

A briefing by the Islamic Human Rights  
Commission on Tackling Extremism in the UK,  
a report of the Prime Minister's Taskforce on  
Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism.

Faisal Bodi

January 2014

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## Summary

1. Since the turn of the millennium the British government has been engaged in an unprecedented legislative programme to combat what it calls terrorism but which also includes ideological and physical threats to its overseas interventions.
2. Running parallel to this has been a wide-reaching anti-terrorism strategy called CONTEST<sup>1</sup>, a key component of which is the PREVENT programme designed to eradicate beliefs amongst British Muslims that run counter to British foreign policy objectives in Muslim-majority countries. Tackling Extremism in the UK (TEUK) is the latest review of this strategy.
3. TEUK represents an intensification of PREVENT's aim of creating a compliant Muslim community, and fails completely to address the foreign policy roots of extremist violence.
4. Controversially, TEUK expands the definition of extremism to capture yet more beliefs and behaviours that are not in themselves illegal or indicators of extremist inclination. In doing so it confirms the government's view of Britain's Muslims as a problem community.
5. TEUK's proposal to introduce new orders against individuals and groups who fall foul of this widened definition of extremism – particularly by means of 'Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance' - is likely to have grave consequences on the right to free expression.
6. TEUK also proposes to redouble efforts to restrict online "extremist" content. With the expanded definition of extremism, it is likely that more legitimate websites will be closed down and legitimate material censored. Moreover, the process of restricting content continues to lack transparency and the necessary checks and balances to ensure fair and effective implementation.
7. TEUK's proposal to arm the Charity Commission with more powers to counter extremism, particularly in relation to universities, is likely to result in more witchhunts against Muslim-run charities and stifle genuine constructive debate on campuses.
8. TEUK marks an upturn in aggressive government efforts to fashion a government-friendly variant of Islam by appointing trained and approved imams to the country's prisons to minister to Muslim inmates, and by smuggling the PREVENT agenda into independent Islamic supplementary schools.
9. TEUK announces the government's intention to make it a legal requirement for all local authorities to implement PREVENT, despite the fact that many of them hold grave reservations about the programme and its effect on Muslim communities and wider community relations. In doing so it fails to address the key failing of PREVENT to build a consensus around tackling extremist violence, continuing to alienate what was at one time a potentially receptive audience.

## Context

For TEUK to be properly understood it has to be set against the backdrop of wider government anti-terrorism policies of which it forms the latest instalment.

Since the year 2000, the British government has introduced a series of draconian and far-reaching laws, designed ostensibly to counter a terrorist threat that is said to be substantially different in nature and scope to the threat it historically faced from its occupation of Northern Ireland.

The Terrorism Act 2000 was brought in principally to curtail the activities of opposition groups, mostly from the Muslim world, who had used the safe and conducive legal framework in Britain to campaign against oppressive regimes back home.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States the British government announced a national state of emergency. This laid the ground for the introduction of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, the centrepiece of which was the right of the state to detain without trial those it suspected of terrorism.

In 2003, Parliament voted in the Extradition Act which gave the authorities the power to approve extradition requests from designated states for UK residents without the need for the receiving jurisdiction to provide any *prima facie* evidence. The Act has been widely employed to remove from the UK Muslim dissidents and activists whose presence the government deems undesirable.

After the right to hold suspects without trial, brought into force by the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, was struck down in 2004 by the House of Lords as incompatible with Britain's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, Parliament wasted little time in replacing it with the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005. Its defining feature was that it substituted internment with control orders that allowed for restrictions to be imposed on the movements, associations and communications of terrorism suspects.

None of these legislative tools were successful in deterring the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks on London commuters. In their aftermath Parliament rushed through the Terrorism Act 2006, which widened the definition of terrorism to include expressing support for the use of violence to achieve political objectives. Under its terms it was now illegal to call for the violent overthrow of an oppressive military dictatorship or to support an armed insurgency.

The Counter-Terrorism Act 2008 unsuccessfully attempted to extend the pre-charge detention period from 28 to 42 days. However the Act introduced more prohibitions including on the publication of material that could compromise the security of British security services and armed forces at home or abroad.

It was followed in 2010 by the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act which made it possible for the executive to designate as terrorist individuals or entities they "reasonably believe" to have been involved in terrorism. The act does not require that the person or entity has been charged, convicted or even arrested for terrorist offences.

This long litany of measures is the 'hard power' component of a much wider government strategy whose real aim is to subdue opposition, mainly though not exclusively, from Britain's Muslim population to the government's dubious foreign policy objectives.<sup>2</sup>

Running parallel to the enactment of legislation has been an exercise of ‘soft power’ by successive governments to engineer a change in the political attitudes of Britain’s Muslims. After the 2005 London attacks, the government set up a Preventing Extremism Taskforce tasked with drawing up a strategy aimed, it was said, at winning the hearts and minds of Muslims by promoting a narrative that would counter extremist violence carried out in the name of Islam. Those discussions culminated in the birth of CONTEST, and within it the PREVENT programme, the so-called community engagement component of this four-pronged counter terrorism strategy.

PREVENT was predicated on the idea that British Muslim society lacked an effective counter narrative to ‘extremist’ ideological positions that were proving increasingly appealing to young Muslims affronted and angered by the effect on their co-religionists of western governments’ foreign policies, in particular the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Tapping into widespread British Muslim revulsion to the London attacks it claimed to seek to build a consensus around defeating the extremist narrative.

However it soon became clear what was originally sold by the government as a strategic partnership with other stakeholders – foremost amongst them the Muslim community - to counter terrorism was in fact an aggressive social engineering exercise to transform attitudes in the community and gather intelligence on its members.

British Muslims, who were initially dubious about PREVENT but won over by promises that it would help expand their organisational capacity to deal with violent extremism in-house and largely on their own terms, soon discovered that the whole initiative was a state-led snooping campaign.<sup>3</sup> Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, branded it the biggest spying programme<sup>4</sup> in Britain in modern times. PREVENT drew on voluntary sector organisations, community groups, educational institutions, local authorities, prisons, mosques and police forces to map the make-up and dynamics of British Muslim communities, often seeking information that had little to do with violent extremism or terrorism.

By 2011, following a government review into its CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy, it had also become clear that PREVENT would entail a more aggressive attitude towards changing opinions amongst British Muslims. Henceforth it would no longer be enough to use counter-narratives to challenge violent extremism - it was also expected that Muslims should also actively promote “core British values”, which according to the government, included conformity with its foreign policy objectives.

This expectation also finds expression in the new Tackling Extremism in the UK<sup>5</sup> report by the Prime Minister’s Taskforce on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism, to which we now turn.



## Tackling Extremism in the UK: More of the same - Anti-terrorism or assimilation?

According to the government, TEUK was set up to determine which areas of the government's current approach needed to be strengthened. The report reiterates the government's commitment to confronting the "poisonous extremist ideology" that can lead people to violence and "runs counter to traditional British values". The exercise has therefore retained PREVENT's aim of shaping British Muslim opinion to reflect what is assumed to be a more "mainstream" position.

The trouble with this is that it risks alienating Muslims in the same way that PREVENT's tying of community development and cohesion to a security agenda did early on in its implementation. Just as British Muslims are wary of participating in initiatives predicated on the assumption that the community is 'suspect' so too are they likely to continue to be unreceptive to anything that smacks of assimilation. Shoehorning Muslims into some ill-defined consensus around what constitutes core British values is authoritarian and amounts to an attack on their religious and cultural identity.

The government is cynically projecting the fallacy that the political positions adopted by British Muslims in respect of western interventions affecting their co-religionists is at the root of the terrorism threat and that disabusing Muslims of these notions will bring them into the political and social mainstream. However in adopting this tactic the government is also exposing an internal contradiction. At the same time as it is busy engineering British Muslims' acceptance of key values such as tolerance and democracy it expects the same community to stay silent on the government's own failure to uphold those very values in its policies towards the Muslim world.

At the time of publication, a request by IHRC under Freedom Information provisions, asking for the following information has been declined:

- A list of the MPs, Ministers and advisors that make up the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- A list of any experts advising the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- The minutes from all meetings held by the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- Copies of all written submissions made to the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- Transcripts of all oral submissions made to the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- Any reports submitted to the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism
- Any other documentation used by the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism to reach its recommendations

The failure to make public any and / or all of this information not only fails usual tests of transparency, but further calls into question how serious the government are about seeking proper advice on any issue and coming to serious conclusions, as opposed to enforcing its own agenda onto a beleaguered community.

## Definition of extremism expanded

Tackling Extremism in the UK expands and puts more flesh on the bones of the definition of extremism contained in the 2011 review of PREVENT. Extremism now encompasses considering western intervention in Muslim countries as a war on Islam, seeking to impose a global Islamic state governed by the shari'ah, and making a rigid binary opposition between Muslims and non-Muslims – “creating a narrative of ‘them’ and ‘us’”, in the words of the document.

With the new expanded definition the government has clearly adopted a position on what it sees as acceptable and unacceptable Islamic beliefs. The government wants us to believe that oppositionist or radical views originating from an Islamic source are a staging post on the road from belief to terrorism. This is clearly ludicrous since all religiously inspired Muslims who hold radical or dissenting views do not go on to commit terrorist acts. It is also counter-productive for the following reasons:

- 1) Creating a role for the state as some kind of high priest deciding what differentiates acceptable from unacceptable Islamic beliefs is a notion that will likely be rejected by most Muslims.
- 2) Narrowing the range of permissible religious expression will increase the mistrust of government that already exists in large sections of the Muslim community.
- 3) In continuing to single out the Islamic faith as the target of an anti-terrorism strategy it will add fuel to the perception that the British government is at war with Islam.
- 4) It will inevitably play into the hands of Islamophobes by continuing to reproduce tropes of the Muslim community as an inevitable source of terrorism.

Having sufficiently widened the definition of extremism to serve its purposes the document lays out the areas in which it is to be applied. All the areas in question have been the subject of previous attention from PREVENT and taken together represent another turning of the executive screw against British Muslims.

## Curtailing freedom of expression

Although TEUK states that it is not intended to restrict or prevent legitimate and lawful comment and debate, it is clear that this will be the likely effect of the proposal to introduce “new types of order to ban groups which seek to undermine democracy or use hate speech, when necessary to protect the public or prevent crime and disorder.”

Any step in this direction would represent a significant extension to current laws which authorise the banning of terrorist groups and the prosecution of those who support them. It would permit the prosecution of people and groups for vigorously attacking democratic values or expressing their dislike of another section of society.

The freedom to communicate dissent, even if it is done in a robust and spirited way, is regarded as a fundamental feature of democratic societies. Making it subject to limitations based on political preferences

simply perpetuates and strengthens the idea that democracy in the UK and other supposedly western contexts is an uneven playing field designed to protect and preserve the dominant discourse. Moreover, elevating democracy into a religious dogma that should be protected from harsh criticism is itself anti-democratic and something that will inevitably invite accusations of hypocrisy.

For those who refuse to submit to the new definition of extremism the government is considering “new civil powers, akin to the new anti-social behaviour powers, to target the behaviours extremists use to radicalise others”. These IPNAs (Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance), would give authorities the power to impose sweeping curbs on people’s liberty if they think they are “capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to any person”. In the absence of any clear definitions, the power amounts to a green light for law enforcement agencies to restrict or prohibit almost anything that somebody may find annoying.

Lord Macdonald, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, has already criticised the proposal<sup>6</sup> saying it amounts to “serious and unforeseeable interferences in individual rights, to the greater public detriment”. The IHRC has strong reasons to believe that if implemented, the new laws would be disproportionately used against members of the Muslim community including against door to door charity collectors, street *da’wah* (propagation) stalls, public preachers, and even protestors.

## Restricting online content

TEUK intends to redouble its efforts to restrict material it deems to be terrorist propaganda. It claims that the authorities have already removed 18,000 items of “online terrorist propaganda” since coming to power. Naturally, eyebrows are raised when governments start to censor information and ideas, especially when it involves something as free and accessible as the worldwide web. Firstly, pulling offending content from the web is not an effective way of addressing terrorism or religious extremism. That is better achieved by ensuring an environment in which the free and frank exchange of ideas can allow the majority to engage the warped views of a minority and those who are vulnerable to them.

Secondly, there appear at present to be no checks and balances to ensure that only terrorist material is being removed. The government has not supplied any lists or details and in short the process lacks the transparency necessary to ensure it is being implemented properly. A more transparent process would also help ensure that it isn’t mainly or exclusively items pertaining to Muslims or the Islamic faith that are being singled out for censorship.

Finally, the widening of PREVENT’s remit to take in (a potentially widely and inappropriately defined) extremism as well as terrorist propaganda appear to be handing the authorities a *carte blanche* to remove items simply because they are hostile to government policy.

## More powers for Charity Commission

The government proposes to invest the charities regulator with new powers to tackle so-called extremism. This will ring alarm bells in the British Muslim community which has seen some of its most prominent charitable organisations on the receiving end of unwarranted attention by the Charity Commission in relation to allegations of supporting terrorist groups overseas. In 2010 the Commission launched an inquiry into Muslim Aid after complaints from pro-Zionist quarters that it was channelling funds to a Palestinian group which Britain has designated a terrorist organisation. The Commission found no evidence to substantiate the allegations. In the preceding years the Charity Commission launched no fewer than three separate inquiries into the mainly Muslim-run Interpal whose work is dedicated to alleviating the plight of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and in the Palestinian diaspora. On each occasion it found no

evidence to implicate the charity. The frequency of the investigations, which have no precedent in the history of the Charity Commission and were instigated at the behest of pro-Israel lobbyists, left the impression that Muslim charities were being witchhunted.

Arming the Charity Commission with new - as yet unspecified - powers to tackle extremism is an alarming prospect. Given that the government's definition of extremism now incorporates a wider range of beliefs and behaviour, it will allow the Commission to target a larger number of charities, simply on account of the religious and/or political beliefs they or their partner organisations appear to hold. They will make it easier for the Commission to find against charities whose activities have previously not met the higher "terrorism" threshold.

The recent appointment by the Cabinet Office of Peter Clarke to the board of the Charity Commission illustrates its centrality to the implementation of PREVENT. Clarke has formerly headed the Metropolitan Police's Anti-Terrorism Branch and was also the National Co-ordinator of Terrorist Investigations. The appointment of Tony Leifer also signals that Muslim charities should expect more Zionist bias from the Commission. A distinguished lawyer, Leifer is a member of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the apologist UK mouthpiece of the Israeli government. In 2003, the same year in which the Charity Commission launched its second inquiry into Interpal, the Board was forced under threat of legal action into issuing a public apology to Interpal for referring to it as a "terrorist organisation".

There is yet another reason why Muslims should fear the expanded remit of the Charity Commission. As registered charities all universities and other higher education institutions in the UK must comply with charities legislation and are answerable for that to the Commission. Since 2011 all university students unions have been under a legal obligation to register separately with the Commission. This puts their activities within the purview of the Commission. One of PREVENT's stated objectives has been to reduce the exposure of university and college students to what it calls the threat of radicalisation. In practice this has meant closely monitoring the activities of university Islamic Societies, especially in their selection of external speakers. The PREVENT strategy review of 2011 made it explicit that the Commission would be expected to hold students unions accountable under charities law for the actions of their individual societies, particularly in respect of whom they select to speak at their events:

"Higher education institutions and student unions can be challenged on whether they have given due consideration to the public benefit and associated risks notably when they, or one of their affiliated societies, invite controversial or extremist speakers to address students."  
*(Prevent Strategy, Home Office 2011, Section 10.59, page 75)*

The screening of speakers for their political or religious views sits uneasily alongside the traditional image and role of higher educational institutions as places where young people go to broaden their horizons and develop their intellects. Instead of presenting students with an environment that is conducive to free unhindered thinking and discussion where they can reach their own conclusions about what constitutes terrorism and extremism, PREVENT has narrowed the range of permissible debate and succeeded in creating a culture of fear on campuses. This runs contrary to a recommendation by a 2010 House of Commons Committee review of PREVENT for the government to:

"make available a proportion of the funding currently available to communities through Prevent specifically to projects aimed at encouraging participation in democratic means of debate." *(Preventing Violent Extremism, House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010, section 69, page 29)*

Another new tool in PREVENT's campus armoury is the planned introduction of Muslim chaplains to universities in order to challenge "extremist views". It is difficult to see how this appointee will function as

anything other than a government watchdog. The proposal conjures up images of specially cultivated government-friendly imams presiding over Islamic Societies to enforce “acceptable” interpretations of Islam by monitoring the views of members, vetting and correcting any wayward ideas. Again this is something that was sharply criticised in the 2010 House of Commons review which recommended: “Government interference in theological matters must be avoided. The Government’s current approach to engagement with Muslim organisations has given the impression that there are ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of Islam—some endorsed by the Government, others not. The construction of an “Islamic experts industry”, funded and sanctioned by Government, has caused a variety of problems, including a failure to represent the views of the whole Muslim community.” (*Preventing Violent Extremism, House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010, sec 94, page 37*)

## **Intruding on Islamic supplementary education**

In fact, in keeping with the history of PREVENT, TEUK sees education as a key battleground in its aim of assimilating the Muslim community. For the first time it proposes to extend the reach of PREVENT into the unregulated Islamic supplementary school sector. Historically, the whole sector has operated totally independently of government, usually under the control of local mosques or other Islamic organisations. It would be fiercely resistant to government intervention, particularly in relation to what is taught.

However one of the consequences of this independence has been the failure to adopt legal safeguards for children that exist in the compulsory school sector, including even the most basic protections such as criminal records checks. Recognising that this is an increasingly important consideration for Muslim parents the government plans to embed PREVENT objectives into a voluntary code of practice that also contains other more general safeguards. The rationale appears to be that Muslim parents will prefer schools that have child protection polices over schools that don’t. Again the policy is unlikely to win any hearts and minds. Naturally, most Muslim parents would welcome any genuine government attempt to help supplementary schools implement long-overdue safeguards - but few would accept it if they knew it was tied to the PREVENT agenda.

In view of the government’s declared intention to combat what it calls the “highly conservative version of Islam” being taught in some supplementary schools (Prevent Strategy, Home Office 2011, section 10.33, page 68), such actions are likely to be seen by the Muslim community as unjustified intrusions on its freedom of religion and education.

## **Forcing PREVENT on local authorities**

There has been much controversy surrounding the role of local authorities in the delivery of PREVENT. As one of the three areas earmarked by the Department for Communities and Local Government (the lead government department for PREVENT) for executing the programme – the others being the police and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – it is seen as key to gaining access to the Muslim community. However from the outset of PREVENT local authorities have entertained major reservations. Their main objection, that subsuming anti-terrorism work under community development was damaging to both, was addressed in the 2011 government review which recommended decoupling the two.<sup>7</sup>

Another major concern for both local authorities and the Muslim community is the way PREVENT was imposed from on high rather than being the collaboration initially envisaged. Arun Kundnani delineated the process by which PREVENT work has been embedded into local authority priorities in his 2009 report for the Institute of Race Relations<sup>8</sup>. In reality, neither local communities nor local authorities have had much influence in how PREVENT is framed and delivered, with ethnic minority representatives being effectively



sidelined from the decision-making process. Contrary to government promises the programme has not proceeded on the basis of locally determined needs but has instead been driven by central government objectives.

For these reasons many local authorities have reported that they have found Muslim organisations and community workers reluctant to engage with a programme they claim is stigmatising. Nevertheless TEUK proposes to make PREVENT a legal obligation on local authorities in “those areas of the country in which extremism is of particular concern” and for the government to intervene where it feels local authorities are not taking the problem seriously.

This would amount to more of the same top-down imposition of PREVENT for which the government has already been highly criticised. Notwithstanding the decoupling of PREVENT from community development work, without a truly communities-led collaboration to decide the content and implementation of PREVENT it is likely to continue facing resistance. The IHRC’s own research and experience supports Parliament’s own findings: “We cannot ignore the volume of evidence we have seen and heard which demonstrates a continuing lack of trust of the programme amongst those delivering and receiving services. (*Preventing Violent Extremism, House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010, sec 39 page 18*)

The legal obligation also extends to the Channel initiative which remains at the centre of suspicions about PREVENT’s spying function. Channel seeks to identify individuals with extremist tendencies and divert them via interventions from statutory and voluntary agencies. Much of its work remains classified but one of the main criticisms is that it has tagged Muslims who have expressed unpalatable views which are neither illegal nor necessarily signifiers of future terrorism<sup>9</sup>. TEUK also fails to address the transparency needed to establish that referrals are being properly made. The IHRC is also concerned that making it a legal obligation to use CHANNEL will circumscribe the ability of local authorities and communities to formulate other more appropriate interventions of their own if they are needed.

## Shaping opinion in prisons

The obsession with developing an officially acceptable brand of Islam has been a strong feature of PREVENT’s application to the criminal justice system. The 2011 review contained a commitment to embed PREVENT firmly throughout the system. This also involved restricting the access of “extremist” information to prisoners and creating a corps of Muslim chaplains to challenge “extremist” views among inmates and impart a softer variant of Islam. Chaplains are the delivery arm of an officially sanctioned educational programme about Islam which “teaches spiritual values and contains modules on topics such as maintaining family ties, forgiveness, and interaction with people of other faiths.” (*Prevent Strategy, Home Office 2011, Sec 10.167, page 88*)

TEUK takes this further by promising to extend the Ibaana educational programme, designed to deal with prisoners holding the most “entrenched extremist views to all prisons” by 2014. Those on whom the new ‘detoxification’ programme fails to work will find themselves subject to post-release intervention.

The application of educational programmes to all Muslim inmates raises serious questions about the use of the criminal justice system and the rights of Muslim inmates. The penal system exists to punish and rehabilitate offenders for the crimes for which they have been convicted. It is an unjustified extension of its purpose to attempt to rehabilitate prisoners who have not committed any terrorism-related offences. Moreover, applying a religious re-education programme to all Muslims simply reinforces the idea that regardless of whether they have any previous history, all Muslims are by nature prone to violent extremism and need inoculating against it.

## Conclusion

TEUK is a missed opportunity by the government to redeem a major pillar of its counter-terrorism strategy. Given the scope and gravity of the criticism PREVENT has faced since its inception, one would be justified in expecting, at the very least, fundamental changes to bring the strategy into line with basic human rights principles. That the government has elected to ignore this signals that it is content with pursuing an authoritarian, security-led approach against Muslims.

This approach is premised on the assumption that the Muslim community is a sympathetic pool in which terrorists swim. Left free to operate within the wider community, their ideas risk infecting some of those with whom they come into contact. In order to isolate the terrorist minority it is essential to immunise the majority and increase their resistance to the extremists' narrative.

The problem with such an approach is that it problematises the entire Muslim community, viewing it as somehow endemically sympathetic to the atrocities that are carried out in the name of its religion. Such a view flies in the face of extensive research showing that a greater proportion of British Muslims identify with the UK than other ethnic or religious groups. We are disappointed that TEUK has failed to heed the recommendation of the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee:

“The Government should learn lessons from the Prevent experience, that any programme which focuses on a single community risks alienating that community, and ignores the fact that no section of a population exists in isolation from others. (*Preventing Violent Extremism, 2010, sec 168, p.62*)

Partly as a result of this misconception, PREVENT has failed to build a consensus with the community and local authorities on how to tackle terrorism - terrorism of all kinds, not just that which is perpetrated by Muslims. Rather than being based on locally perceived needs the strategy has instead come down from Whitehall in the form of edicts. These often have less to do with tackling terrorism than trying to shape Muslim opinion and gather intelligence.

As others have already pointed out it demonstrates a crippling lack of trust in the Muslim community, reinforcing the perception that it is an enemy within. The approach has the effect of dividing Muslims into moderates and extremists, with the former being treated as an asset and the latter being regarded with suspicion. That in turn undermines the ability of government to do its job and view Muslims as equal citizens who must be equally served.

Another feature TEUK shares with previous reviews is the failure to clearly define extremism, violent extremism and radicalisation. The consistent refusal of the government to narrow down what it means by these terms suggests that it has deliberately left them open-ended to capture the widest possible range of behaviours and beliefs. In fact, non-definition appears to be a key implement in the government's Muslim-pacification toolkit, allowing the authorities to mark anyone and anything they consider to be a threat to their activities and policies.

Since it was conceived PREVENT has also progressively become more aggressive, with the definition of extremism, in particular, growing to cover more types of behaviour and views. Muslims resent and reject TEUK's attempt to define what is and isn't acceptable Islamic belief. Attempting to inculcate these beliefs via education programmes in prisons, controlling the choice of speakers in universities, trying to smuggle PREVENT into Islamic supplementary education, limiting the range of views that can be discussed freely, appointing state approved imams to regulate student and prison activity, and “re-educating” those suspected

of holding ‘wayward’ ideas via the Channel programme, simply confirm the popular Muslim view that PREVENT is a social engineering exercise, aimed at creating a politically deferent type of believer following an officially acceptable brand of Islam, with disturbing echoes of the state surveillance of communities and control of religion that is characteristic of authoritarian regimes.

TEUK also stands to compound the biggest failing of the PREVENT programme which is the stubborn refusal to address the role of government policy in creating terrorists. Looking in the mirror is always more difficult than seeing the mote in someone else’s eye but even in the absence of introspection the government cannot be blind to the truth that supporting oppressive regimes and intervening immorally, even illegally, in other countries is feeding a righteous indignation and burning sense of injustice. In our global village, with its myriad interconnections of race, religion, class, and culture the government cannot expect to strut around the globe invading, occupying, abusing and terrorising foreign peoples and expect that some determined, like-minded individuals will not seek to repay it in kind. However, rather than addressing this first cause Britain has increasingly sought to divert attention from it by scapegoating its Muslim citizens and locating terrorism’s roots in their “corrupted” interpretations of Islam.

That scapegoating has had disastrous consequences for Muslims in the UK. Singling out a community and its faith as the almost exclusive target of PREVENT and wider counter-terrorism strategy has contributed to creating and sustaining a wave of anti-Muslim feeling in the UK. This climate of Islamophobia undoubtedly lies at the root of the rise in discrimination and attacks against British Muslims and their institutions. A policy pattern has been established in which a terrorist attack is met with a swift, sharp legislative response targeting British Muslims, which in turn has the effect of both confirming and perpetuating an existing image of a problematic community. The fact that each act of Muslim terrorism triggers a wave of reprisals against British Muslims making them the biggest victims of this kind of violence usually gets ignored. This has again been the case with TEUK, which was put in place by the Prime Minister David Cameron shortly after the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby in London last May. Notwithstanding its reference to dealing with the kind of far-right extremism that inspired the murderer of 82 year-old grandfather Mohammed Saleem, stabbed to death as he walked home from his local mosque in Birmingham last April, TEUK is clearly designed to be applied almost exclusively on the British Muslim community. The climate of fear and loathing also has disturbing consequences for Britain in general in that it sways otherwise discerning citizens into accepting the erosion of liberties and rights that they would normally believe to be the bedrock of democratic society.



## Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Anti-Terrorism: Whose Hearts and Minds? Contest 2 in Context, IHRC, 2009
- <sup>2</sup> British Anti-Terrorism: A Modern Day Witch-hunt, by Fahad Ansari, 102pp, ISBN: 1-903718-36-
- <sup>3</sup> Preventing Violent Extremism: Response by the Islamic Human Rights Commission to UK Government Consultation, September 2009
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/16/anti-terrorism-strategy-spies-innocents>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tackling-extremism-in-the-uk-report-by-the-extremism-taskforce>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10437127/New-Asbo-plans-are-assault-on-basic-freedom-says-former-DPP-Lord-Macdonald.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Prevent Strategy: HM Government, 2011
- <sup>8</sup> Spooked: How not to prevent violent extremism, Arun Kundani, 2009
- <sup>9</sup> Louise de Menthon 'British Muslims: The Suspect Community'  
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