

## **UK Counter-Radicalization Strategy: Accommodation to confrontation?**

By Jonathan Paris

I think the U.K. is the bell weather for Europe in terms of counter-terrorism. We've had four wake-up calls for the last four summers. The first summer was an aborted attack-an attempt to blow up the Museum of Sound in London. Then we had 7/7, the following summer we had the Heathrow plot and then last year Glasgow. Finally there was the attempt in the theatre district in London about a year ago. If there are no bombings here this summer what tends to happen to the public is that it becomes anesthetised and its willingness to support tough confrontational policies and enact anti-terrorist legislation recedes. I also believe that terrorism in the U.K. is essentially home-grown although there is a phenomenon where people go to get their masters degree at Al-Qaeda University somewhere in South-West Asia. But essentially there is a home-grown terrorism and that is what makes the subject so fascinating and sensitive in this country.

### **Counter-Radicalisation**

In light of that observation I think that the responses have changed especially since the Heathrow plot two years ago. There is now a much stronger focus on counter-radicalisation in terms of the 'p' that stands for Prevent among the four 'ps' in the general defence strategy of the UK; 'Prevent' is about counter-radicalisation. The recognition after Heathrow is that the police cannot arrest their way out of the problem.

I've had interviews with various departments that have been charged with implementing the 'prevent' programme at the Home Office, the Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism, at the DCLG which deals with local communities, at the Foreign Office which deals with the foreign side of radicalisation and with a group called RICU which is a new unit set up to coordinate the messages that the government puts out on counter-terrorism. A 2008 update of the Prevent strategy was recently issued. It encourages coordination with local partners in England; to schools, to universities, to health-carers, to the jails. It is also tough on the tendency to rely on the 'gate-keepers' of the community and aims to go beyond these traditional interlocutors.

The intellectual analogy to the current challenge can be found in the Cold War. During the Cold War Europe was faced with the struggle against communism emanating from the Soviet Union. The counter challenge was to differentiate socialists from communists and to work with socialists to isolate the communists. Today the mantra is to work with moderate Muslims to isolate the radical Muslims. There are contrasts but there are also very interesting similarities. Some people take the view that there was no difference in the Cold War between a socialist and a communist; the so-called hardliners. Today of course some people take the view that there is no difference between a moderate and a radical Islamist. I would suggest that there are differences and I put forward a three tier differentiation. Firstly there are radical Islamists which in the UK are translated as 'extremists'.

I would suggest there is a second category called political Islamists; those who advocate Muslim issues such as foreign policy issues or Sharia issues. Generally they espouse a politics of victimhood and grievances. They put their British national identity and responsibilities to the civic state and their communities second to their obligations to fellow Muslims at home and trans-nationally. Finally I would identify the truly moderate Muslims who view Islam as a faith not as a political ideology and who identify strongly as citizens of Britain and not as members of some transnational political Ummah. We need to engage with each other and develop more strategies for pulling out this moderate Muslim view, making it more vocal. I think it's there but it's been very reticent. I know that is very simplistic but I think it's very important to recognise that there is this second category of political Islamists.

I think there are certain assumptions that people make when discussing this subject. Firstly, we assume that radicalisation leads to extremism. Secondly, we assume that segregated Muslim communities in the UK can nurture radicalisation. The third assumption is that we need to embrace the political Islamists who do not espouse violence in order to isolate those radical extremists who do. We need to ask, is that a short term tactic with long-term problems or is that the correct strategy? The fourth assumption is that we need to promote a deeper understanding of Islamic scholarship particularly in our universities despite the fact that there is some evidence that Islamic Studies may dilute rather than enforce identity with British national interests. Again, it's important to understand what kind of Islamic scholarship is being taught in universities and also who is sponsoring those courses. Are we funding the right people? When you promote Islamic identity are you doing it in a way that promotes tolerance or in a way that promotes intolerance and rather dilutes British identity? The goal must be shared values.

## **Social Cohesion**

How then does radicalism undermine social cohesion and how does social cohesion prevent radicalisation? We seem to assume these days, given the popularity of the term 'social cohesion', that there is some relationship between having strong social cohesion and preventing radicalisation. Additionally, I think too often we have seen a misguided reliance in the U.K. on community leaders with political agendas. I also think that the ideas involved in this discussion need to be discussed and contested. There is too much of a criminalisation approach in this country to radicalisation. Finally, I would also say that the rise of parallel cities, not only in the U.K. but also in Germany and other places in Europe, could be a potentially disturbing factor in promoting more segregation, more isolation and perhaps more radicalisation.

In France they have a very robust legal regime but they do have their own problems attributed essentially to poor socio-economics. In Germany they have very inadequate integration and very little upward mobility among primarily the Turkish communities. I think in Brussels we see a misguided use of human rights, particularly with the Human Rights Convention of Europe, to prevent effective counter-terrorism. National security

interests begin to compete with the allegiance to certain moral values and that tension has to be understood. As former Home Secretary John Reid said, the European Human Rights Convention was designed to protect the individual against fascist states, not to protect states against fascist individuals.

## **Foreign Policy**

There is a link between foreign policy and domestic radicalisation but it is not necessarily the relationship that pundits on the left-wing claim. I agree that foreign policy does matter and that what happens in Gaza does raise the temperature but my problem is that it tends to be an emotive response among British Muslims not based on facts. It is not simply Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. I believe that if extremism is perceived to prevail in the Middle East and South Asia, if

Ahmadinejad<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud\\_Ahmadinejad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Ahmadinejad)> can get away with his rhetoric and Iran can get a nuclear bomb without paying any price, if the U.S. is driven out of Iraq, if Afghanistan goes badly, I think more than a few Muslims in Europe may conclude that the winning horse is extremism and they may jump off the fence and join that winning horse.

Finally, I think we need to talk about a new kind of social covenant. I do believe social cohesion has something to do with radicalisation. The problem we face is building loyalty among our immigrant community. I hesitate to use the word loyalty but when I think about it, the very word fence-sitter suggests that their loyalty is questionable. The idea of a fence sitter is a loaded term and a very unsettling proposition.

I commend Rabbi Sacks' recent book 'How to Build a Home Together' and I think he makes a very interesting analogy between assimilation, multiculturalism and what he calls the 'social covenant'. In the first instance, the country manor image, you have the immigrant come and live in the country manor. He is a guest and he is treated very well but it is clear that he is the guest and the host of course is the dominant value system of the manor that he has just immigrated to. That is the melting pot; that is what we call assimilation. The second metaphor the Rabbi uses is the 'hotel' metaphor where we all check in at a hotel, we all have a contractual relationship with the hotel, and we don't really interact with each other. It's a very impersonal living arrangement although we are in the same building. That is the multicultural model. The third model is about the immigrant and the mayor coming together and the community coming together to build a home together and in that act of doing something together they learn to live with each other. That is the social covenant.

## **Solutions**

This is all very nice but what needs to be done? Is there a course of action? I will start by saying yes there is but the contradictions in the U.K. government need to be sorted out. For instance, a consensus must be reached on the point that political Islamists who promote grievance politics, who attempt to divide Muslims from Britain and who advocate a creeping Sharia-isation, pose as much or more a long-term danger to Britain

and British national security than the obvious salafist jihadi taqfiri mentor of suicide bombers. If this can occur then perhaps the government will be less solicitous of the opinions of Muslim Brotherhood leaders and some of the gate-keepers of the communities.

The second and perhaps most important point is that there must be, and I believe there is, a greater willingness to assert and promote Britishness; a kind of British version of the American dream, an inspirational identity to make it easier for immigrants to become British and to understand their obligations as British citizens. This country is so reticent about insisting or imposing these obligations or even discussing its values that I think not only do we need to engage with the Muslim community but we need to engage with each other to define and talk about what it means to be British citizens.

There is a new magazine called Standpoint which insists on celebrating Western values. I would prefer to call them human values because they are human values not just the province of the West, and these values need to be debated and articulated. We also need to get away from the moral relativism of a hyper secularised society where people are reluctant to assert that maybe some values are better than others. It may be that the liberal values of toleration, of equal opportunity, of gender equality are superior to those value systems that promote intolerance and the subordination of women to men.

## **Demographics**

As far as demographics are concerned, there is, in the case of Muslim immigrants, far less inter-marriage and far less integration of successive generations than you see with say Black Caribbeans or other minorities that move here. As a result they retain their religion and thus they have more children.

Most experts see that the 4% of Muslims in the population today will increase to roughly 8% by 2025 and roughly 10-15% by 2050. Despite assumptions, a recent study found that in fact in Sweden, Muslim immigrants have fewer children than their offspring because the women grow up and they choose not to go into the work place because either they would rather be at home or because they feel excluded from the workplace. So if this divergence continues we will see, I believe, more like 25% of the U.K. population as Muslims in the year 2050 and more importantly you will see roughly 1/3 of children up to the age of 15 as Muslim.

Not only is this happening in the U.K. it's happening in places like Austria. They have gone from 1% Muslims in 1981 to 4% Muslims in 2001 but they are projecting that according to current patterns, 1/3 of Austrian children within the year 2050 will be Muslim. It is not just about Muslims having more children; it is also about indigenous Europeans not having enough children perhaps.

## **Conclusion**

So with that I will conclude by saying that I talked about some assumptions and whether they're true or not. What we really need is better metrics to measure these assumptions empirically. The U.K. has made great strides in the last year as the funding levels have increased, that have resulted in greater government staffing, more focus and much better co-ordination among the various ministries.

The U.K. recognises that it cannot arrest its way out of the problem. Yet in implementing certain counter-radicalisation initiatives such as promoting better partnerships with moderate Muslims and building up the latter's capacity to confront extremists in their own community, is the U.K. government funding the right people? Is Islamic study and stronger Islamic identity the answer to the problem of shoddy Islamic scholarship on the part of some extremists? Finally, are we certain of the relationship between building the self-belief, this greatest sense of Britishness, and social cohesion? Are we certain that that will reduce radicalisation? The other question which remains is, does counter-radicalisation at home depend on the defeat of extremism abroad? We shall have to assess progress on these issues.

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