are unemployed (the national average is 5%); 30% of working age men, and 68% of working age women are economically inactive (national average is 15% and 30% respectively) many others “work for uncle” and may earn less than the minimum wage.
- 31% of working age have no higher education qualifications (national average is 15%); those of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin are more likely to have no educational qualification compared to other groups. Educational under-achievement is very marked among boys particularly by the age of 14 (Key Stage 3 English).
- While Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls do much better at school both have much lower rates of female economic activity than other ethnic groups and these differences exist even among young people.
- Muslims tend to be over-concentrated in certain sectors of the economy, for example 40% of Muslim men in employment work in the distribution, hotel and restaurant industry, compared with 17% Christian.
- Higher rates of ill health: 13% for men and 16% women (national rate is 8% for both) and disability (21% and 24%).

It is suggested that care is needed when analysing statistics of not confusing what is true of British Muslims in general with what is true of particular ethnic groups, but which has nothing to do with religion per se.

¹¹ Open Society Report “Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens 2005”