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HOME AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE SESSION 2016-17 HC 135:

Radicalisation: the counter- narrative and identifying the tipping point

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of Her Majesty

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Conclusions and Recommendations- Factors contributing to radicalisation

There is no evidence that shows a single path or one single event which draws a young person to the scourge of extremism: every case is different. Identifying people at risk of being radicalised and then attracted to extremist behaviour is very challenging. It also makes the task of countering extreme views complex and difficult. If the Government adopts a broad-brush approach, which fails to take account of the complexities, and of the gaps in existing knowledge and understanding of the factors contributing to radicalisation, that would be counter-productive and fuel the attraction of the extremist narrative rather than dampening it.

The Government must take a much more sophisticated approach both to identifying the factors which instigate radicalisation and in the measures it takes to tackle this. We recommend the Government work with a cross-section of academic institutions in the UK that work on radicalisation, to marshal existing intelligence and research and develop a more effective understanding of the factors leading to extremism. This should include speaking to the families of known extremists to draw on their experiences. Without such a solid foundation, the strategies in the proposed new Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill are likely to approach the issues and entire communities in an unfocussed manner, and therefore ultimately to be ineffective.

Government Response

Our understanding of the radicalisation process is based on Government research of individuals that have engaged in terrorist activity. It is clear that there is no single socio-demographic profile or pathway that leads an individual to become involved in terrorism. Susceptibility to radicalisation depends on complex interactions between different risk factors. These can include involvement in criminality, family influence, failure to integrate, or a sense of grievance or injustice.

However, the presence of these risk factors does not make radicalisation inevitable or predictable. The vast majority of people at risk do not go on to engage in terrorist activity. This might be due to the presence of protective factors, such as a having a strong family life that provides a sense of belonging, self-esteem and purpose, friendships that would be jeopardised by involvement in terrorism, or being open to challenge from other perspectives.

Research and evaluation is essential to the successful delivery of *Prevent*. Academics and leading Government experts in both the UK and overseas play a significant role. We work with academics and evaluation experts to ensure that our approach is based on the best available evidence.

Social media analysis also plays a key role in informing our understanding. It enables us to develop a comprehensive insight into the methodologies and online spaces being used by terrorists and extremists in order to recruit and radicalise individuals.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Role of technology

The use of the internet to promote radicalisation and terrorism is one of the greatest threats that countries including the UK face. We commend the work being carried out on a daily basis by security officials and the police to counter online extremism. The vital function which the Metropolitan Police's Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) provides in combating online extremism has been invaluable to date but needs to be enhanced, extended and much better resourced to meet the scale of the ongoing threat. Its funding, equipment and operation should reflect the urgency and importance of its vital function in trying to protect the public from fanatics and criminals.

We need to win the cyber-war with terrorist and extremist organisations. We recommend that CTIRU is upgraded into a high-tech, state-of-the-art round-the-clock central Operational Hub which locates the perils early, moves quickly to block them and is able to instantly share the sensitive information with other security agencies. It is odd that when taking down dangerous and illicit material the CTIRU needs to waste time trying to establish contact with organisations outside the unit. Representatives of all the relevant agencies, including the Home Office, MI5 and major technology companies, should be co-located within CTIRU. This will enable greater cooperation, better information-sharing and more effective monitoring of and action against online extremist propaganda. We have also made recommendations about the role of internet companies in this respect. We further recommend that the security services address the lack of Arabic-speaking staff, and staff with Urdu, Kashmiri and Punjabi language skills.

Government Response

We take robust action to tackle radicalisation online and to counter the poisonous ideology promoted by extremists. CTIRU was the first unit in the world set up to tackle the proliferation of illegal terrorist and violent extremist content on the internet. Over 300,000 pieces of terrorist related content have been removed from the internet by Communications Service Providers (CSPs) since CTIRU's inception in February 2010. CTIRU ensures the removal of over 2,000 pieces of terrorist content per week. The Government commends the work of the CTIRU and will explore the recommendations suggested by the Committee to upscale its capabilities whilst continuing to encourage industry to take a leading and more proactive approach to terrorist and extremist content online.

As a result of these efforts, the four leading platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Microsoft and YouTube – have launched the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which had its first meeting on 1 August 2017 in San Francisco.

The Security and Intelligence Agencies all possess a wide range of specialist language skills.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Europol

EU organisations, such as Europol, are a vital resource for the UK in combating terrorism and extremism, and the UK makes a considerable contribution to European cooperation on these activities. We commend the leadership shown by Rob Wainwright as the British Director of Europol. It is imperative that the Government negotiates an ongoing effective relationship with these organisations, including continued access to and contribution to information-sharing, in the forthcoming discussions on the UK's exit from the EU. The USA already has a high status in Europol, despite being outside the EU. The UK should aim to emulate this position on leaving the EU. Our predecessor Committee has previously said that platforms should be created with Interpol to deal more effectively with cross-border issues, particularly terrorism which is a key cross-border challenge. Freedom of movement works just as well for terrorists as it does for law-abiding citizens, which the measures in place to tackle it need to fully recognise. The UK's exit from the EU makes our relationship with Interpol even more vital.

Government Response

The UK plays a lead role in Europol. Indeed, the UK staffs one of the largest national desks in the organisation and is one of the biggest contributors of information to Europol systems. We value our participation and will continue to play a role while we remain in the EU; the recent decision to opt in to the new Europol legislation is testament to that.

The UK's future participation in Europol will have to be agreed as part of wider negotiations when establishing our relationship with the EU on security, law enforcement and criminal justice cooperation.

The models of cooperation enjoyed by other countries, such as the United States, illustrate the breadth of agreements that can be achieved with Europol. In leaving the EU the UK will be in a unique position, as a former EU member and with our history working within Europol, so we will not be looking to replicate any other nation's model.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Social media industry response to online radicalisation

The internet has a huge impact in contributing to individuals turning to extremism, hatred and murder. Social media companies are consciously failing to combat the use of their sites to promote terrorism and killings. Networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are the vehicle of choice in spreading propaganda and they have become the recruiting platforms for terrorism. They must accept that the hundreds of millions in revenues generated from billions of people using their products needs to be accompanied by a greater sense of responsibility and ownership for the impact that extremist material on their sites is having. There must be a zero tolerance approach to online extremism, including enticement to join extremist groups or commit attacks of terror and any glorification of such activities. Manuals for terrorists and extremists should be removed from the internet. It is therefore alarming that these companies have teams of only a few hundred employees to monitor networks of billions of accounts and that Twitter does not even proactively report extremist content to law enforcement agencies. These companies are hiding behind their supranational legal status to pass the parcel of responsibility and refusing to act responsibly in case they damage their brands. If they continue to fail to tackle this issue and allow their platforms to become the 'Wild West' of the internet, then it will erode their reputation as responsible operators. (Paragraph 38)

The EU rules introduced in May are a first step towards the internet companies assuming more responsibility. The UK Government should now enforce its own measures to ensure that the large technology companies operating in this country are required to cooperate with CTIRU promptly and fully, by investigating sites and accounts propagating hate speech, and then either shutting them down immediately, or providing an explanation to CTIRU of why this has not been done. This activity would be facilitated by the companies co-locating staff within the upgraded CTIRU and we recommend that this be part of its enhanced operations. We do not see why the success of the Internet Watch Foundation cannot be replicated in the area of countering online extremism. (Paragraph 39)

The Government must also require the companies to be transparent about their actions on online extremism; instead of the piecemeal approach we currently have, they should all publish quarterly statistics showing how many sites and accounts they have taken down and for what reason. Facebook and Twitter should implement a trusted flagger system similar to Google's and all social media companies must be more willing to give such trusted status to smaller community organisations, thereby empowering them in the fight against extremism. In short, what cannot appear legally in the print or broadcast media, namely inciting hatred and terrorism, should not be allowed to appear on social media. This is all the more necessary when one takes into account Daesh's view that inciting individuals to take action "in the heart" of countries is "more effective and damaging" to those countries than action taken by Daesh itself. (Paragraph 40)

Government Response

The Government agrees with the Home Affairs Select Committee that Internet and Communication Service Providers (ISPs/CSPs) have a key role in preventing their platforms being used to host and disseminate terrorist and violent extremist material.

We have been working with industry to ensure they adopt a more proactive approach to removing terrorist content. As a result the four leading platforms – Twitter, Facebook, Microsoft and YouTube – have launched the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, which had its first meeting on 1 August 2017 in San Francisco. The Home Secretary presented at the event. Following the first meeting of the forum, the Prime Minister co-chaired an event jointly with the leaders of France, Italy, and a representative of the GIFCT, at UNGA on 20 September in New York, to highlight our commitment to the forum's success, and upcoming milestones.

The Government commends the work of the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) and will explore the recommendations suggested by the committee to upscale its capabilities whilst continuing to encourage industry to take a leading and more proactive approach to terrorist and extremist content online.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Role of media

The media have a responsibility to avoid contributing to negative views of particular groups in society through unbalanced or unsubstantiated reporting. This is particularly important in relation to stories about extremism and terrorism involving people professing to be Muslims, and in reports about views held by Muslims, because of the impact it can have in creating hostility towards Muslim communities and alienating people from those communities, particularly young people. Islamophobia contributes to young Muslims feeling alienated from mainstream society, as we heard in Bradford and Glasgow, thereby potentially leading to them becoming more susceptible to radicalisation. It is not clear to us that all news editors are taking sufficient care in their handling of these stories and some continue to prioritise sensationalism over facts. They should refrain from using the term 'so-called Islamic State', and should instead refer to 'Daesh'. We also recommend that they do not identify terrorists as Muslims, but as terrorists and followers of Daesh. (Paragraph 45)

Government Response

The Government agrees with the Home Affairs Select Committee that the media has a responsibility to avoid contributing to negative views of particular groups in society through unbalanced and unsubstantiated reporting.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Concerns about the Prevent Strategy and Duty

The concerns about Prevent amongst the communities most affected by it must be addressed. Otherwise it will continue to be viewed with suspicion by many, and by some as “toxic”. We have heard calls for Prevent to be brought to an end (although notably not from Inspire or the families of those who had travelled to join Daesh). Even the Government’s Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation has recommended a review of Prevent, because of it becoming such a huge source of grievance. Rather than being seen as the community-led approach Prevent was supposed to be, it is perceived to be a top-down ‘Big Brother’ security operation. Allaying these concerns and building trust will require full and wide engagement with all sections of the Muslim community, including at grassroots level—and not just with groups which already agree with the Government. The focus of the strategy should be around building a real partnership between community groups and the state. The concerns of parents about the lure of radicalisation, and their desire for support and advice, should be heeded. If stakeholders buy into such a strategy it can be successful, but unfortunately that is not what is currently happening. (Paragraph 55)

The Government must be more transparent about what it is doing on the Prevent strategy, including by publicising its engagement activities, and providing updates on outcomes, through an easily accessible online portal. This will help communities to understand what Prevent is seeking to achieve and help to avoid it being seen as threatening to their culture and religion. As our predecessors have said in previous reports, we also recommend that the Government abandons the now toxic name ‘Prevent’ for the strategy and renames it with the more inclusive title of ‘Engage’. (Paragraph 56)

The Prevent Duty has placed a responsibility on educational establishments and other public bodies which they are finding very hard to fulfil. We are concerned about a lack of sufficient and appropriate training in an area that is complex and unfamiliar to many education and other professionals, compounded by a lack of clarity about what is required of them. We recommend that the Home Office appoint an independent panel to reassess the Prevent training being provided to education and other professionals, to ensure they have the confidence to be able to deliver their Prevent Duty in the context of the environment in which they work, and the need to continue to deliver their primary function. The review team should include frontline staff and should aim to issue new guidance on delivering Prevent, including the provision of clear definitions of extremist behaviour; and to specify the length of training which professionals receive and when there should be follow-up training. Finally, the independent body should be asked to report on the advantages and disadvantages of placing the Prevent duty on a statutory basis and the range of institutions which are subject to the duty. (Paragraph 69)

We have consistently heard strong criticisms about Prevent both from grass-roots organisations and from community members. The Government must do more to explain its approach to any new measures aimed at countering extremism in advance of them being implemented. There has been a great deal of counter-terrorism legislation over the past 12 years, some of which has been counter-productive, as the former Director of Liberty told us. (Paragraph 70)

The Government plans to introduce a new Countering Extremism and Safeguarding Bill shortly. It is imperative that this does not turn out to be another Bill that fails to achieve its objectives. Concerns have already been expressed about the approach the Bill is expected to take, including from the former and current national police leads on Prevent (Sir Peter Fahy and Chief Constable Simon Cole of Leicestershire Police) and a multi-faith alliance of 26 organisations and individuals. The Home Office has itself acknowledged that finding meaningful definitions is proving problematic. The Government must ensure that the Bill includes a clear definition of what extremist behaviour is and a full explanation of what the Government is and is not seeking to achieve through its provisions. This information should be made available before the Bill receives detailed consideration in Parliament. (Paragraph 71)

Government Response

The purpose of our Prevent work is to safeguard people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism, by engaging people who are vulnerable to radicalisation and protecting those who are being targeted by terrorist recruiters.

The foundation of the Prevent programme remains our local work through communities and our network of civil society groups, statutory partners and local authority co-ordinators. We continue to improve and increase the capability and reach of this network and have diversified the organisations we work with bringing bigger charities and more locally based groups on board. We currently work with over 80 civil society groups.

Our community-based programmes aim to tackle the influences of radicalisation that can lead to individuals being drawn into terrorism. We work to build resilience in communities against radicalisation, including online. We focus on working with families, young people and schools to give communities the skills and confidence to identify and resist the threat posed by radicalisers. Many of these projects are delivered by grassroots organisations, with our support. Headline findings from our impact evaluation show that these projects have increased awareness of the dangers of radicalisation, reduced factors associated with extremism and improved knowledge of what actions to take when concerned about an individual. Headline statistics on Prevent delivery are reported annually through the CONTEST Annual Report. In 2015-16 we delivered 142 projects aimed at tackling vulnerabilities to, and influences of, radicalisation.

We introduced the Prevent statutory duty through the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The duty requires local authorities, schools, colleges, universities, health bodies, prisons and probation, and police to consider the need to safeguard people from being drawn into terrorism in their day-to-day work. The purpose of the duty is twofold: it ensures we build resilience to terrorist propaganda by encouraging discussion, debate and challenge; and it helps to ensure that individuals who might be at risk of radicalisation are supported as they would be under other safeguarding processes. The duty has prompted a significant step forward in the delivery of Prevent work in sectors.

Since 2012, almost 850,000 individuals, including teachers and NHS staff, have been trained to identify the signs of radicalisation. We have diversified the training

available to include readily accessible web-based packages. Since its launch in April 2015, our Prevent e-learning package has been completed more than 85,000 times. Over 80,000 staff in the Further Education (FE) sector have accessed the Education Training Foundation Website which provides training and resources for those working in the FE sector as part of their duty to safeguard students against radicalisation. A Teachers' Omnibus Survey carried out by the Department for Education showed that over 80% per cent of school leaders are confident in how they should implement the Prevent duty in schools. We will keep under review the possible extension of the duty to other sectors.

To enhance the understanding of Prevent amongst mental health professionals, NHS England published NHS Prevent guidance for all mental health trusts on 2 November 2017. Bespoke Prevent training for mental health professionals has been developed with clinical input to sit alongside the guidance and provide tailored training to support professionals' identification of radicalisation risk in a mental health setting.

In October 2015, the Government published its Counter-Extremism Strategy. The strategy represented a step change; it was the first time the Government had set out a programme of work that focused on tackling the non-violent harms of extremism (e.g. the erosion of women's rights, promoting hatred and division, the spread of intolerance, and the isolation of communities). Extremists create an environment in which the shared values that unite us as a country – values that include democracy, free speech, mutual respect and tolerance for each other, and the rule of law – are eroded. Since the strategy was published the Government has made good progress. This includes establishing a network of partners that are standing up to extremism and tackling it in their communities through our Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT) programme. The programme includes a network of 160 civil society groups and funding and support has been awarded to 120 of these groups.

The Counter-Extremism Strategy committed the Government to commissioning a review into how we can boost opportunity and integration in our most isolated communities. The review was led by Dame Louise Casey and it was published in December 2016. As part of the Government's response to the review, we are considering the causes of poor integration and will bring forward plans for tackling these through a new integration strategy in the coming months.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Border Security

The Director General of Border Force has assured us that the UK has one of the strongest borders in the world and additional measures have been put in place since the horrific attacks in Paris in November 2015. However, we are not convinced that border exit checks operate at the 100% level which the Home Office has set, which would mean that every person leaving the country by whatever mode of transport was checked. Known terrorists like Siddhartha Dhar have been able to exit the country by avoiding the major points of departure and instead using smaller airports, ports and Eurotunnel, which employ weaker, purely digital processes. We call on the Government urgently to report to the House the conclusions of its review into security at smaller airports and ports. Even at the major airports it is the airlines, rather than the Government, which are operating as guarantors of our safety. Until 100% exit checks are fully in place, UK citizens under suspicion for encouraging extremism and prohibited from leaving the country will continue to be able to do so undetected, and could end up joining terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq. (Paragraph 84)

Government Response

In April 2015 the Government achieved its commitment to introduce exit checks on all international commercial scheduled air, sea and Channel Tunnel rail services leaving the UK. This data provides the police and the security service with more information on the movements of persons of interest, supports intelligence work and enables appropriate interventions in high priority cases. Exit checks apply to over 100 million travellers a year.

At the time, the Government was clear that intra-Common Travel Area (CTA) routes were excluded from this arrangement, but these represent a very small proportion of overall departures. However, there is close collaboration between the Home Office, the Irish Government and the Crown Dependencies to strengthen the external CTA border: data sharing is routine. The Government is working closely with the maritime and aviation sectors and members of the CTA to further expand data coverage to this very small proportion of travellers.

Border Force is continuously improving security across all ports. Greater structure has been given to our programme of visits to small ports with other law enforcement agencies to increase visibility and gather intelligence.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Seizure of travel documents

We were appalled to hear from Assistant Commissioner Rowley, the UK counter-terrorism police lead, about the apparent ease with which Dhar and others arrested for terrorism offences could breach bail conditions and flee the country, despite being asked to hand in their passports. It seemed incredible to us that the only follow-up action for failure to comply was a polite reminder letter from the police. We welcome the Government's acknowledgement of the importance of seizing the travel documents of suspected terrorists subject to police bail to prevent them travelling abroad. We were very pleased that the former Prime Minister's interest in this issue, in response to our concerns, led to the then Home Secretary tabling an amendment to the Policing and Crime Bill currently before Parliament to make breach of certain pre-charge bail conditions relating to foreign travel a criminal offence, where the person has been arrested in relation to terrorism offences. The Government should ensure that the new legislation requires automatic notifications about individuals suspected of terrorism offences to be sent to HM Passport Office and the CTIRU, and that the handing in of a passport is made a pre-condition of bail. (Paragraph 87)

Government Response

The Government has created a new offence for individuals who breach pre-charge bail conditions which are related to travel in terrorism-related cases as a provision to the Crime and Policing Act. The offence applies where a person is arrested on suspicion of committing a terrorism offence, is then released on pre-charge bail and subsequently breaches the conditions of that bail aimed at preventing them from leaving or attempting to leave the UK. The maximum penalty for the offence of breaching this pre-charge bail condition would be imprisonment for up to twelve months, a fine or both. This new offence is in direct response to the threat posed by Daesh and its affiliates and will enable the police to take action against those already under investigation who may be motivated to escape further investigation in the UK or join a terrorist organisation by fleeing overseas.

To require individuals to surrender travel documentation to the police prior to their release on pre-charge bail would be inappropriate as it may lead to persons being detained indefinitely if they cannot surrender their travel documents.

The police follow existing standard procedures to share the details of individuals suspected of terrorism offences with relevant authorities where appropriate and do so on a case by case basis. The Government believes that to enshrine such a procedure in law would remove necessary operational flexibility from police investigation teams.

Further provisions in the Crime and Policing Act create a power of entry for the police to seize British passports cancelled under the Royal Prerogative public interest criteria, in relation to national security, as well as new powers to seize invalid foreign travel documents away from ports.

The Government has continued to strengthen its response to terrorism. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA) which came into force in February 2015 includes measures to strengthen Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMs), including through stronger locational constraints. Schedule 1 to CTSA 2015

allows the police to seize and retain passports at ports if they reasonably suspect a person is traveling to engage in terrorism related activity outside the UK.

The CTSA also strengthened our position across aviation, maritime and international rail travel, with provisions relating to passenger data, authority to carry ('No Fly'), and security and screening measures. In April 2015 the Government achieved its commitment to introduce exit checks on all international commercial scheduled air, sea and Channel Tunnel rail services leaving the UK. This data provides the police and the security service with more information on the movements of persons of interest, supports intelligence work and enables appropriate interventions in high priority cases. Exit checks apply to over 100 million travellers a year.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Support to families

The support made available to families of individuals who travel abroad to join terrorist organisations is lamentable. We were concerned to hear from Konika Dhar that she received no support from the Government or statutory agencies. Our predecessor Committee previously recommended that there needs to be an easily accessible advice and counselling service, particularly for parents, but also for other family members and friends, who wish to raise concerns and ask for help when worried about their loved ones being radicalised. We reiterate the recommendation for such a counselling service which would provide much needed support to families. We know that identifying the route to radicalisation and the tipping point where individuals start embracing extremism is complicated. By constructively engaging with the families and friends of people who have been radicalised, lessons can be learned, which is crucial to better identifying the tipping point for their transition to extremism. As a minimum, the Government must change the name of the 'anti-terrorist helpline' which can be seen as too stigmatising and makes people apprehensive about expressing their worries. (Paragraph 94)

We are never going to combat terror effectively unless the communities themselves take on a leadership role. It is these communities that stand to lose the most when atrocities occur. We were deeply concerned to hear CAGE's views on not condemning terrorist acts, which we believe simply increases the sense of isolation from society that some individuals within the community feel. We also note CAGE's sensitivity about the use of the term 'religious fascism'. We commend the speed of organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain in condemning atrocities, but feel they could do more to expose and remove those who preach or advocate race hate and intolerance, and particularly those who draw young people into extremism. Such large community organisations must also show more effective leadership in supporting families concerned about their loved ones. It would be hugely beneficial for the new advice service which we have recommended be established to be staffed by trained members of community organisations. The Home Office should also provide support for existing community initiatives such as Families Against Stress and Trauma (FAST), including publicising their activities, to ensure that people are clearly aware of who they can turn to for support. (Paragraph 95)

Government Response

Approximately 850 UK-linked individuals of national security concern have travelled to engage with the Syrian conflict. We estimate that just under half have returned to the UK and approximately 15% are deceased. Over the course of 2016, fewer people travelled from the UK to the conflict area than in previous years. We continue to prevent individuals from travelling overseas to Syria and Iraq and this crucial work includes police officers, social workers and education professionals. In response to increasing numbers of incidents in which children and young people were being taken to Syria and Iraq, we supported local authorities' use of the family courts to safeguard children. In 2015, 50 children (from around 20 families) were protected by the courts from being taken to a conflict area.

For those families affected by relatives joining terrorist organisations, specialist officers are appointed by police forces to support families during investigation. These are trained officers who are not themselves involved with the investigation.

They provide the link between the family and the investigative team. This officer will gain an understanding of the needs, fears and expectations of the family and work with partners to ensure that any safeguarding provision is discussed and implemented where appropriate. They are also able to introduce the family to relevant organisations for support. In addition, statutory adult and children social services and GPs exist to provide assistance to vulnerable families as required.

The Home Office has worked with local authorities, NHS partners and childcare specialists to understand the likely needs of minors returning from Syria and ensure support is available to safeguard them on return to the UK.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Rehabilitation

The Government needs to have a more effective strategy to help those who have genuinely moved away from extremism and wish to reintegrate into society, just as it should also seek to support those families who have reported radicalisation by individuals or community groups. Indeed, ways should be found to harness their knowledge and experience in the fight against radicalisation if this can be done safely. The UK should look at the experience of other countries, including Denmark, which has developed a specialist approach to dealing with returning foreign fighters. There is no monopoly of wisdom on these life and death issues. We will look in greater detail at the “detoxification process” for extremists as part of our ongoing work on this subject. (Paragraph 99)

Government Response

A new programme has been developed for individuals who are already engaging in terrorism to disengage and reintegrate safely back into society. The Desistance and Disengagement Programme focuses on those who have already engaged in terrorist-related activity. This can mean people in prison, or recently released from prison, for terrorist-related offences, as well as people who have returned from Syria or Iraq who are of concern to counter-terrorism police. Where necessary and proportionate, attendance in the programme will be mandatory. Intensive interventions including mentoring, psychological, theological, and family support will be tailored to support individual need, risk and circumstance.

For those being released from prison, the programme will run alongside statutory Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements. The programme will also be an option for preventing future travel to Syria or Iraq, or to other conflicts.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Building resilience

Engaging with and empowering young people is a critical element of the effort to counter extremism and provide an effective counter-narrative. From our engagement with young people who are most affected by these issues, it is clear that they are willing to discuss their concerns and share their views, and they should be given a safe space to do so. The Government must move urgently to develop a programme that helps these young people better develop the critical skills required to be conscious of manipulation and grooming and to actively question information they receive—both offline and online. It is only when they are equipped with these skills that they will be able to develop the resilience and tenacity necessary to deal with the complex issues of faith, identity and aspiration, as well as mental health, the role and power of women, the role of prisons, English-language skills and urban pressures. This is also why we have recommended a hotline that is not led by the security services. This resilience programme would best be developed through working with education experts, community organisations, social media companies and policing bodies, including Police and Crime Commissioners and senior police officers, which must all take steps to encourage young Muslims to challenge extreme interpretations of their faith. (Paragraph 103)

Government Response

We introduced the Prevent statutory duty through the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The duty requires local authorities, schools, colleges, universities, health bodies, prisons and probation, and police to consider the need to safeguard people from being drawn into terrorism in their day-to-day work. The purpose of the duty is twofold: it ensures we build resilience to terrorist propaganda by encouraging discussion, debate and challenge; and it helps to ensure that individuals who might be at risk of radicalisation are supported as they would be under other safeguarding processes.

Schools are already expected to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and, within this, fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. The implementation of the duty supports this work.

We have explicitly said that our schools, colleges and universities should be places in which children and young people can understand and discuss sensitive topics, and where they can develop the knowledge and critical skills they need to make reasoned judgments and challenge extremist views. To support this, we launched the Educate Against Hate website in January 2016 to provide teachers, school leaders and parents with the information, tools and resources they need to protect children from extremism and radicalisation. By May 2017 the website has had 457,634 page views generated by 171,008 individual users, and it has 13,541 social media followers (10,899 followers on Facebook and 2,642 followers on Twitter).

We will continue to update this website with new resources, including on topical issues, so that it remains a valuable tool. A Teachers' Voice Survey carried out by the Department for Education showed that over 80% per cent of school leaders are confident in how they should implement the Prevent duty in schools.

The Prevent statutory duty does not restrict debate or free speech in our schools, colleges and universities. Moreover, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 explicitly sets out that, alongside the duty, a specified authority must have particular regard to the duty to ensure freedom of speech. Encouraging free speech and open debate is one of our most powerful tools in defeating the poisonous ideology of terrorism and tackling the influences of radicalisation.

Freedom of Speech is a key tenet of our Higher Education system. Open debate exposes students to a diverse range of viewpoints and develops critical thinking preparing young people to be active global citizens. Government policy reflects this; free speech within the law is of utmost importance. The DfE recently extended these protections in the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA), which will ensure a level playing field where the duty to ensure free speech extends to all registered providers of Higher Education.

Furthermore, the current Office for Students consultation includes a proposal to emphasise the importance of free speech in higher education by building responsibilities around free speech into its regulatory framework.

As part of our Internet Safety Strategy, we are consulting on introducing an annual internet safety transparency report so that we can better understand the prevalence and types of harmful content and conduct online, and how complaints are dealt with.

Conclusions and Recommendations- Developing and communicating alternate messages

The approaches to counter-terrorism of successive governments have not so far achieved the success we would all have desired (although the success of the UK's security services in preventing tragedies on the scale which have been seen elsewhere should be noted). Instead, in some circumstances, they have created suspicion and alienation amongst the very people they need to reach. Most of the communities that one might expect to say that radicalisation was present within them gave little evidence that they believed it was on their doorstep. This raises suspicions that the extent to which Prevent has reached those it needs to is limited. This is exacerbated by the fact that families who identify radicalisation may tend to retreat, making them even harder to reach, and is a failure of so-called community groups. (Paragraph 111)

The success of Abdullah-X's YouTube channel in appealing to young people shows how, if done sensitively and in collaboration with community organisations, Government involvement can be effective in engaging with the target audience. The UK has the brightest and the best talent in the creative industries in the world, including in video-games. We should be using this talent to ensure that every sophisticated piece of extremist propaganda is countered by even more sophisticated anti-radicalism material. The Government must facilitate regular meetings of the leaders of the UK's Muslim communities, while also recognising that many communities have no leadership and taking the necessary proactive steps to reach out to them. These regular meetings should also include think-tanks with expertise in the field and the private sector, to begin to build a bank of best practice counter-narrative case studies that will help civil society and business to implement effective counter-narrative programmes. Its scope should include training for community organisations and working with former extremists to develop and target online counter-narratives. (Paragraph 112)

Terrorism is an overwhelming global crisis, and violent extremism is what fuels it. Countering it involves the portfolios of education, health, justice, home affairs, foreign affairs and international development. Local communities in the UK are ready and willing to enter the fray and defend the British way of life. The Government must not squander any opportunity to harness this beneficial force. It must forge and disseminate strong counter-narratives that will address the wilful blindness and blame-games of vested interests and combat the lies and deceit that the extremists want to feed to our young people in order to send them to their deaths. (Paragraph 113)

Government Response

We reject the Committee's finding that the Government has created suspicion and alienation amongst the very people it is trying to reach.

The Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) is responsible for delivering on counter-terrorism priorities under the CONTEST strategy. RICU is a government strategic communications unit based in the Home Office which works across a range of public safety issues, including counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, organised immigration crime, cyber crime and money laundering.

RICU works in partnership with private sector experts to build the capacity of civil society groups to confront and challenge the ideology of terrorism and extremism. Through RICU, we are working to ensure that groups which are willing to lead the fight against radicalisation in their own communities are supported by the best communications professionals and industry experts, who can provide them with creative advice and support, production capabilities, public relations expertise and social media training. We are proud of the support RICU has provided to organisations working on the frontline to confront the warped ideology of groups like Daesh, to protect communities and to support families.

We agree with the Committee about the need to reach out to communities, and that civil society has a role in tackling extremism locally. At the heart of our Counter Extremism strategy sits a partnership between Government and all those individuals, groups and communities who want to see extremism defeated. That's why the Home Office has launched Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT), to support civil society and community organisations who work to create more resilient communities, stand up to extremism in all its forms and offer vulnerable individuals a positive alternative regardless of race, faith, sexuality, age, and gender.

The programme allows organisations that share these aims to bid for in-kind support (for example social media training or website design to help a group reach a wider audience), and grant funding for specific programmes that deliver goals set out in the Counter Extremism strategy.









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