



United Kingdom's Counter- Extremism Strategy Analysis and the Feasibility of adapting it to an Iraqi Context

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About

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Al-Bayan Center pursues its vision by conducting independent analysis, as well as proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern policymakers and academics.

United Kingdom's Counter-Extremism Strategy

Analysis and the Feasibility of adapting it to an Iraqi Context

Research Department

Introduction

The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have exposed the West to notions of extremism never seen before. Whereas many of the conflicts during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath were characterised by political ideologies or ethnic tensions, the events in 2001 and its aftermath were notable in the manner in which individuals were polarised and radicalised towards gradually more extreme ends. Nearly 16 years on, much of the world continues to feel the impacts of what took place on that day.

Since then, analysts and security specialists have sought explain and rationalise the how and why of individuals getting radicalised towards extremist causes. And yet, despite immense amounts of literature produced over the course of these 16 years, the very definition of extremism itself remains elusive. In the interim, further questions have been raised with regards to the distinctions between violent and non-violent extremism and the specific parts they play in radicalising vulnerable individuals.

Outside the realm of theory, extremist groups and ideologies continue to wreak death and destruction across the globe. The Islamist extremism represented by al-Qaeda has since been eclipsed, at least momentarily, by the Islamic State which took over large swathes of Syria, Iraq, Libya and Egypt. Terrorists guided directly by the group's ideology or simply inspired by it were responsible for bloody attacks in the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Belgium, Tunisia and elsewhere.

Perhaps as a reaction, long-dormant and marginalised factions of right-wing extremists, white supremacists and neo-Nazis have made a comeback in the 2010s, riding a wave of xenophobia and conducting their own attacks in Norway, United Kingdom and United States.

Confronted with these threats, governments across the world have found themselves trying to formulate a coherent and sustainable response against the

forces of extremism. While many governments have followed a fairly orthodox approach of responding to extremism under the wider counter-terrorism strategy, a few governments have vied for alternatives.

This paper seeks to explore the concept of extremism, its definitions, its subsets and ways in which governments counter extremism. In the first chapter, this paper investigates the various ways in which extremism has been defined. This paper notes that the definitions of extremism have varied from country to country, and even different governments within the same country have provided amendments towards how they define extremism, focusing on how this process took place within the United Kingdom which remains the overall case study of this paper. Afterwards, the paper highlights the distinct ways in which “violent extremism” and “non-violent extremism” have been defined, noting how the latter concept took an increasingly important position in the United Kingdom's counter-extremism strategy.

Afterwards, this paper analyses the counter-extremism strategy of the United Kingdom. Using government-published White Papers; the way in which the British Government counters extremist narratives and deny extremists public space; how it aims to increase the profile of credible voices against extremism; how it uses targeted powers to disrupt extremist activities; and, how it aims to build cohesive communities where radicalisation is not a problem. Within the context of analysing the counter-extremism programme, this paper pays particular attention to the Prevent Programme of the counter-terrorism strategy and its Channel Referral System that aims to act as an early warning system towards individuals becoming radicalised.

Subsequently, this paper addresses the numerous concerns faced relating to Prevent, Channel and the wider counter-extremism strategy, noting why they are important when assessed at the macro-level and how they can be detrimental to counter-extremism projects elsewhere. Particular attention is given in this section towards accusations that these programmes have unfairly targeted Britain's Muslim population while overlooking the growing threat from right-wing extremists.

In the final chapter, this paper looks at the feasibility of applying Prevent and the wider counter-extremism programme in Iraq. As a country reaching the end of a devastating war against a faction of Islamist extremists, Iraq is in dire need of robust and holistic counter-extremism strategies and this paper highlights how

the Prevent model can act as a suitable, community-centred method in Iraq where familial, tribal and religious support networks remain the most comprehensive grass-roots institutions in the aftermath of the war that has swept across much of the country. This paper then concludes with a comparative analysis of counter-extremism programmes from Germany and Morocco both of which would complement a Prevent-based counter-extremism model in Iraq and would be suitable to the socio-political context of the country.

As a whole, this paper identifies the counter-extremism strategy of the United Kingdom as one of the most robust and comprehensive examples of strategies in existence. The paper notes that although a number of structural and practical deficiencies hinder the ability of the programmes to be fully effective, they nevertheless represent a highly community-centric approach to counter-extremism that distinguishes the British approach from the security-centric policies of countries such as United States, France and Israel. A number of community-based strategies have been undertaken in each of these countries but the strategies remain highly securitised overall and they lack the scope and depth of the British programmes. Such reasoning also underpins why the author recommended the counter-extremism programmes of Germany and Morocco on a complementary capacity, as the programmes from both these countries offer strategies is compatible with and can complement the British counter-extremism strategy.

Definitions of Extremism

Extremism, violent extremism and non-violent extremism

Despite all the extensive coverage and analysis bestowed upon the topic of extremism in the present political and security climate, finding a satisfactory legal definition for it has been beset with difficulties. Part of the challenge lies in formulating a definition that will be flexible enough to encompass all forms of extremism regardless of race, religion or political affiliation yet robust enough to ensure that the individuals practicing extremism cannot find loopholes to continue their practices while going unchallenged. Another concern in defining extremism has been the question of where free speech ends and where extremism starts. A number of activists, rights groups and government officials have expressed fears regarding the improper definition of extremism. Chief Constable Simon Cole was particularly concerned that an improper definition of extremism could risk “turning police officers into thought police” and that “unless you can define what

extremism is very clearly, then it's going to be really challenging to enforce.”¹ As a result, the British Home Office, which is response of dealing with matters relating to extremism, has formulated a number of definitions and amended them over time.

The 2015 edition of the Home Office White Paper on British Counter-Extremism Strategy defines extremism as:

*“Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.”*²

This definition was retained in the 2017 overview of the Home Office's counter-extremism strategy and therefore constitutes the most up-to-date parameters of what constitutes extremism. Earlier versions of the counter-extremism strategy had somewhat differing definitions such as in the counter-extremism White Paper of 2011 that defined extremism as “opposition to our fundamental British values”³ even though the definition of what constitutes “British values” has remained vague and contested⁴. These minute variations to the way extremism has been defined by the British Government over the years highlights the challenges faced in confronting the limits and parameters of the issue at hand.

The particular way extremism is defined by the British Government as “opposition” to values associated with the United Kingdom, is significantly different from the definitions of other countries such as Germany which posits extremism in the following, significantly more abstract terms:

“As the term is controversial, it is necessary to point out that extremism is understood as mainly violent and (from the democratic perspective) deviant behaviour that is promoted by attitude but cannot be reduced to it. Extremism consists of a particular and exclusive morality that contains an inhuman and cynical component that offers people a deeper meaning which has the strength

1. “Radicalisation: The Counter-Narrative and Identifying the Tipping Point”, *House of Commons and the Home Affairs Committee*, 19-July-2016, p. 19

2. “Counter-Extremism Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, October 2015, p. 9

3. “Prevent Duty Guidance”, HM Government, 2011, p. 50

4. Kazmi, Zaheer. "Islamophobia and the New Britishness", *Foreign Affairs*, 02-August-2016, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2016-08-02/islamophobia-and-new-britishness>>, [Accessed 01-August-2017]

*to replace religious motives by those of political spirituality. Extremism is then understood as an encapsulated ideology that forms and sustains a subculture which is in a constant dialogue with mainstream society to which it responds, and against whom it is acting.”*⁵

The practically-and-philosophically divergent definitions of what constitutes extremism highlight the elusive nature of the term. Just as reaching an agreement on what constitutes extremism has been an elusive goal, determining what constitutes “violent extremism” and “non-violent extremism” has also been subject to dispute. The Home Office guidelines define “violent extremism” as violent action that is aimed at achieving the goals described above under the definition of extremism while “non-violent extremism” is defined under the above definition of extremism but where violence is not involved⁶. The rather vague distinction between violent and non-violent extremism under the Home Office have been described as “insufficient” and “incoherent” by both the members of the British political establishment and British civil society activists⁷. Definitions used by other governments, such as that of the United States’ Department of Homeland Security, offer somewhat more detail into what constitutes violent extremism. Here, violent extremism has been defined as “beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political views.”⁸

Part of the reason there has been such difficulty in defining extremism or what constitutes violent or non-violent extremism is because from the perspective of the British Government, the matter of violent extremism has been viewed as a security issue (and treated accordingly) while the matter of non-violent extremism has been treated as a civil matter within the context of free speech and freedom of expression. The causality between violent and non-violent extremism was noted in Home Office documents as early as 2011, which suggested that such ideas must be challenged through a counter-ideological and counter-narrative framework⁹. However, only in 2013 did the taskforce created by then-Prime Minister David

5. Mareš, Miroslav; Bötticher, Astrid. “Extremism as a security threat in the Central Europe”, Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs, February 2013, p. 2

6. “Prevent Duty Guidance”, HM Government, 2011, p. 36

7. Dawson, Joanna; Godec, Samantha. “Briefing Paper: Counter-Extremism Policy: An Overview”, House of Commons, 23-June-2017, p. 37

8. “Countering Violent Extremism”, Department of Homeland Security, 2016, <<https://www.dhs.gov/countering-violent-extremism>>, [Accessed 01-August-2017]

9. “Prevent Duty Guidance”, HM Government, 2011, p. 60

Cameron draw causal links between violent and non-violent extremism (within the context of Islamist extremism and al-Qaeda). The task force also noted that the unwillingness to confront non-violent extremist ideas due to a fear of being perceived as attacking Islam itself had allowed radicalism to spread¹⁰. Furthermore, non-violent extremism was cited as a threat to social fabric due to its potential to weaken social fabric by normalising intolerance through enabling discrimination on grounds of gender, race, religious belief or sexual orientation. The linkage between violent and non-violent extremism was subsequently acknowledged by then-Prime Minister David Cameron in July 2015 who described the process of radicalisation as a linear process that starts with non-violent extremism and gradually leads to violence:

“...you don't have to believe in barbaric violence to be drawn to the ideology. No-one becomes a terrorist from a standing start. It starts with a process of radicalisation. When you look in detail at the backgrounds of those convicted of terrorist offences, it is clear that many of them were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists.”¹¹

Cameron's speech was a response to the large number of British citizens who had left the United Kingdom to travel to Syria and Iraq where they joined the Islamic State (IS; also known as ISIS, ISIL, DAESH) and marked a shift on matters relating to extremism and radicalisation by explicitly securitising non-violent extremism. The narrative of securitising non-violent extremism would continue over the next two years, following IS-linked terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Attacks such as these raised concerns not only regarding British citizens returning from Syria and Iraq and could stage attacks locally but also regarding the “home-grown terrorists” who have been radicalised locally.

Common Patterns in Extremisms and Warning Signs of Radicalised Individuals

While the distinction between violent and non-violent extremism has been difficult to pin down and the definitions fraught with difficulties, a number of common patterns have nevertheless emerged. These patterns relate to the common goals and harms that are justified or promoted by extremist groups. The Counter-Extremism Strategy of the British Government has identified six specific harms

10. Dawson, Joanna; Godec, Samantha. “Briefing Paper: Counter-Extremism Policy: An Overview”, House of Commons, 23-June-2017, p. 13

11. “Counter-Extremism Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, October 2015, p. 21

that are justified or promoted by extremists:

- Justifying violence towards others, as well as justifying violence towards achieving political and ideological goals.
- Promoting hatred and division by motivating others to commit hate crimes. Many non-violent extremists are careful to express their views in a manner that does not directly incite hatred (and therefore break the law) but indirectly encourage the promulgation of such views.
- Encouraging isolation from the wider society and distance themselves from the shared mores and values. This can allow alternative values, structures and authorities to gain prominence.
- The use of alternative systems of law with the goal of subverting the legitimacy of UK law and institutions and enable discriminatory policies incompatible with the law.
- Rejecting the democratic system through coercion and intimidation on grounds that democracy has no place in their extremist world view.
- Harmful and illegal cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence and extreme forms of violence against women and girls and certain communities to propagate these practices¹².

Despite the ostensibly clear-cut parameters of the British Government's definitions of the harms promoted and used by extremists, the identification of whether an individual has been drawn to extremism and radicalised remains a far less exact science. The British Government has advised both individuals and officials to keep an eye for early signs of individuals getting radicalised. However, the British Government itself admits that there is no evidence of a single path, event or indicator for someone getting radicalised and warned that a "broad brush approach which fails to take account of the complexities and of gaps in existing knowledge and understanding of the factors contributing to radicalism" was likely to be counter-productive¹³. A number of early, circumstantial signs of an individual being radicalised have, however, been identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the

12. Dawson, Joanna; Godec, Samantha. "Briefing Paper: Counter-Extremism Policy: An Overview", House of Commons, 23-June-2017, pp. 24-25

13. "Radicalisation: The Counter-Narrative and Identifying the Tipping Point", House of Commons and the Home Affairs Committee, 19-July-2016, p. 9

French counter-extremism programme.

- Sudden break with the family and long-standing friendships.
- Sudden drop-out of school and conflicts with the school.
- Change in behaviour relating to food, clothing, language or finances.
- Changes in attitudes and behaviour towards others: antisocial comments, rejection of authority, refusal to interact socially, signs of withdrawal and isolation.
- Regular viewing of internet sites and participation in social media networks that condone radical or extremist views.
- Reference to apocalyptic and conspiracy theories¹⁴.

Contextually, these patterns of behaviour are most reliably signs of extremism when accompanied by a variety of “push factors” and “pull factors” present in the environment. These terms are rooted in analysis of migration patterns and relate to the factors that make an individual leave the country they grew up in and the factors that make the individual move to a new country¹⁵.

Within the context of analysing extremism and radicalisation, a “push factor” is defined as what drives an individual away from mainstream society, governance and politics or outright turns the individual against them. Limited access to quality and relevant education; denial of rights and civil liberties; marginalisation, inequality, discrimination, persecution or the perception of thereof; environmental factors such as pollution, desertification and natural disasters as well as persistent failures by authorities to alleviate resultant hardships; persistent socio-economic hardships; chronic corruption; endemic instability and insecurity can all act as a push-factor¹⁶.

Conversely, a “pull factor” is defined what drives an individual towards finding violent extremism (and the vision of the society it represents) more appealing. These range from political stability; access to wealth; promise of better services;

14. “A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism”, UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO Open Access Repository, 2016, p. 13

15. “Why Do People Migrate?”, BBC, <www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/migration/migration_trends_rev2.shtml>, [Accessed 02-August-2017]

16. “A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism”, UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO Open Access Repository, 2016, p. 12

promise of transparency and lack of corruption¹⁷; better (if stricter) governance; promise of adventure and freedom; a supportive social network and a sense of belonging can all act as pull factors towards extremism¹⁸. With a black-and-white interpretation of the world, extremist worldviews are also seen by some as providing easy, realistic answers to the more complex issues of the modern world.

The official position of the British Government with regards to the drivers of extremism is that extremism can emerge from all religions, races and creeds. Although extremist ideologies may use religious or racial language in order to legitimise themselves among their target audience, their core reasons are linked to the aforementioned push-and-pull factors¹⁹. For much of its history, the United Kingdom's main concern (and experience) regarding terrorism and extremism was linked to Northern Ireland and "the Troubles" there due to the sectarian clashes between the Catholic separatists and the Protestant unionists. The focus shifted away from Northern Ireland to Islamic extremism in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre attack of September 11, 2001. The subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as the continued dangers from terrorists motivated by Islamist extremism, such as al-Qaeda and, more recently, the Islamic State, have kept Islamist extremism high on the agenda²⁰. To be sure, the Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper issued by the Home Office makes a point of highlighting the risks posed by other extremist groups such as Neo-Nazis and similar right-wing extremists, particularly on documents published after 2016 when racially-motivated attacks by right-wing nationalists saw a spike in the aftermath of the "Brexit" referendum that saw the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union²¹. However, the White Paper still identifies Islamist extremism as the primary, most immediate threat and much of the document, as well as other documents relating to radicalisation and extremism focus on Islamist extremism as the main source of danger to the United Kingdom²².

17. "Why Do People Migrate?", BBC, <www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/geography/migration/migration_trends_rev2.shtml>, [Accessed 02-August-2017]

18. "A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism", UNESCO, Paris: UNESCO Open Access Repository, 2016, p. 12

19. Dawson, Joanna; Godec, Samantha. "Briefing Paper: Counter-Extremism Policy: An Overview", House of Commons, 23-June-2017, p. 10

20. Ibid, p. 5

21. "Counter-Extremism Strategy", HM Government, London: Crown Publications, October 2015, p. 10

22. Ibid, p. 9

This phenomenon is not unique to the United Kingdom. Among politicians in many parts of the world, particularly in the West, the term “violent extremism” has become something of a code-word for Islamist extremism. This was particularly apparent on a speech given by the United States’ former President Barack Obama who, during a speech in February 2015, emphasised that his country was fighting violent extremism, not Islamist extremism. Obama was widely criticised by his opponents for too “politically correct” and showing cowardice by “not calling out the threat by its name”²³. However, in the United States, attacks by right-wing extremists, radical environmentalists and Puerto Rican nationalists account for far more and regular attacks than Islamist extremists²⁴. The decision by the Trump Administration to ‘call it what it is’ and reorient programs focusing on violent extremism towards focusing on Islamist extremism comes at a time when hate-crimes linked to right-wing extremists are rising steadily. Law enforcement agencies across the United States warn that right-wing anti-government extremists constitute a far more severe threat than Islamist extremism²⁵.

Counter-Extremism and the United Kingdom’s Strategy

Definitions of Counter-Extremism

Just like the definition of extremism, the definition of what constitutes counter-extremism remains a contentious matter. Although many governments, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations have issued statements and policies regarding counter-extremism, providing an exact definition has been elusive, and most definitions of counter-extremism policy have been within the context of wider counter-terrorism policies.

For instance, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 included lengthy condemnations of violent extremism by world leaders and emphasis on the need for greater cooperation. The Resolution identified a number of extremist groups, such as the Islamic State and the Nusra Front (the al-Qaeda franchise at the

23. Beinart, Peter. “What Does Obama Really Mean by 'Violent Extremism'?”, *The Atlantic*, 20-February-2015, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/obama-violent-extremism-radical-islam/385700/>>, [Accessed 02-August-2017]

24. *Ibid*

25. Tamkin, Emily; Gramer, Robbie; O'Toole, Molly. “Trump’s focus of ‘Radical Islam’ Downplays the Growing Risk From Right-Wing Extremism, Experts Fear”, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 15-February-2017, <foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/15/trumps-focus-on-radical-islam-downplays-growing-risk-from-right-wing-extremism-experts-fear/>, [Accessed 02-August-2017]

time), emphasizing the need to counter them through measures such as financial checks and border controls to deprive them of funds and recruits. However, at no point did the Resolution actually identify what constitutes counter-extremism beyond framing it as opposition to the aforementioned extremist groups within the context of counter-terrorism²⁶.

A similar approach has been taken by the United States' Department of Homeland Security which highlighted the threats that:

*"...come from a range of groups and individuals, including domestic terrorists and home-grown violent extremists in the United States, as well as international terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIL. Lone offenders or small groups may be radicalized to commit violence at home or attempt to travel overseas to become foreign fighters."*²⁷

The Department states that its policy towards countering violent extremism therefore aims to:

*"...address the root causes of violent extremism by providing resources to communities to build and sustain local prevention efforts and promote the use of counter-narratives to confront violent extremist messaging online. Building relationships based on trust with communities is essential to this effort."*²⁸

This particular definition provides more details, highlighting a few key methods such as supporting local initiatives and promoting counter-narratives. However, these refer to the "how" of countering-extremism in the United States rather than "what" counter-extremism broadly is. As a whole, Washington has failed to provide a single, consistent definition of counter-extremism across its publications.

One workable definition of what constitutes "countering violent extremism" comes from Humera Khan, a counter-extremism analyst and an advisor to Washington. Khan defines "countering violent extremism" as:

"The use of non-coercive means to dissuade individuals or groups from

26. "Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution Condemning Violent Extremism, Underscoring Need to Prevent Travel, Support for Foreign Terrorist Fighters", The United Nations, 24-September-2014, <www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11580.doc.htm>, [Accessed 03-August-2017]

27. "Countering Violent Extremism", Department of Homeland Security, 2016, <<https://www.dhs.gov/countering-violent-extremism>>, [Accessed 01-August-2017]

28. Ibid.

mobilizing towards violence and to mitigate recruitment, support, facilitation or engagement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state actors in furtherance of political objectives."²⁹

When it comes to the aforementioned “means”, Khan identifies four intersecting parts:

- Preventing radicalisation;
- Intervening on behalf of individuals who have radicalised;
- Interdicting or finding and prosecuting those who have engaged in criminal behaviour;
- Reintegrating into society those offenders who are in prison, have served their term or are returning from conflict zones³⁰.

Khan notes that the counter-extremism policies and programs in many countries tend to have limited scope, addressing only one or two of these aspects. The counter-extremism strategy of the United States, for instance, focuses on prevention and interdiction. Khan notes that as a result of these gaps, it is quite frequent for individuals who have begun to radicalize to not be turned around and for individuals who have acted violently to not be rehabilitated³¹. As a whole, Khan notes the traditional response to extremism has been steeped in the counter-terrorism strategies of military and government authorities and criticises such approaches for not having an active role for civil society even if there “can and should be.”³²

The counter-extremism policy of the United Kingdom, in this sense, follows some of the elements identified by Khan as being part of the wider counter-terrorism strategy. However, the program has been praised by Khan for improving upon the traditional formula by having an active civil society role within its framework³³.

The United Kingdom Counter-Extremism White Paper published by the Home Office cites four areas as the main focus of the national strategy towards dealing

29.Khan, Humera. “Why Countering Extremism Fails”, Foreign Affairs, 18-February-2017, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-02-18/why-countering-extremism-fails>>, [Accessed 01-August-2017]

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

with the broader challenges posed by extremism:

- **Countering extremist ideology** through the confrontation and challenge of extremist propaganda. The strategy aims to ensure that no space goes uncontested in the public space including online and the goal is to promote a better alternative while supporting those at the risk of radicalisation;
- **Building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism** by standing with individuals and community organisations that work to challenge extremism and protect vulnerable individuals and mainstreaming their voices;
- **Disrupting extremists** through the use of new, targeted powers that are flexible enough to cover the full range of extremist behaviour, including where extremists sow division in communities and undermine the rule of law;
- **Building cohesive communities** through the review and understanding as to why some people living in the United Kingdom do not identify with the country or its values and address these issues. The government envisages a “Cohesive Communities Programme” to help these communities most at risk of isolation³⁴.

The White Paper states that the overriding purpose of this strategy is to protect people from the harm caused by extremism. The paper further states that in order to achieve this, the government will work in partnership with all those dedicated to preventing extremism. Wherever possible, the government aims to work locally in order to find the most credible voices among communities to ensure the projects are most effective³⁵. In addition, while the government’s counter-extremism strategy is primarily domestically focused, it also recognises the importance of the international linkages of extremism whether it is due to the flow of people, money or ideas. The government acknowledges that all these linkages are increasingly internationalised and promises to coordinate and cooperate with other governments or international actors to make responses to extremism more encompassing and effective³⁶. The government acknowledges that on some matters, it may not have the adequate understanding of the issues involved and therefore sets out to create independent reviews to understand and assess these issues and provide an appropriate response³⁷.

34. “Counter-Extremism Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, October 2015, p. 17

35. Ibid, p. 17

36. Ibid, p. 18

37. Ibid, p. 19

Countering Extremist Ideology:

As has been mentioned above, there is no single model towards the radicalisation of an individual. However, in general, three elements are present: A vulnerable individual, an influencer (typically another extremist in the form of an individual or merely a publication) and the absence of protective factors such as a supportive network of friends and family that can draw the vulnerable individual closer to extremism³⁸. The British Government acknowledges that extreme ideologies can prove very attractive to individuals as they offer conveniently simple solutions to fundamentally difficult problems. They also offer a sense of belonging, purpose, self-respect and an opportunity for personal reinvention or renewal. Extremist ideologies often feed off the vulnerability of their audience to radicalise and recruit. Advances in modern communications have enabled extremists to become far more sophisticated and adept at spreading their ideology and acting at a pace and scale previously unseen when targeting individuals³⁹. Although the exact parameters and methods of recruitment efforts differ between Islamist extremists and neo-Nazis, their adoption of new communication technologies follow remarkably similar patterns. Despite vehement opposition against each-other, these groups have been known to learn from each-others' methods to improve their own.

The Home Office cites that challenging the proliferation of extremist ideologies will require the government to outpace the extremist organisations in the age of rapid communications and control the narrative in order to present a compelling alternate proposition to extremist ideology⁴⁰. In order to achieve this, the Home Office suggests a number of steps:

- Continue to challenge the extremist argument by repeatedly exposing the brutality and baseness of extremist groups. The idea is that there should be no space where the extremist group is the only one heard.
- Confront the underlying weaknesses of the extremist ideology and expose, particularly to young people, that their simplistic offers and solutions are built upon false premises and tackle the illusion of “glorious” or “honourable” lives under these groups – (Countering Islamist narratives).
- Promote a positive alternative in showing that it is entirely possible to reconcile faith identity and national identity and that this is something that the

38. Ibid, p. 21

39. Ibid, p. 23

40. Ibid, p. 23

overwhelming majority of people do every day.

- Support vulnerable young people including by helping them participate in real-life activities that provide a sense of belonging, pride and self-worth they seek⁴¹.

In order to achieve these goals, the counter-ideology campaign needs to focus on contesting extremists in the online space; strengthening institutions in order to provide a robust and adaptable response; supporting individuals at particular risks of radicalisation; and building a partnership with those opposed to extremism⁴².

One way of achieving this is to deny extremists a platform. The Home Office states that the British Government has been working with the social media industry to remove terrorist and extremist material. The Home Office cites that cooperation with the industry has steadily improved, as has the number of extremist pages, materials and propaganda⁴³. In conjunction, pressures from governments have resulted with social media companies, particularly Facebook and YouTube, to monitor extremist content and removing it⁴⁴. Alongside extremist material, the government envisages supporting a network of credible commentators who wish to challenge extremists and put forward mainstream views online. Also envisaged is the training of civil society groups to help them build and maintain a compelling online presence; run a national programme to make young people more resilient to the risks of radicalisation online; provide schools and teachers more support to address the risk posed online; and build awareness in civil society groups and public to empower internet users to report extremist content⁴⁵.

The counter-extremist strategy also envisages strengthening institutions targeted by extremists to spread their online propaganda. The strategy, in particular, highlights efforts by extremists to take control of schools and create a space where extremist ideologies can go unchallenged. This has been a particular concern since concerns of a “Trojan Horse” plan by Islamist extremists in the schooling system were first highlighted in 2014. The Home Office states that a number of regulatory amendments have been put in place since to deal with the issue⁴⁶. However, higher education institutions, charities, local authorities,

41. Ibid, p. 24

42. Ibid, p. 24

43. Ibid, p. 24

44. Ibid, p. 24

45. Ibid, pp. 24-25

46. Ibid, p. 25

the National Health Service (NHS) and faith institutions have all been cited as possible targets of extremist subversion⁴⁷. The Home Office has issued guidelines particularly towards matters of faith institutions, as the majority of the extremist challenges faced today tend to have a religious component. Although loath to “regulate religion”, the Home Office has nevertheless pledged to ensure that the government has a responsibility to ensure that those working in faith institutions serve public interests and allow for all faiths to coexist while challenging intolerance⁴⁸.

Building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism:

Compared to the strategy outlined under countering extremist ideology, the strategy for building a partnership with all those opposed to extremism is remarkably more streamlined. The Home Office notes that across the United Kingdom, there are organisations and individuals standing up to extremism but too often their voices are drowned by strident extremists, both in person and online. The government therefore aims to support such individuals and groups who have credibility and experience fighting extremism and amplify their voices where required. Such support and partnership envisages working with local partners and authorities to find the most impactful and relevant groups that already do important work to protect communities and defeat extremism. In effect, the strategy is a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches⁴⁹.

The Home Office has emphasized the importance of preventing giving extremists further funding, legitimacy and exposure. It has therefore pledged to create a series of guidelines to help government decide whether an individual or organisation should be engaged with. With regards to media, the Home office acknowledged that extremists can make for exciting, rating-friendly broadcasts and that they do not have the power to directly censor media. Regardless, then-Prime Minister David Cameron urged networks to exercise discretion when it comes to airing extremist views and take steps to ensure that the debates are shaped in a positive manner⁵⁰.

Disrupting Extremists:

At a glance, this particular area of the counter-extremism strategy could be viewed as redundant due to the whole of the counter-extremism strategy being

47. Ibid, pp. 24-29

48. Ibid, pp. 28-29

49. Ibid, pp. 30, 31

50. Ibid, p. 32

dedicated towards disrupting extremists. This is true in a majority of cases where those espousing extremist views, particularly in a non-violent manner, can be dealt with using the aforementioned methods of denial and discrediting through the creation of a counter-narrative. However, in a number of particularly dangerous instances, the direct application of legal powers has become necessary to deal with the facilitators and advocates of extremism who pose the greatest threat to others. This particular area of the counter-extremism strategy refers to such legal means.

The British Government already possesses in its means a range of powers to help disrupt terrorism. However, there are a number of extremists who can cause immense amount of harm to society even as they remain on the right side of the law. Such individuals employ tactics such as indirect insinuation of hatred against a group, washing their hands of any culpability when one of their followers commits an act of violence. For instance, extremist Islamist preacher and a leader of the banned group al-Muhajiroun, Anjem Choudary, has evaded direct prosecution for years despite standing accused for inspiring a number of terrorist attackers. In a bid to counter such individuals, the British Government has pledged to implement targeted powers to challenge the most active and persistent offenders⁵¹.

One facet of these targeted powers entails reviews of laws surrounding immigration, asylum and citizenship. The government pledged to review laws on citizenship to promote “good character” of immigrants and is looking to coordinate between different agencies to ensure that information regarding an individual’s extremist background can be shared across agencies⁵².

Another aspect of this policy is to provide improved mechanisms to report and monitor crimes that have been motivated by the race, religion, gender or sexuality of the victim. The government has pledged to provide improved means for individuals to report such hate crimes and stated that it aims to introduce an Extremism Community Trigger to guarantee that concerns about local extremism are taken seriously. This mechanism will enable police and local authorities to fully review extremism and coordinate their actions for expediency⁵³.

Another facet of this policy is the introduction of measures to counter extremist broadcasts by communicators who seek to exploit television and radio services

51. Ibid, p. 33

52. Ibid, p. 33

53. Ibid, pp. 34-35

to broaden their reach. The Home Office's Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper notes that while a lively public debate is vital towards exposing the myths at the heart of the extremist ideologies, extremists should not be allowed to have a platform from which they can preach their propaganda without critical challenge. The White Paper further notes that the broadcast regulator, Ofcom, already possesses significant powers to limit extremist content on TV and the Home Office suggests new powers that will allow the regulator to immediately suspend TV services that broadcast unacceptable extremist material and extend it into all radio services⁵⁴. It should be noted that these powers would not extend towards broadcast of channels based online (and not hosted on the aforementioned social media networks such as YouTube) or satellite TV channels that broadcast from other countries.

Building Cohesive Communities:

The Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper notes Britain as a successful multi-racial, multi-faith country that has welcomed such diversity and been better off for it. However, it acknowledges that a number of immigrant communities have felt a reduced sense of belonging to the United Kingdom. This, in turn resulted with such communities in isolating themselves from the wider society and lagging behind in education and employment, providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to fester. Immigrant communities are not the only ones susceptible to extremism under these conditions. The perceived separation between communities can stoke nationalist sentiments as well, creating an us-and-them narrative that groups such as neo-Nazis can and have taken advantage of, resulting in a cycle of reciprocal radicalisation across communities. In order to counter these circumstances, the British Government has pledged to respond to the challenges of isolated and segregated communities and build upon existing programmes such as the National Citizen Service (which aims for young people to engage in their wider community and become more active, responsible citizens) and English language training to help break down barriers between communities. Meanwhile, the government has also pledged to eliminate harmful practices such as Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation⁵⁵.

54. Ibid, pp. 34-35

55. Ibid, pp. 37-39

The Prevent Programme of the United Kingdom’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy

Much of the Counter-Extremism Strategy of the United Kingdom is underpinned by the *Prevent* strand of *CONTEST*, the country’s counter-terrorism strategy. Prevent is one of the four strands of the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, the rest consisting of Pursue, Protect and Prepare. Each strand of *CONTEST* prioritises a particular aspect of countering terrorist threats, with the end-goal of reducing terrorism and maintaining public confidence⁵⁶.

The Pursue strand of *CONTEST*, for instance, involves intelligence, law enforcement and military actions to locate and disrupt terrorists and bring them to justice. This strand, which includes anti-terrorist legislation, organisational reforms and counter-terrorist operations is the most prominent and orthodox area of counter-terrorism strategy⁵⁷.

The second strand is Protect, involves measures designed to protect the public and property, such as the surveillance of locations that could be targets of terrorist attacks and the deployment of relevant measures and personnel to pre-emptively counter the threat. This strand involves a significant focus on protecting and bolstering the country’s critical national infrastructure and services such as telecommunications, energy supplies and transport networks⁵⁸.

Prepare, in turn, aims to manage the impacts of a terrorist attack and other incidents once they have occurred. The focus here is on equipping and training the emergency services to respond to terrorist attacks, improving capacity to maintain these services even in the face of highly disruptive attacks. The government has resolved to bolster Prepare not only in the context of ordinary terrorist attacks but also within the context of major chemical, biological and radiological attacks as well as natural disasters⁵⁹.

Lastly, the Prevent strand of *CONTEST* is concerned with preventing radicalisation and “stopping people from becoming terrorists” and supporting violent extremism⁶⁰. In its original conception in 2004, much of *CONTEST* had much more orthodox goals that focused on international terrorism. In this context,

56. Foley, Frank, *Countering Terrorism In Britain and France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 82

57. *Ibid*, p. 82

58. *Ibid*, p. 82

59. *Ibid* pp. 82-83

60. *Ibid*, p. 82

Prevent was often eclipsed by the three other strands. In 2006, one year after the first terrorist attack on British soil by “home-grown” Islamic extremists, CONTEST was overhauled with an emphasis added addressing “structural problems in the United Kingdom and overseas that may contribute to radicalisation, inequalities or discrimination”, putting significantly more emphasis on Prevent as a result⁶¹.

As far as the focus of policy recommendations are concerned, the author of this paper has elected to focus on Prevent, rather than Pursue, Protect and Prepare. This is primarily because the Iraqi Government already has significant experience in the matters that Pursue, Protect and Prepare deal with. While there is certainly scope for improvement (and the author recommends that the Iraqi Government look at what these programmes can offer), stopping people turning to extremism is the area that seems to need the greatest improvement in Iraq. Furthermore, much of Pursue, Protect and Prepare follow fairly orthodox lines of security analysis whereas the approach taken by Prevent is highly unorthodox and therefore worth exploring, while being in line with the main focus area of this paper.

The Prevent programme was significantly overhauled in 2011, after the Conservative Party under then-Prime Minister David Cameron was elected. The Home Office under the Conservative Party considered the previous iteration of Prevent flawed, citing that it confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism. In doing so, the pre-2011 strand of Prevent was accused of failing to confront extremist ideology at the heart of the extremist threats faced by the United Kingdom. Instead of helping those at risk of radicalisation, the pre-2011 Prevent programme had sometimes allowed funding to reach extremist organisations that “Prevent should have been confronting”. The pre-2011 Prevent programme was also criticised for failing to monitor individual Prevent projects enough to justify the vast sums of money spent upon them⁶².

The post-2011 Prevent strategy therefore aims to address these deficiencies of the pre-2011 version. It is the main label under which the United Kingdom's Counter-Extremism Strategy is practiced and the objectives it identifies are in line with the objectives cited in the Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper:

- Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat faced

61. Ibid, p. 81, 83

62. “Prevent Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, July 2011, pp. 1-2

from those who promote it. The Prevent documentation published by the British Government states that the government will not work with any extremist organisation that “oppose our values of universal human rights, equality before the law, democracy and full participation of society;

- Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support. The Government pledges to achieve this through the multi-agency programme *Channel* which identifies and provides support for people at risk of radicalisation;
- Work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that need to be addressed. The government praised the progress made in this sector towards reducing the vulnerabilities of schools, charities, faith groups and the NHS but noted that there remains space for improvement⁶³.

Effectively, the Prevent Strategy represents the practical application of the strategies described in the Counter-Extremism White Paper against specific extremist threats that the United Kingdom faces at present. While the British Government defined Prevent as working against all kinds of terrorist and non-violent extremism threats faced by the United Kingdom. Islamist extremism, particularly from groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are cited as the most immediate threat⁶⁴.

Responding to the Ideological Challenge:

Under the Prevent Strategy, the British Government has strived to follow the twin goals of denying extremists a platform to espouse their views from and promoting authentic voices that reflect the status of the United Kingdom as a multiracial and multi-religious society. The appearance and rise of the Islamic State in 2014 was a significant challenge to the British Government due to the group’s departure from network-based radicalisation techniques to one that casts a broad net on their intended audience. In addition to prevent Islamic State-inspired attacks at home, the government was tasked with the challenge of preventing individuals drawn to the group’s image of a utopian society of being drawn into conflict zones in Iraq and Syria, as their return could pose a significant security threat to the United Kingdom. Under Prevent, 46,000 pieces of terrorist material were removed from social media providers in 2014 and another 55,000 in 2015⁶⁵.

63. “Prevent Duty Guidance”, HM Government, 2015, p. 5

64. Ibid, pp. 6-7

65. “CONTEST: The United Kingdom’s Strategy for Countering Terrorism: 2015 Annual Report”, Home Office, p. 15

In addition to removing online content, the British Government has taken measures to limit the ability to spread their influence in the real-world by limiting their movements. This part of the law is particularly fraught with difficulties due to the great care many non-violent extremists take to remain on the legal side of the law in conjunction with the government's aforementioned concern against acting as a the "thought police". However, a number of successful policies were applied particularly with regards to extremists who are not from the United Kingdom, nor citizens of the country. The law has permitted for those who are found to be engaging in "unacceptable behaviours" such as public speaking or publishing material that foments, justifies or glorifies terrorist violence or fosters hatred which might lead to inter-community violence have been barred entry from the United Kingdom in as many as 130 occasions since the law came into effect⁶⁶. The prison system represents another sector where preachers of extremism have had their access restricted to individuals who would prove susceptible to radicalisation. Statistics show that many radicalised individuals also have a history⁶⁷ of petty crime and prisons have been cited as a hotbed of radicalisation for these individuals. As such, the government announced on 2016 that the most dangerous Islamist extremists will be removed from the general prison population and will be held in "specialist units" in the higher security estate⁶⁸.

On top of removing extremist material that promoted the worldview of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, a number of projects were undertaken to challenge these worldviews. The majority of these projects were undertaken by the cross-departmental Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU)⁶⁹ and involved counter-narrative projects that countered the idea that there is a battle between the West and Islam. Such RICU-sponsored counter-narrative programs also sought to give more voice to victims of Islamist terrorism (particularly

66. "Prevent Strategy", HM Government, London: Crown Publications, July 2011, p. 50

67. Ibid, pp. 20-21

68. "Government Sets Out New Measures To Tackle Extremism in Prisons", Ministry of Justice, 22-August-2016, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-out-new-measures-to-tackle-extremism-in-prisons>>, [Accessed 07 August 2017]

69. RICU was established in the Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office in 2007. At that time, it comprised representatives from the Home Office, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and reported to Ministers in all three Departments. Its function was to coordinate Government communications about the terrorist threat and the response to it and to facilitate and generate challenge to terrorist ideology and the claims made by terrorist groups.

Muslims) as well as highlight instances where people from across religious lines have worked together against the forces of extremism⁷⁰. However, despite the powerful impact projects such as these can have towards discrediting extremists, implementation of the specific projects were noted to be slow. In particular, a number of counter-narrative projects aimed at promoting authentic voices from the Islamic World, recommended as early as 2011, did not become active until 2015 when the need to counter the narrative of the Islamic State became a pressing concern. Indeed, the government itself notes that some of the projects implemented by RICU have suffered from “lack of precision around target audiences” and the voices they promoted continued suffer from lack of reach⁷¹.

Protecting Vulnerable Individuals From Being Drawn Into Extremism:

The Prevent Strategy White Paper notes that in a number of cases where individuals conducted terrorist attacks or attempted to do so, they had shown a number of signs that should (and in some instances, have) been recognised as warning signs. Such individuals had often expressed extremist views, had asked probing questions regarding security and even openly discussed terrorism with a number of associates. Based on these incidents, the Home Office contends that there is a scope and space for positive intervention in the radicalisation process before a law enforcement response is required. In this sense, the Prevent Strategy White Paper compares this particular aspect of the policy to other forms of crime prevention⁷².

This area of Prevent is based on the premise that people being drawn into radicalisation and recruitment can be identified and then provided with support. The purpose of that support is to dissuade them from engaging in and supporting terrorist-related activity. This support is sometimes described as ‘de-radicalisation’, a term which is sometimes used to refer to cognitive or behavioural change. Within the context of Prevent, both outcomes are sought. The main goal of this area is to seek to remove people from the influence of and from contact with terrorist groups and sympathisers, and to challenge any support they have for them⁷³.

Part of identifying an individual as a risk factor is to know what the risk factors are. To this end, the British Government has engaged in a campaign to educate

70. “Prevent Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, July 2011, pp. 47-49

71. Ibid, pp. 50-51

72. Ibid, pp. 55-56

73. Ibid, p. 56

members of the local police, government, teachers, members of faculty, health service workers, religious authorities, prison officers, members of the civil society and other public figures to help them identify signs of extremism. A number of these individuals, typically a number of local police or local government, were then designated as a coordinator for Channel, the multi-agency programme aimed at providing support to individuals showing early signs of radicalisation. The coordinator would then have the authority to refer the individual to the Channel programme⁷⁴. Channel is described as being appropriate for anyone vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and focuses on ensuring that vulnerable children and adults of any faith, ethnicity or background receive support before their vulnerabilities are exploited by those that would push them towards a terrorist cause and get them involved in criminal or terrorist activity⁷⁵. Channel coordinators are encouraged by to maintain effective links and networks to ensure a credible community response.

Once an individual at risk has been referred to Channel, the programme aims to assess the nature and extent of that risk and develop the most appropriate support plan suitable for the individual. A small panel of local authority members are then gathered to assess whether the referral is appropriate. If deemed appropriate, the panel gathers information regarding the circumstances of the individual to identify whether the individual is engaged with a group, cause or ideology; whether the individual has intent to cause harm; and whether the individual is capable of causing harm⁷⁶. Should the panel conclude that the individual is at risk of being drawn into terrorism, a series of actions ranging from drawing up a support plan to carrying out further assessments are recommended by the government⁷⁷. The Channel Programme White Paper advises a number of support programmes such as mentoring, life skills training, anger management session, cognitive/behavioural contact, constructive pursuits, education skills contact, careers contact, family support contact, health awareness contact, housing support contact and drugs and alcohol awareness contact. Additional theological or ideological support may also be offered if approval is obtained from the Home Office⁷⁸.

The Home Office acknowledges that like many other aspects of the post-

74. Ibid, pp. 57-58

75. "Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting Vulnerable Individuals From Being Drawn Into Terrorism", HM Government, London: Crown Publishing, 2015, p. 5

76. Ibid, p. 11

77. Ibid, p. 16

78. Ibid, p. 17

2011 Prevent Programme, Channel employs an approach that is unorthodox and relatively new and, therefore, unproven. The Home Office has emphasised the need for Channel to be deployed in a proportionate manner to avoid unnecessary referrals over legitimate political opinions or simple misunderstandings, warning that misapplications of the programme can result in loss of public confidence, trust and goodwill that it needs to function effectively⁷⁹.

Working With Institutions under Heightened Risk:

The Home Office cites that in the United Kingdom, radicalisation takes place in spaces where terrorist ideologies and those who promote them go uncontested and are not exposed to challenge. As many of these spaces are either under direct responsibility of the government or are otherwise regulated by the government (even if they may have relative autonomy), ensuring that these institutions are not undermined by extremists has become one of the main concerns of the Prevent Programme. Sectors such as education, faith, health, criminal justice and charities have been specifically identified as priority areas at risk⁸⁰. All of these institutions offer extremists a potentially fertile ground for radicalisation either because the individuals are in their formative years (as is the case with educational institutions); in challenging, high-stress environments (as is the case in prisons); or are already in a mentally, physically or spiritually vulnerable state (as is the case with hospitals and religious institutions). In addition, investigation into the activities of extremists in these sectors have revealed some significant regulatory lapses that could permit for extremists to have the space to operate as legitimate authorities, raising the fears of a “Trojan Horse” scenario in which extremists gradually integrate themselves into institutions with the goal of subverting them wholesale from within⁸¹.

While subsequent investigations have not revealed an organised “Trojan Horse” situation to be present, evidence was found of individuals with extremist views finding positions in a number of institutions in the education system in particular. Islamist extremists were also noted to have attempted to recruit sympathisers in higher education centres such as universities with high Muslim populations, often joining Muslim societies and framing their attitudes under legitimate political discussion⁸². Meanwhile, the financial records of a number of

79. “Prevent Strategy”, HM Government, London: Crown Publications, July 2011, pp. 56-57

80. Ibid, pp. 63

81. Ibid, pp. 63-64

82. Ibid, p. 73

charities were found to contain lapses where the money they gathered could have been knowingly or unknowingly transferred into extremist organisations inside or outside the United Kingdom. Faith institutions have been particularly targeted by Islamist extremists due to the religious underpinnings of their ideology as well as the unique role they play towards discrediting their ideology⁸³. Finally, as mentioned above, individuals arrested on terrorist offences have sought to identify vulnerable individuals in prison due to petty crimes and radicalise them so that when they are released, they are already radicalised⁸⁴.

The British Government has sought to counter the impact Islamist extremists can have on British institutions by taking a multi-pronged approach. In addition to increased regulation of these institutions (particularly where the regulation and inspection was found out to have suffered serious lapses), the government has implemented measures of expelling or otherwise isolating (as would be the case in prisons) the extremists responsible for radicalisation. Meanwhile, members and employees of the institutions have been given training that links not only towards identifying extremists but also towards identifying those vulnerable to extremism, thus including these institutions under the Channel referral programme. The government has recognised that different approaches are needed for institutions in different sectors. As such, the specific Prevent guidance for each sector was prepared with the input of technocratic figures to the sectors in question in order to have maximum impact⁸⁵.

Concerns Associated With the Prevent Programme and the Wider Counter-Extremism Model of the United Kingdom

As highlighted above, the United Kingdom's approach to counter-extremism strategy has been praised by a number of counter-extremism experts. Experts who praised Prevent and Channel pointed out to the combination of top-down and bottom-up policies, in conjunction with a community-centric approach to countering extremism would help with the programmes having increased reach and legitimacy. In general, the British counter-extremism strategy and the associated Prevent and Channel programmes were viewed as an innovative departure in community engagement against Islamist extremism. On the whole, however, it is vital to understand the challenges the United Kingdom's counter-extremism strategy has faced and to identify its failings in order to make implementation in other parts of the world more effective. In a country like Iraq where tensions

83. Ibid, pp. 80-81

84. Ibid, pp 86-87

85. Ibid, pp. 65-93

and polarisation remains high, mistakes like those described below can have detrimental impacts towards reconstruction and reconciliation.

Particularly in recent years, these programmes as well as the wider strategy has received criticism over a number of issue areas by critics who posited that the programmes were not as effective as they could be at best and counter-productive at worst.

Concerns Relating to Censorship

The first and most basic criticism of the strategy stems from the government's apparent difficulty in defining what constitutes "extremism", "non-violent extremism" and "British values". The root of the issues goes back to 2015, when then-Prime Minister David Cameron first cited non-violent extremism as a direct security threat and sought to outlaw it. Cameron's statements took place in conjunction with a number of developments taking place in the United Kingdom at the time, as concerns relating to the threat represented by the Islamic State reached apex. Cameron gave public bodies in the United Kingdom a set of new powers to clamp down on content deemed as extremist but also put them under pressure to comply with the Prevent Programme. Critics claimed that this new but unclear approach has resulted with government institutions taking their attention from targeting those involved in terrorism to instead targeting those who, to use Cameron's words, "quietly condone it"⁸⁶. Subsequent efforts by Cameron's successor and former Home Secretary Theresa May to further curtail civil rights in the name of security, even as the definitions of British Values and non-violent extremism remained vague have raised further concerns regarding the state of civil liberties in the United Kingdom. Critics indeed have noted that the securitisation of political discourse sets a dangerous precedent for freedom of expression in the future⁸⁷. The relevance of such concerns regarding the securitisation of political discourse can be easily applied to Iraq where different discourses were similarly securitised over the years. Most recently, the Islamic State was able to appeal to notions of Sunni marginalisation through the debates surrounding de-Ba'athification and how accusations of being Ba'athists were used as a means to block a number of politicians of running for public. Real or

86. Kazmi, Zaheer. "The United Kingdom's Anti-Extremism Policy", Foreign Affairs, 05-August-2015, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2015-08-05/united-kingdoms-extreme-anti-extremism-policy>>, [Accessed 07-August-2017]

87. Kazmi, Zaheer, "British Counterterrorism After the Election", Foreign Affairs, 22-July-2017, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2017-06-22/british-counterterrorism-after-election>>, [Accessed 07-August-2017]

perceived, such actions fed into the narrative of Sunni marginalisation in Iraq, allowing the extremist group to find a fertile ground for future radicalisation.

A different but related criticism posits the question credibility and whether denying a platform to non-violent extremists or convicting them for their speeches discredit the very Western values that counter-extremism laws claim to protect. Simon Cottee, a senior fellow at the Freedom Project notes that resorting to restricting free speech on grounds of countering non-violent extremism not only highlights a certain hypocrisy among Western nations that put themselves above such practices otherwise deemed authoritarian, but they suggest that Western ideologues were unable to provide a robust ideological counter the forces of extremism. Cottee provides an example in the form of the British extremist preacher Anjem Choudary, who was arrested for inviting support “for a proscribed terrorist organisation” in the form of the Islamic State, and suggests that arresting him has lionised him in the eyes of his followers instead of leaving him to be ridiculed and discredited like the “clown with the odious views” he is⁸⁸. Whether Cottee is in the right on this matter or not remains to be seen. However, the questions he raises are important with regard the need to maintain a robust counter-narrative against extremism as well as the relevant legal powers for when they are needed. Furthermore, discrediting extremist preachers rather than imprisoning them creates an additional safeguard against prison radicalisation. Given that prison radicalisation has been a persistent issue in Iraq prior to the emergence of the Islamic State, an alternative approach seems expedient.

Concerns Relating to Practical Failings in Stopping Extremists

A number of practical aspects of the British counter-extremism strategy have also been subject to criticism. Many of these criticisms tie towards the inability to correctly identify individuals who posed a risk to British Government and public, as well as inter-departmental bureaucracy that got in the way of apprehending potential suspects. Critics cite examples of Khalid Masood who attacked Westminster Bridge on March 2017 and Salman Abedi who blew himself up at a concert in Manchester on May 22. Both of these men were known to British intelligence officials but both were ranked as low-priority. Similarly, out of the 850-odd British citizens who travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight for the Islamic State, a number of them were not only known to intelligence agencies and some, such as Siddhardtha Dhar, had their passports confiscated over fears that

88. Cottee, Simon. “Anjem Choudary and the Criminalisation of Dissent”, Foreign Policy Magazine, 19-August-2018, <foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/19/anjem-choudary-and-the-criminalization-of-dissent-britain-isis/>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

they were a flight risk. Despite these measures (and being under investigation), Dhar left United Kingdom with his family to managed join the Islamic State. He subsequently gloated about the ease in which he was able to reach his destination⁸⁹. According to critics, all these incidents highlight that the security agencies in the United Kingdom suffer from lack of coordination and overstretch. They contend that the British intelligence apparatus can only focus on the most immediate dangers, allowing low-priority threats such as Masood and Abedi to slip past the cracks⁹⁰. Critics of the strategy also note that the rapidly-growing scope of the Prevent Programme has made identifying and prioritising threats even harder and note that this was exacerbated by the police force undergoing cuts under austerity⁹¹. Ultimately, they argue, the problem in British counter-extremism and counter-terrorism strategy stems from lack of efficient policing and inter-agency coordination. In the absence of these practical steps towards policing, the provision of any laws and legislations that grant security agencies increased powers become meaningless. This is a particularly relevant matter to consider in Iraq where inter-agency rivalries between the different security arms of the Iraqi Government (such as the Iraqi Federal Police and the Iraqi Army) has resulted in poor communication and coordination.

A similar problem has been cited with regards to the government's approach to countering extremist content online. In the Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper, the Home Office speaks optimistically about the growing cooperation between the British Government and major social media companies such as Facebook and YouTube. The government has praised these companies' assistance in taking down a staggering amount of extremist content. This is indeed commendable. However, the need to delegate such tasks to private companies (who technically own the content posted on these websites) bring with its own problems. Although committed to countering extremism for understandable reasons, many social media companies have their own divergent motivations in the form of making profit, cutting costs, and retaining active user engagement. All of these motivations go against the task of providing active moderation,

89. "Radicalisation: The Counter-Narrative and Identifying the Tipping Point", House of Commons and the Home Affairs Committee, 19-July-2016, p. 25

90. Simcox, Robin. "British Counterterrorism Policy After Westminster", 28-March-2017, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2017-03-28/british-counterterrorism-policy-after-westminster>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

91. Kazmi, Zaheer, "British Counterterrorism After the Election", Foreign Affairs, 22-July-2017, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2017-06-22/british-counterterrorism-after-election>>, [Accessed 07-August-2017]

removing content and banning users, even if they have been deemed extremists by governments. As a result, many of these companies have been more concerned with abiding the letter of what the governments require of them, rather than the spirit. Facebook, in particular, has suffered from an overreliance on algorithms instead of active moderation as a cost-cutting measure. Attempts to pass-the-buck by directing users to report extremist content has resulted with extremists and fundamentalists attacking legitimate, non-extremist pages through mass-reporting instead. A notable such instance was when a Facebook page belonging to Arab Atheists was banned due to fundamentalist users flagging the page as extremist⁹². Similarly on Youtube, the overreliance on algorithms and community moderation as a cost-cutting measure has resulted with informative channels such as LGBT networks or legitimate political discussion channels getting censored⁹³. Where active moderation was involved, moderators (often overworked and undermanned) were issued with inconsistent guidelines that permitted extremist content to remain unchallenged as long as they were framed in a certain way⁹⁴. In general, social media companies have been criticised by a number of observers, including the Home Affairs Select Committee for being “shamefully far” from countering extremist content, noting specific instances where extremist content belonging to both Islamists and neo-Nazis were not removed on grounds that they “did not breach the hateful conduct policy” or “did not cross the line into hate speech”⁹⁵. Any government dealing with private companies to counter or filter extremist content will need to recognise that the interests of these companies will often diverge from what the government needs them to do, resulting in half-measures that can be ineffective (if wasteful) at best and counter-productive at worst.

Concerns Relating to Prevent Being Perceived as Disproportionately Targeting Muslims

Perhaps the biggest and most persistent criticism levelled against the British

92. “Abusing Facebook notifications to block atheist views in the Arab language”, Humanrights.CH, 22-June-2016, <<https://www.humanrights.ch/en/standards/international/campaigns/abusing-facebook-notifications-block-atheist-views-arab-language/>>, [Accessed 04-August-2017]

93. Ellis, Emma Grey. “Silly Youtube, Don't You Know Making the Internet Nicer is Impossible?”, Wired Magazine, 22-March-2017, <<https://www.wired.com/2017/03/youtube-restricted-mode-fiasco/>>, [Accessed 04-August-2017]

94. “Leaks 'expose peculiar Facebook moderation policy””, BBC, 22-May-2017, <www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-39997579>, [Accessed 04-August-2017]

95. “Social media giants 'shamefully far' from tackling illegal content”, BBC, 01-May-2017, <www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-39744016>, [Accessed 04-August-2017]

counter-extremism strategy and, more specifically, the Prevent Programme, comes from the Muslim community in the United Kingdom who argue that the implementation of the programmes had a number of detrimental impacts on their communities.

The primary concern surrounding Prevent relates to the matter of Islamist extremism being identified as the primary extremist threat that the United Kingdom faces. Given the numerous risks faced by Islamist extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, this is an understandable position. However, critics argue that the implementation of the policy, the intense pressure institutions face towards reporting anything unusual and the general ignorance non-Muslims have regarding Muslims have all resulted with “an atmosphere of fear” that puts Muslims in the spotlight for ordinary behaviour. Since the overhaul of the Prevent Programme in 2011, reports of referrals over seemingly innocuous patterns of behaviour have picked up steadily. In schools in particular, Muslims students have reported being referred to Channel over legitimate questions in class as well as one instance where a student was referred to Channel after being asked by the teacher to provide opinions regarding the Syrian Civil War⁹⁶. In another instance, a Muslim student was referred to Channel after asking a question regarding nuclear fission. No referral took place when another, non-Muslim student asked the same question⁹⁷. Although the Home Office has admitted that not all Channel referrals deserve to be referred, the perception among Muslims was that the Prevent Programme was targeting Muslims for patterns of behaviour a non-Muslim would not be targeted for. Teachers, in turn, have stated that the increased pressure from the government over applying Prevent guidance to schooling has resulted with an environment where teachers are too worried about having discussions on difficult topics due to the fear of being reported⁹⁸.

In turn, such fears are reportedly leading towards Muslims losing trust towards the government and these programs being viewed as designed to spy on

96. Khaleeli, Homa. “You worry they could take your kids’: is the Prevent strategy demonising Muslim schoolchildren?”, *The Guardian*, 23-September-2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/23/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-schools-demonising-muslim-children>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

97. Ibid.

98. Bowcott, Owen. “Prevent strategy ‘stifles debate and makes teachers feel vulnerable’”, *The Guardian*, 09-March-2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/09/prevent-strategy-stifles-debate-and-makes-teachers-feel-vulnerable>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

Muslims in a manner that forces friends and neighbours to report on each other. Activists claim that beset by such an environment, people may not only become less willing to speak to authorities, thus hampering counter-extremism efforts, but the environment of fear itself can lead to individuals getting radicalised due to extremists instrumentalising such grievances⁹⁹. A number of figures, including Kalsoon Bashir, an activist and a supporter of Prevent, have disputed these claims, stating that despite its disproportionate focus on Muslims, the programmes had done good by providing counselling for vulnerable individuals and preventing them from slipping further into extremism¹⁰⁰. Kalsoon echoed the Home Office line that much of the concerns relating to Prevent and its role as a “snooper’s charter” was due to not properly understanding the means and purpose of the programme. Internally, however, the Home Office itself has noted that Prevent is becoming far too “toxic” a brand¹⁰¹.

The impression that Prevent is disproportionately targeting Muslims is supported by data. A Freedom of Information request from 2014 shows that the number of people referred to Channel went up from five in 2006 (when the program was first implemented) to 748 in 2013, with a total of 2653 referrals. The data shows of the total referrals, 14% of them accounted for far right extremism, with referrals for Islamist extremism accounting for nearly¹⁰² the rest even though Muslims account for only 5% of the population of the United Kingdom¹⁰³.

Concerns Relating to Legitimised Islamophobia as a Result of Prevent

Critics also suggest that the disproportionate focus directed upon the Islamic

99. Gayle, Damian. “Prevent strategy 'could end up promoting extremism'”, The Guardian, 21-April-2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/21/government-prevent-strategy-promoting-extremism-maina-kiai>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

100. Khaleeli, Homa. “You worry they could take your kids’: is the Prevent strategy demonising Muslim schoolchildren?”, The Guardian, 23-September-2015, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/sep/23/prevent-counter-terrorism-strategy-schools-demonising-muslim-children>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

101. Dawson, Joanna; Godec, Samantha. “Briefing Paper: Counter-Extremism Policy: An Overview”, House of Commons, 23-June-2017, p. 32

102. The FOI Request only specifies far-right extremism out of the total. Among the religions listed in the datasheet, Islam accounts for the majority but a number of other religions are also listed, as well as a significant (but less than Islam) proportion where the religion was listed as “unknown”.

103. Traquair, Sherry. “Freedom of Information Request Reference Number: 000117/13”, Association of Chief Police Officers, Hampshire, pp. 3-4

extremist by the Prevent Programme has resulted with the legitimisation of Islamophobia due to the framing of extremism as a predominantly Muslim problem. Criminologist Dr Fahid Qurashi suggests that in an environment where extremism is framed as a Muslim problem in the eyes of the law, the loyalty of Muslims in Britain is constantly cast into question. This, in turn sends a signal to ordinary people on how to interact with Muslims. In addition to reifying an us-versus-them narrative, such an environment is conducive for the emergence of politicians who seek to instrumentalise hatred against Muslims through appealing to the issue as a matter of security¹⁰⁴. Qurashi's views are echoed by Zaheer Kazmi who states that the gradual instrumentalisation of Islamophobia in the British political discourse was directly linked to the re-emergence of nationalist and populist figures such as Nigel Farage, as well as the Brexit vote to leave the European Union and the subsequent spike in hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities¹⁰⁵.

In conjunction with the problem discussed above regarding the concerns about the disproportionate targeting of the Muslim community, the problem of legitimised prejudice on security grounds highlights the catch-22 problem most security agencies face: There may be a legitimate concern about a particular demographic being targeted for recruitment by extremists (such as Muslims) and causing attacks. However, giving the community a sense that the targeting is unjust or otherwise normalising social and political discrimination can cause trust between that demographic and the government being shaken. This can, in turn, strengthen the narratives of marginalisation (whether such marginalisation is real or not) used by extremists to recruit supporters. Whether Sunni Marginalisation in Iraq is real or not has been a matter of debate, but the narrative has been used to justify the existence of Sunni-extremist groups. Similar concerns have been raised in the United Kingdom. The banned extremist groups Hizb ut-Tahrir and al-Muhajiroun, whose leader Anjem Choudary was subsequently arrested for expressing support for the Islamic State, frequently used the spectre of racist attacks to recruit young Muslims¹⁰⁶.

104. Qurashi, Fahid. "Prevent gives people permission to hate Muslims – it has no place in schools", *The Guardian*, 04-April-2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/04/prevent-hate-muslims-schools-terrorism-teachers-reject>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

105. Kazmi, Zaheer. "Islamophobia and the New Britishness", *Foreign Affairs*, 02-August-2016, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2016-08-02/islamophobia-and-new-britishness>>, [Accessed 08 August-2017]

106. Pantucci, Raffaello. "We Love Death as You Love Life": Britain's Suburban Terrorists", London: Hurst Publishing, pp. 51-53

Concerns Relating to Threats from Right-Wing Extremists, Neo-Nazis and White Supremacists Being Overlooked

The abovementioned point regarding a spike of hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities leads to a final critique regarding Prevent and the wider counter-extremism strategy and that is the apparent failure to identify the dangers of growing right-wing radicalism. As has been noted above, both the Prevent Strategy White Paper and the Counter-Extremism Strategy White Paper have referenced to white-supremacist, right-wing and neo-Nazi extremism as a potential threat but have nevertheless focused on Islamist extremism. This is understandable, as many such groups have been marginalised and discredited for much of the late 20th and early 21st Centuries. However, while the focus of politicians and security agencies remained on Muslim communities and the risks of Islamist extremism, many of these groups have been reinventing themselves with an anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic platform under the premise that Europe (or more generally, “the West” or even “the Christendom”) is at risk of losing its identity and “racial purity” to foreigners. Notably, although diametrically opposed to the likes of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, many of these groups have adopted the West-versus-Islam adopted by these groups in what has been described as “Violent Counter-Jihadism”¹⁰⁷.

What is notable and especially disconcerting is that even after the high-profile terrorist attacks by right-wing extremists such as Anders Behring Breivik in Norway, security agencies across Europe and the United States have continued to overlook the threats from right-wing extremism. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Theresa May outright omitted right-wing extremism during a speech on security on May 2017, despite a spike of attacks on Muslims and other minorities since the Brexit vote of 2016 and the murder of Labour Party MP Jo Cox by a neo-Nazi shortly before that. Only after a van attack on Muslims in Finsbury Park did Prime Minister May bring up right-wing extremism as a danger¹⁰⁸. Indeed, there is a growing body of analysts who notice the growing trend of right-wing extremism in the Western world that counter-extremism programmes such as Prevent have failed to take into account on a significant scale. So far, much of

107. Strømme, Øyvind. “Violent 'Counter-Jihadism'”, *Foreign Affairs*, 27-July-2011, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/northern-europe/2011-07-27/violent-counter-jihadism>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

108. Kazmi, Zaheer, “British Counterterrorism After the Election”, *Foreign Affairs*, 22-July-2017, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-kingdom/2017-06-22/british-counterterrorism-after-election>>, [Accessed 07-August-2017]

the threat has been confined to northern and eastern Europe, as well as the United States¹⁰⁹. However, particularly since 2016, far-right groups around the world have increasingly displayed signs of coherence, coordination and convergence¹¹⁰. The House of Lords has recognised the growing risks posed by right-wing extremism and has advised the government to increase Prevent funding towards countering right-wing extremism in 2017¹¹¹.

The Western experience with right-wing extremism so far highlights how the implications of an extremist threat from the majority is often overlooked in favour of an extremist threat from the minority, which tends to occupy the dominant narrative. This is a problem that can become particularly acute when the conflict is predominantly religious in nature. Given the delicate religious syncretism in Iraq, this is something that must be recognised and applied to a greater extent than in the United Kingdom.

Comparative Applicability of Counter-Extremism Programmes in Iraq

Today, Iraq is nearing the end of its war against the Islamic State. The group has been expelled from all major cities including Mosul, and only controls two smaller cities¹¹² and a handful of rapidly-shrinking territory in the Anbar countryside. However, the war has taken a massive toll on the Iraqi society. Many cities that languished under the Islamic State and subsequently battered by conflict will need to be rebuilt. The people of these parts, many of them Sunni Arabs, have witnessed the group's brutality first hand and have rejected the group's extremist ideology. However, the group has taken great lengths to indoctrinate people living in its territories, particularly children, into its worldview. Without appropriate care and support, many of these Iraqis risk being pulled into radicalisation.

Compatibility of the United Kingdom's Counter-Extremism Strategy in Iraq

Can the Prevent Programme and, indeed, the wider counter-extremism strategy of the United Kingdom act as a barrier towards such radicalisation?

109. Adler-Bell, Sam. "Why Are We Blind to Right-Wing Terrorism?", The Century Foundation, 26-June-2015, <<https://tcf.org/content/commentary/why-are-we-blind-to-right-wing-terrorism/>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

110. Amarasingham, Amarnath; Davey, Jacob. "Far-Right Movements Are Starting to Converge, Posing An Ever Greater Risk", The Mantle, 19-July-2017, <www.mantlethought.org/international-affairs/far-right-movements-are-starting-converge-posing-ever-greater-risk>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

111. "Counter-Extremism: Second Report of Session 2016-17", House of Lords, p. 12

112. Haiwja, Tal Afar as of August 2017

At a glance, the circumstances between Iraq and the United Kingdom are too divergent for Prevent to be suitably applied into Iraq. Furthermore, the myriad problems described above suggest that the program suffers from a number of serious deficiencies. However, these myriad criticisms directed towards Prevent and the wider British Counter-Extremism Strategy should not be grounds to discredit the whole model but rather improve on it. This is the opinion held by counter-extremism experts such as Humera Khan and Majid Nawaz, as well as the pro-Prevent activist Kalsoon Bashir. They all acknowledge that there are many aspects of Prevent that need fixing but note that it nevertheless offers a promising and unorthodox model towards countering extremism.

Furthermore, while the circumstances of the United Kingdom and Iraq are highly divergent, one particular element of the Prevent Programme is highly applicable to Iraq: The community-centric bottom-up approach to countering extremism. The war against the Islamic State has not only devastated cities and industries; it has damaged or otherwise hollowed out many state institutions. As a result, tribal and religious organisations remain some of the strongest civil society institutions on the ground. Both tribes and religious institutions are highly hierarchical and therefore conducive towards a programme that would see community leaders such as religious figures and tribal elders deal with signs of extremism among members of their own community. Under such a model, the Iraqi Government would not need to train a vast bureaucracy it is ill-equipped to support but can rather spend resources towards identifying and training tribal and religious figures who are committed to the vision of a united Iraq regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation. The Iraqi Government would be well-suited to take advantage of the spirit of national unity that is prevalent across Iraq as a result of the defeat of the Islamic State and help promote voices of such individuals.

The author argues that the Prevent model can be further complemented with other strands of the United Kingdom's counter-terrorism strategy in the form of Pursue, Protect and Prepare, as reducing the damage and loss of life caused by terrorist attacks would consequently reduce the polarisation across the country, allowing for policies implementing de-radicalisation and reconciliation to be applied with greater ease.

Counter-Extremism Programmes in Germany and their Compatibility to Iraq

The community-centric nature of the Prevent Programme can be further bolstered by taking cues from the two counter-extremism programmes employed in Germany: EXIT and Hayat. EXIT is a de-radicalisation programme that

specifically deals with those who were adherents of neo-Nazi groups or similar right-wing extremists. EXIT takes a two-pronged approach in stigmatising extremism and hate crime while simultaneously offering members of these groups a way out. Participants of the program are offered alternative worldviews on extremist movements through societal questions and critical reflections, ultimately convincing the participants to cut ties with the groups themselves. In addition to support workers, the organisation employs psychologists and offers protection to participants in the event of retaliatory attacks¹¹³. The multi-pronged approach of EXIT puts it in a uniquely effective position to understand the underpinnings of fascist movements, as well as the best ways to discredit them. Although diametrically opposed, the Islamic State shares a number of totalitarian tropes with fascist movements. The organisation can therefore provide unique insights towards dealing with Islamist extremism.

Indeed, the second German-based counter-radicalisation programme, Hayat, was explicitly based on EXIT but is aimed at Islamist extremists in Germany. The main premise of Hayat puts families at the forefront of the de-radicalisation process on the grounds that Islamic teachings put utmost importance towards respect for one's parents. The programme also acknowledges that parents are better suited to change the minds of their children than a politician and therefore provide the parents with guidance towards how to best reach their child and convince them to abandon the extremist ideology. Like EXIT, it then provides a series of support programmes in order to normalise them back into society¹¹⁴. This programme is uniquely suitable to Iraq where familial and tribal ties play significant role in support networks and civil society.

Counter-Extremism Programmes in Morocco and their Compatibility to Iraq

While the abovementioned counter-extremism and de-radicalisation programmes offer significant guidance on how to implement a similar programme in Iraq, all of these programmes come from non-Islamic countries. Even in their most progressive state, such programs tend to approach outlier as an outlier rather than looking at it from a Muslim perspective. This is where Morocco's unique counter-extremism programme comes in. The country's counter-extremism

113. "Aims", EXIT, <www.exit-deutschland.de/english/?c=aims>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

114. Oltermann, Philip. "Crackdown on British jihadis to include 'deradicalising' scheme from Germany", The Guardian, 27-August-2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/aug/27/crackdown-british-jihadis-youths-german-hayat-home-office>>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

strategy can be traced to May 2003 when 14 suicide bombers staged synchronised attacks in Casablanca. The attacks flied in the face of the conventional logic that the country, which had long promoted itself a fount of moderate Islam, was immune to radicalisation. The Moroccan Government implemented a series of policies that overhauled family law, dramatically increased the role and status of women in society and introduced a pilot training program for female preachers called *morchidates*¹¹⁵. In conjunction, the kingdom launched an extensive overhaul of how Islam is taught, interpreted, and promulgated to its citizens. Working through its Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulamas - a council of religious scholars appointed by the King - the government formulated a response to debunk, delegitimise and discredit radical interpretations of the Koran. The project reached its full implementation with the inauguration of the Mohammed VI Institute in 2015¹¹⁶.

Although the majority of the school's students are Moroccan, the school envisages an international focus and image. Imams from a number of countries including Tunisia and Russia have studied in the school and the government is looking to internationalise the faculty even more. In addition to religious studies, the school's curriculum is made up of 30 separate subjects, divided evenly between religion and the humanities. Students thus get instruction in social science topics such as philosophy and psychology, as well as an education in the geography, history, and politics of the country where they are from. Simultaneously, vocational training is offered in four separate fields: electrical engineering, agriculture, sewing, and computer use¹¹⁷. The end goal of the school is to attract a greater international following in order "to actively help in the fight against radical Islam and to contribute to the adoption of the correct interpretation of Islam the world over"¹¹⁸. In addition to espousing a version of Islam that directly contradicts the extremist interpretations of al-Qaida and the Islamic State, the school's curriculum also allows the Imams to have a more informed view of the world that is suitable to the modern era. Furthermore, in promoting a unified interpretation of Islam, the school addresses a serious deficiency of institutionalised clergy in Sunni Islam.

For Iraq, the existence of such an educational institution represents a major

115. Berman, Ilan. "Morocco's Islamic Exports", 12-May-2016, Foreign Affairs, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-05-12/moroccos-islamic-exports>>, [Accessed 09-August-2017]

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

opportunity towards combating extremist interpretations of Islam. Across Iraq, there exist many Sunni Imams who have stood up against the Islamic State and the version of Islam it represents. However, such figures were often solitary and not part of an organised structure that provided them with material and ideological support when needed, allowing the more extremist preachers of the Islamic State to eclipse them. The creation of an organised clergy with a moderate outlook and an internally-coherent narrative that reconciles Islam with the modern world would therefore be highly instrumental towards erasing the ideological remnants of the Islamic State.

Such a model has already been proposed by Sheikh Khaled al-Mulla, a prominent Sunni Sheikh and a vehement opponent of sectarianism and religiously-motivated hatred. Like the Moroccan Government, al-Mulla has envisaged the creation of a unified and organised school of thought based on Sunni Islam and against the versions of Sunni Islam preached by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Al-Mulla proposed that in the long-run, such an institution could even be responsible for issuing uniform Friday sermons (Khutbah) across Iraq to maintain religious coherence. The author disagrees with the latter proposition and believes that such a policy could lead to the clergy losing legitimacy among the grassroots population, noting that such concerns are already present in Egypt where a similar policy was put in place¹¹⁹. However, the author believes that the idea of a unified Sunni school of thought to provide an ideologically coherent and moderate version of Sunni Islam in Iraq is a very promising idea. The author therefore recommends that the Iraqi Government identify religious figures like al-Mulla and have them assess the Mohammed VI institute in order to determine whether the counter-extremism efforts between Iraq and Morocco can be synergised.

119. “Egypt orders Muslim preachers to deliver identical weekly sermons”, Reuters, 12-July-2016, <www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-islam-idUSKCN0ZS2FI>, [Accessed 08-August-2017]

Conclusion

As this paper has displayed at length, defining what constitutes extremism and further identifying violent, non-violent extremism and counter-extremism remains an inexact science, even years after years of debates and deliberation over the terms. This paper has highlighted that the definition of these terms have differed not only between different countries, but also between the different governments of a single country. However, many of the definitions of extremism nevertheless put an emphasis on upsetting the existing, established political, economic and social order, often in a violent manner.

While finding exact definitions for extremism, violent extremism and non-violent extremism has been an elusive pursuit, security analysts and government officials have had more success in identifying common trends and patterns in identifying individuals vulnerable to extremism and at risk (or in the process of) getting radicalised. This paper has highlighted these trends and patterns as part of contextualising the subsequent chapters where the United Kingdom's Counter-Extremism Strategy has been detailed.

With the signs and processes involved in radicalisation contextualised, this paper subsequently detailed the United Kingdom's Counter-Extremism Strategy and, in conjunction, the Prevent Programme and the Channel Referral System. Details were provided as to how the British Government approaches the counter-extremism strategy, the focus of the Prevent Programme in countering Islamist extremism, which has been identified as the greatest extremist threat facing the United Kingdom. The paper further detailed how the British government identifies individuals at risk of radicalisation and offers them support, which simultaneously denying extremists a platform from which they can preach their views unchallenged.

The paper has subsequently acknowledged a number of concerns relating to the counter-extremism strategy and the Prevent Programme. Although a number of concerns surrounding censorship and practical implementation were noted, the main source of concern stemmed from the perception among the Muslim communities of Britain. The paper noted that over half of Channel referrals involve Muslims despite Muslims making some 5% of the population. Many of these referrals were over innocuous mistakes and misunderstandings and led to the programme being viewed as "toxic" by the wider public. The paper has also identified serious concerns with regards to right-wing extremism being

overlooked by the programmes in question despite numerous signs to highlight that they are becoming more organised and dangerous. Failings in these areas will need to be kept in mind if and when the British counter-extremism strategy is being adapted in a new environment.

Finally, the paper has assessed whether the British counter-extremism strategy and the Prevent Programme in particular can be applied to Iraq as it emerges from its own war against Islamist extremists. The paper has concluded that there is great promise in the community-centric approach promoted by Prevent due to familial, tribal and religious institutions being some of the most resilient and functional aspects of civil society in present-day Iraq. This paper has further identified the Moroccan religious education institutes as a promising way to bolster Iraq's religious civil society by training Imams in a comprehensive and moderate version of Islam. Similarly, the German EXIT and Hayat counter-extremism programmes have been identified as feasible additions to the British counter-extremism strategies, with a strong likelihood for their applicability within an Iraqi context.

Thus, the paper's ultimate conclusions are that the Iraqi Government has a number of promising counter-extremism policies it can borrow from to formulate its own counter-extremism strategy in Iraq after the defeat of the Islamic State. The author recommends that the government take advantage of the spirit of national unity still prevalent in Iraq in the aftermath of the militant defeat and build upon that to foster an Iraqi identity that can reconcile its many differences without being hijacked by extremist agendas.