



**Wilton
Park**

Report: From 'War on Terror' to Whole-of- Society Prevention

Wilton Park and UK Counter-Terrorism Policy, 2001–2026



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Executive Summary

This special report argues that the Wilton Park terrorism- and violent-extremism-related programme of events from 2001 to 2026 reflects a shift in British and allied policy thinking on terrorism: from an early post-9/11 focus on transnational threat, government reorganisation, intelligence, border security, and specialist operational responses, toward a broader framework encompassing community resilience, strategic communications, disengagement and reintegration, human rights, gender, and multilateral prevention. Early conferences focused on responding to international terrorism, reorganising government, biological and chemical threats, maritime security, and terrorist finance. By the mid-2000s, dialogues increasingly emphasised Muslim youth, community-based approaches, extremist discourse, and diaspora politics. By the late 2000s and into the 2010s and early 2020s, the discussion widened further to include disengagement policy, prisons, religion, gender, returnees, and post-territorial Daesh influence. The Wilton Park record thereby illuminates not simply the evolution of counter-terrorism policy, but an expansion of what policymakers considered counter-terrorism to mean in practice.

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Introduction

Wilton Park is the UK's foremost multilateral facilitator, convening international policy dialogues at its home in Sussex, England. Established in 1946, it served originally as an education centre for German PoWs from the Second World War, before hosting a broader range of predominantly foreign affairs dialogues over the following decades. As an Executive Agency of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (formerly Foreign and Commonwealth Office), it operates 'at arm's length' from the UK government. This status and close links to FCDO/FCO mean that discussion topics provide a unique reflection of the government's foreign policy thinking – and openness to external consultation and challenge – at any one time.

The Wilton Park documents assembled for this special report provide a valuable record of how terrorism and violent extremism were framed over two decades following the attacks of 11 September 2001 (hereafter '9/11'), in British and allied official, semi-official, academic, and practitioner circles. While Wilton Park had convened a handful of related dialogues in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the focus on counter-terrorism began in earnest in 2002, fully 10 years after the previous related event (WP681 'Terrorism and Business in the 1990's: Threats and Responses', July 2002). The earliest programmes are shaped directly by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and ask how (mainly Western) governments should respond to international terrorism, reorganise themselves for effective action, and strengthen national and multilateral cooperation. Later records increasingly treat terrorism and violent extremism as challenges rooted not only in clandestine extremism and transnational violence, but also in identity, grievance, media ecologies, local governance, and post-conflict recovery.

The key revelation from reviewing these documents is that the Wilton Park programme of events from this era reflects a gradual but substantial redefinition of the field in the post-9/11 years. In the early 2000s, terrorism is principally approached as a matter of threat assessment, institutional adaptation, intelligence, law enforcement, border control, and specialist technical capability. By the mid-2000s, especially after the London bombings of 7 July 2005 (hereafter '7/7'), the focus broadens to include social cohesion, Muslim youth, community-led prevention, and the political effects of foreign policy, media, and exclusion. By the late 2000s and 2010s, conferences on strategic communications, disengagement, human rights, prisons, women, violent extremism, and returnees suggest a more explicitly whole-of-society and multilateral prevention agenda.

This special report is based on the event programmes and reports recovered from Wilton Park's own corporate record. These feature conference themes, aims, partner organisations, and visible speaker profiles. The Wilton Park Protocol – which makes statements from discussions and the individuals who made them (as well as the organisations and countries they represent) non-attributable outside of the dialogue itself – means that an analysis of individual participants is outside the scope of this analysis. The Wilton Park Protocol (hereafter 'the Protocol') applies to all of the documents analysed, meaning that the accounts of the dialogues, and the policy recommendations that emerge from them, are non-specific about their individual sources. This obscures where there will have been conflicts of views within the groups, and which positions were taken by whom. Nonetheless, it is a rich set of source material from which to gather the preoccupations of the groups. Each of the participants would have been identified and hand-selected by Wilton Park in cooperation with the event partners for their ability to contribute to the dialogue, and to provide a breadth of views and perspectives on the topic.

2002–2005: Phase I. Post-9/11 Shock, Government Reorganisation, and Specialist Security Responses

The earliest Wilton Park conferences in the record are dominated by the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the need to rethink state response. Speakers and participants are dominated by foreign and defence ministries, law enforcement, prosecutors, intelligence-related bodies, security analysts, and technical-security experts, especially from the UK, the United States, Western Europe, and allied capitals. The prevailing expertise is strategic, legal, intelligence-oriented, and regulatory.

Two typical events in this initial sequence are 'Responding to International Terrorism: Forging Effective Responses after the 2001 Attack on the US' from (WPS02-03, September 2002), and 'The War on Terrorism: Reorganising Government for Effective Response', (WPS03-10, February 2003).

The 2002 conference stated its purpose as forging effective responses after 9/11, with sessions on the American response, European policy options, Russia's contribution, the roles of the EU and UN, and cooperation between the "Western" and "Islamic" worlds. The 2003 event moved directly to the institutional question, examining US, UK, French, German, Canadian, Japanese, Israeli, and Russian responses to terrorism. The associated report states that Western democracies had all re-evaluated terrorism policy after 9/11 and that the "new terrorists" exploited

globalisation and technology, sought mass-effect violence, and threatened democratic systems over a sustained period.

The same early years also show Wilton Park taking a broader civilisational and foreign-policy view of the problem. The 2002 conference on 'Western policies toward the Islamic world' (WPS02-7, February 2002) draws boldly on Israeli and Palestinian official perspectives, alongside British and European views. The report emphasises the need for constant engagement, deeper understanding, greater consistency, and a longer-term policy perspective. Its report explicitly warned against allowing the "war on terrorism" to be seen as a war on Islam, and linked Western policy credibility to issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Afghanistan, Iraq, authoritarian governance, and human rights. This shows that, from very early on, some Wilton Park discussions located terrorism in a larger political relationship between the West and the Islamic world. It is notable that the programme does not feature a formal event partner, suggesting that it was Wilton Park's own initiative to incorporate these perspectives in the CT conversation.

Even so, the dominant texture of the early events is of security adaptation and technical specialisation. Conferences on biological terrorism, transnational terrorism and US CT policy dealt with state sponsorship, homeland security, the Iraq war's implications, diffuse network structures, intelligence, risk communication, science and technology, and multilateral priorities. One dialogue, simply titled 'War On Terrorism' (WP769, November 2004) organised with the United States Institute for Peace, vividly illustrates the shock caused by events such as the Madrid train bombings of 2003, and features sessions on "how effectively to combat campaigns of terror" in the long term. This reveals a policy community preoccupied with how to build a functioning architecture of state response across intelligence, law enforcement, public communication, and international cooperation.

By 2005, this broad strategic concern had already differentiated into specialist subfields. One conference concentrated on chemical and biological terrorism (WPS05-5, February 2005), another on maritime security and international terrorism (WPS05-22, March 2005) and another on the financing of international terrorism (WPS05-19, October 2005). These programmes are striking for the specificity of their policy fields: they convene prosecutors, the FBI, HM Treasury, the Home Office, financial-sector specialists, transport-security authorities, RAND Europe, the International Maritime Organisation, and the European Commission. The implication is that terrorism was increasingly being decomposed into distinct technical, regulatory,

infrastructural, and financial problem-sets rather than treated as a single undifferentiated threat. Wilton Park was therefore used to ‘deep-dive’ into these technical sub-fields as well as looking at the overall CT ecosystem.

A further broadening of the standard ‘war on terror’ picture appears in the 2005 conference on the engagement of armed groups in peace processes (WPS05-34, December 2005), organised in partnership with the UK-based organisation Conciliation Resources, and featuring organisations such as the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in. Resulting documents explicitly argue that principled and strategic engagement with non-state armed groups (including those proscribed as terrorist organisations) should remain an available option where durable settlements are sought. Although not a conventional counter-terrorism conference, this is relevant because it reveals that even at the height of the post-9/11 period, Wilton Park hosted reflection on the limits of coercive or purely prohibitive strategies, and entertained engagement with armed groups in a way that was not the dominant Western CT narrative; the participant footprint from UK government departments is also noticeably lighter.

2005–2007: Phase II. The Emergence of Community-Based Prevention

The clearest marker of a new phase is the March 2006 conference WP801 ‘Towards a Community-Based Approach to Counter Terrorism’, which stated that security and legislation can at best contain the threat of terrorism and may sometimes do more harm than good. Partners included Demos (a democracy think-tank), the Home Office Faith Community Unit, the United States Institute for Peace, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), all of whom were contributing to a research project of the same name. The report argues that Muslim communities in the UK “can and should now provide many of the solutions,” and that a “bottom-up” or community-based approach was necessary alongside the traditional “top-down” response. The programme emphasises socio-economic context, foreign policy, media portrayals of Muslims, the use and abuse of faith, the policing of Muslim communities, institutions such as mosques, prisons and universities, and the role of public services.

The importance of the 7 July 2005 attacks (‘7/7’) is explicit in this report. It states that much of the British response after the London bombings had focused on strengthening security and legislation, but that preventing terrorism required a

different approach and stronger partnership with Muslim communities. It identifies youth work, one-to-one de-radicalisation in prisons and universities, mosque outreach, women and families, local authorities, and sensitive policing as important elements of a preventive strategy. This was a major conceptual shift: radicalisation was being framed as something that had to be addressed through social relationships, local institutions, identity formation, and trust, not only through surveillance and interdiction.

The steady expansion of preventive thinking is one of the most striking long-term developments over this period. Many of the Wilton Park events from this era can be viewed through the framework of the UK's 2003 CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy and its four pillars: Prevent, Pursue, Protect, and Prepare. Early events focus on state response, intelligence, disruption, terrorist finance, and specialist technical threats, and align with Pursue; maritime security and crowded places map strongly onto Protect; biological and chemical terrorism, civil-military coordination, crisis management, and resilience all speak to Prepare. However, the themes of community-based responses, Muslim youth, extremist discourse, strategic communications, disengagement, prisons, religion, gender, and education, show Wilton Park as a real incubator for Prevent thinking.

This development is revealed in mid-2000s material on Muslim youth and community-based CT (including WP82630 'Engaging with Muslim Youth in Europe and North America', October-November 2006, organised with the USIP and Department for Communities and Local Government). The report emphasises national identity, belonging, the role of moderate mainstream Muslim voices, education, women, community organisations, and democratic participation. It also examines "resilient communities," the relationship between integration and cohesion, and the need to address social justice and community trust. Taken alongside contemporaneous dialogues such as WP841 'Countering Terrorism in Europe and North America: How Can a Community Based Approach Be Developed?' (February 2007, again with DCLG), it suggests a conscious policy move away from seeing Muslim communities primarily as sources of suspicion or intelligence-gathering, and toward seeing them as necessary partners in countering extremism and strengthening democratic resilience. These themes would be re-visited when the UK and Europe faced the prospect of its Muslim communities being targeted to join the so-called Islamic State in Syria in Iraq in the mid-2010s.

The same broadening is visible in Wilton Park's treatment of discourse and identity beyond the UK domestic frame. Conferences on creating common platforms between Muslim and Western societies, and on understanding and engaging with diasporas (notably 'WP883 Understanding and Engaging with Diasporas' from December 2007), focused on shared values, media amplification, moderate religious authority, educational reform, identity, remittances, transnational politics, and women's experiences. These events show that by the mid-2000s Wilton Park's terrorism-adjacent work was embedding security concerns in a wider framework of dialogue, belonging, and citizenship.

During this phase, the field of event partners broadens significantly across government, reflecting the need to manage a threat that was simultaneously distant (in the Afghan-Pakistan border regions) and also home-grown (as were all of the 7/7 attackers); violent extremism was no longer contained within a single bureaucratic domain. Therefore, the Home Office – and in particular its Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT), and the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) – HM Treasury, DCLG, ACPO, and later the National Offender Management System (NOMS) and Department for International Development (DFID) recur across these events, in addition to FCO. This suggests that Wilton Park was increasingly acting as a bridging venue among foreign policy, domestic security, policing, social cohesion, and development agendas.

2008–2010: Phase III. Communications, Disengagement, Protective Security, and Human Rights

By the late 2000s, the Wilton Park material shows further expansion. One notable development is the explicit treatment of extremist appeal as a communications and branding problem. The 2008 conference on 'Al Qaeda: Challenging the 'brand'?' (WP897, March 2008) aimed to help UK policymakers think about how to undermine the Al Qaeda message and promote a credible alternative. Sessions focused on messaging, appeal, the role of messengers, delivery channels, and methods for measuring success. Terrorism was now being approached in part through concepts borrowed from communication strategy, marketing, and narrative contestation, and participation reflected this – the dialogue was held in partnership with the RICU, and featured participants from communications consultancies, branding specialists, as well as former-extremists-turned-community-workers. By combining figures from film and magazines with national and local policy officials, including from the

controversial 'Prevent' programme, this showed Wilton Park as a safe space for government to think expansively about the challenge of terrorism and radicalisation.

A second major development is the emergence of disengagement as a distinct field of policy concern. The 2009 conference on 'Leaving Extremism Behind: Disengagement Policy and Programmes' (WP962 July 2009, in partnership with OSCT) stated that disengagement had been a neglected area of counter-terrorism policy, practice, and research. It distinguished disengagement from deradicalisation and counter-radicalisation, thus framing counter-terrorism measures in more practical and pragmatic ways. This also indicates a policy shift from asking only how to stop radicalisation or attacks, to asking how individuals could exit violent extremist milieus via credible disengagement strategies. This shift in language from terrorism to extremism also shows a willingness to situate threats from Al-Qaeda and others not only in a 'vertical' context (a linear progression from support, through radicalisation, to violent action), but also a 'horizontal' one (seeing Islamist terrorism alongside different types of political violence). As such, sessions feature an openness to learning about disengagement from 'psychology, cults, criminality and gangs', and case studies on Northern Irish terrorism and even Nazism.

Protective security was also being redefined in more local and partnership-based terms. The conference on implementing the Lord West review of crowded places (WPS08-2, June 2008) emphasised risk matrices, Counter-Terrorism Security Advisers, local authorities, business forums, planning guidance, and national strategic frameworks that still depended on local ownership and local partnership. This was a form of counter-terrorism embedded in planning, design, licensing, resilience, and public-private cooperation, rather than only in intelligence and policing.

At the same time, Wilton Park became a forum for debate over the relationship between security and law. The 2009 conference on 'Terrorism, Security And Human Rights: Opportunities For Policy Change' (WP992, October 2009) argued that contemporary terrorism required a long-term response rooted in public legitimacy, rule of law, and human rights, and then examined hard cases such as deportation with assurances, control orders, intelligence cooperation, detention, and overseas military operations. This event was held in partnership with the International Commission of Jurists, based in Geneva, alongside FCO and the Home Office, and explicitly made space for questioning the long-term risks of counter-terrorism to freedom of speech, the right to privacy, and rule of law. In doing so, it actively platformed frequent critics of Western CT policy such as Amnesty International. This shows an evolution not

simply from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ counter-terrorism approaches, but away from ‘emergency’ thinking and towards sustainable and accountable legal frameworks for CT.

The same period also demonstrates Wilton Park’s value as a venue for focused regional-policy learning. The 2009 workshop on ‘Understanding the Pashtun Context: Afghanistan and Pakistan’ (WPS09-10, October 2009) aimed to inform UK government understanding of society and militancy in Pashtun regions. It stressed that Pashtun societies were not homogeneous, that localised approaches were essential, that political reform should accompany development, and that consultation with Pashtun communities was necessary. The significance here lies in the move toward historically and socially specific analysis rather than generalised threat frameworks alone, as well as the continued commitment to engagement rather than purely securitisation of communities of concern.

Similar ambition can be seen in two dialogues in consecutive months: ‘Yemen: prospects for security, stability and development’ (WP1014, February 2010), and ‘Tackling Violent Extremism: The Arc Between Pakistan and the UK Diaspora’ (WP1021, March 2010). The first dialogue notes that “the threat posed to Yemen and its neighbours by terrorism and radicalisation is important, but the counter-terrorism imperative should not be allowed to get in the way of a more holistic and longer-term approach to Yemen’s problems”. Featuring sessions on the economy, governance, and politics of Yemen, as well as the role of external actors, the event is far-sighted in noting the risk of a failed state leading to humanitarian consequences for Yemen’s population, and ramifications for Yemen’s neighbours (including a “potentially serious impact on regional and international shipping routes”).

WP1021, organised once again with RICU and OSCT, takes a broad look at the issues affecting the Pakistani diaspora in the UK, setting the issue of violent extremism in both a historical context and a comparative one, referencing France’s post-colonial relationship with Algeria. It brings together DCLG, the Prevent programme, the education sector, and the needs of vulnerable people in society.

Both these events signal a UK counter-terrorism eco-system becoming increasingly aware of the range of issues that countering terrorism and violent extremism entails, and the kaleidoscopic range of partners that required.

2011–2023: Phase IV. Whole-of-Society and Multilateral CVE

The later programmes and reports show the full extension of the policy field beyond classic counter-terrorism. Conferences on violent extremism in prisons (WP1115, July 2011) emphasised prison management, staff training, humane treatment, tailored interventions, and multi-agency coordination. Other events addressed the role of religion and religious actors, peace process design in Afghanistan, the nexus between firearms trafficking and terrorism, and the centrality of gender dynamics in violent extremism.

Technological change also necessitated further examination of online jihadism (WP1082 ‘Tackling online jihad: understanding the issues and how to respond?’ January – February 2011, again with RICU). This programme shows a CT system grappling with the nuances of online extremism amid the emergence of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and learning lessons from other agencies, including the UK Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). Participants are drawn from inside and outside of the system, with senior officials from the UK, US and Saudi Arabia alongside communications specialists with job titles like ‘Chief Storyteller’.

Three Commonwealth-focused conferences between 2019 and 2022 (WP1701 ‘Managing, preventing and countering violent extremism across the Commonwealth’, WP1793V ‘Meeting of the Commonwealth Cadre of CVE Experts, and WP2032 ‘Commonwealth CVE Cadre meeting’) deepen the impression of a system understanding violent extremism’s place in wider issues. These events, in partnership with the Commonwealth’s Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Cadre of Experts and the Commonwealth Secretariat’s CVE unit, emphasise the importance of youth, women and girls, resilience, peer learning, and whole-of-society prevention across Commonwealth states. The language is notably multilateral and preventive rather than reactive or emergency-driven.

Meanwhile, Syria-focused dialogues (WP1723 ‘Experts Meeting: Developing a shared approach to families of Daesh fighters in North-East Syria’, October 2019) approaches newly created camps and detention facilities not purely as residual security risks, but as sites of humanitarian concern, citing repatriation dilemmas, and reintegration challenges. This willingness to grasp the human security aspects of the global

campaign against Daesh is perhaps evidence of learning from the previous era of responding to AQ's attacks through a primarily military-security lens.

A sequence of dialogues in the late 2010s re-visited themes from earlier phases, as well as connecting terrorism and violent extremism with some of Wilton Park's most enduring themes: WP1475 (2016) and WP1599 (2018) address the role of religion in radicalisation and violent extremism; WP1511 from November 2016 looks at radicalisation in Africa; WP1630 directly addresses gender dynamics in violent extremism. There is a suggestion from this period here that the continued dominance of CT as a foreign policy issue meant that CT was the only available lens through which to talk about development, faith, and gender, rather than the other way round.

By the 2020s, Wilton Park's CT and CVE work was operating at the intersection of humanitarian governance, multilateral coordination, and long-term social stabilisation. This may indicate a recognition that, in light of a wave of terrorist activity emanating from Iraq and Syria (including a sequence of violent attacks in the UK in 2017), that the 'hard' approaches of the early GWoT era had not defeated terrorism or associated ideologies. Furthermore, it was becoming obvious that the appeal of these ideologies had actually broadened, as evidenced by large numbers of women and young people who had left the UK to join the so-called Caliphate. This naturally brought the focus onto issues of community as well as the imminent threat from overseas terrorist actors.

One illustration of the long arc of CT response comes from the focus on communications. A March 2015 conference (WP140) had asked how to challenge and counter the innovative and highly successful ISIL/Daesh brand, which was then at its very peak. The fact that this dialogue arrives so quickly after the establishment of the 'Islamic State' in 2014 stands in stark contrast to the seven years it took between 9/11 and the first mention of AQ as a 'brand' in March 2008 (WP897); this perhaps reflects some of the learning Wilton Park sessions had helped instil.

By 2023, the ISIL 'Caliphate' had been militarily defeated, and threat of mass-casualty attacks in the UK had diminished. However, an event on 'Defeating Daesh's post-territorial brand' (WP3050 January 2023), in partnership with the Global Coalition Against Daesh and the UK-based Counter-Daesh Communications Cell, revisited the terrorism problem in a new form. Participants analysed Daesh's post-territorial brand, its global affiliates, online ecosystems, grievance narratives, and the need for a holistic response integrating strategic communications, stabilisation, development, and

conflict prevention. In the course of just over twenty years, the challenge for the UK had moved from neutralising a band of clandestine overseas attack operatives, to trying to marginalise a diffuse, adaptive, and networked extremist brand.

The most recent evolution of the CT and CVE landscape can be seen in Wilton Park's counter-extremism dialogues from 2025 and 2026: WP3525 'Countering Extremism and wider harms' and WP3681 'Building a new counter-extremism and democratic resilience approach for today and the future'). Both events feature the trusted Wilton Park formula of policy officials engaging with academics, experts and counterparts from overseas, offering space for the UK government to think freely. However, the contrast from the early days is profound. Rather than a focus on a singular group of ideologically committed and battle-hardened extremists threatening the UK from overseas, the threat is described as much broader, more diffuse, and more online, with significant proportions of the UK population shown to be holding views that would be deemed 'extreme'; moreover, these views were no longer tied to purely diaspora communities. The prescriptions – the defence of democracy, the regulation of the online space, and the renewal of the social contract – reveals a problem that genuinely involves the whole of society.

Conclusion

The Wilton Park terrorism and violent-extremism corpus offers a valuable record of how British and allied policy thinking evolved between 2001 and 2026. In the early years, the materials are shaped by post-9/11 strategic shock and focus on how governments should respond to international terrorism through institutional adaptation, intelligence, law enforcement, specialist capability, and multilateral cooperation. Yet even in that first phase there are already signs that terrorism could not be understood as distinct from questions of grievance, foreign policy, human rights, and political legitimacy.

From the mid-2000s onward, particularly after the 7 July 2005 bombings, the materials shows a marked broadening of perspective. Muslim youth, social cohesion, policing-community relations, extremist discourse, diaspora politics, and community-based prevention become central concerns. By the late 2000s and beyond, this evolves further into strategic communications, disengagement, protection of public space, legal accountability, prisons, women's participation, returnees, and post-territorial extremist ecosystems. The cumulative effect is to show that the UK CT policy community came to see hard-security tools as necessary but insufficient, and to

place increasing emphasis on resilience, legitimacy, rights, reintegration, and partnership.

The broader historical significance of this shift is that it redefined the boundaries of counter-terrorism itself. What began as a response to a transnational emergency developed into a much wider effort to shape the social, institutional, legal, and communicative environment in which violent extremism either takes root or is contained. In that sense, the Wilton Park record is not only a record of terrorism policy. It is also a record of how the UK and its partners gradually constructed a more expansive understanding of prevention, one that linked security to community, human rights, governance, diplomacy, and long-term social stability.

Impact

There is a valid question about the actual impact of Wilton Park dialogues on UK policy during this era. Some events were explicitly tied to live policy development, for example where draft guidance was being consulted upon, or where workshops were convened to inform a government approach. Other events were plainly broader and more exploratory, designed to widen understanding, allow for discreet dialogue under the Wilton Park Protocol, or stress-test emerging ideas across a mix of officials, academics, practitioners, and civil-society actors. Overall, the evidence suggests that Wilton Park was neither the birthplace of UK counter-terrorism policy nor merely an aspirational ‘talking shop’; rather, it functioned as a policy-adjacent venue of consultation, socialisation, reflection, and strategic imagination. The departments that sat at the heart of UK CT policy such as OSCT repeatedly made use of Wilton Park for this purpose, and so obviously they felt that some benefit was gained.

Some discussions clearly informed policy thinking; others articulated ambitions, cautions, or alternatives that governments only partially adopted or did not adopt at all. As examples: no negotiated political settlement was reached in Afghanistan, and nor did Western states converge on a shared approach to the families of Daesh fighters and detainees in North-East Syria. However, such gaps do not render the discussions insignificant. Rather, they indicate that Wilton Park often captured a wider and sometimes more ambitious policy conversation than governments were ultimately willing or able to implement. It was a space where the official policy mainstream and a broader CVE community could meet, overlap, and diverge.

On the question of impact, it is worth returning to the recurrence of Prevent, which accounts for more of these gatherings than the other CONTEST pillars. Prevent, despite some notoriety, remains a core part of UK CT strategy nearly 25 years after its creation, and has been iterated repeatedly to meet the evolving challenges of violent extremism; it has been a model to many other strategies around the world. Its focus on bringing people from diverse sectors together – rather than the more technical challenges associated with Prepare and Protect – made it an ideal fit for Wilton Park, where the focus has always been on forming networks across disciplinary boundaries to tackle critical challenges.

Samuel Godsland, Senior Programme Director

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AI was used to support the preparation of this report, but all findings and conclusions are those of the report author.

Source Note

This paper is based on Wilton Park programme and report documents, together with structured spreadsheet information extracted from the sample. Claims in the paper are limited to what is explicitly visible in those documents and extracted results.

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