

- There have been public meetings advocating extremist positions, some quite well attended. For example, Hizb-ut-Tahrir organised a conference entitled 'British or Muslim' conference, in September estimated to have attracted 10,000 (although some of these will have gone expecting an open debate rather than what turned out to be a one sided advocacy of extremism).
- Increasing numbers of British Muslims, often young, have needed UK consular services after being detained on suspicion of terrorist or extremist activity in other parts of the world (eg Yemen, Egypt and the US).
- Polls between November 2001 and December 2002 suggested that a relatively small, but not insignificant minority of British Muslims felt some sympathy for terrorist attacks on the USA, did not feel loyal to Britain, did not condemn British Muslims who fought against allies in Afghanistan or thought Muslims have gone too far in integrating into British society. The ICM poll published in the Guardian on 15 March 2004 recorded 13% of British Muslims as thinking that further terrorist attacks on the USA would be justified. In each case, substantial majorities took the opposite view but the existence of minorities disposed towards extremist positions cannot be ignored and needs to be better understood.

## **Context**

But we need to put this into context. We know that a large number of young Muslims are able to integrate into society, define a British Muslim identity for themselves and contribute positively to society. Anecdotal evidence suggests Muslims who have experienced life in other European countries often say that acceptance is better in the UK (this perception is likely to have been enhanced by France's decision to ban the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in schools). Neither a strong sense of Muslim identity (including a sense of community with Muslims world-wide) nor strict adherence to traditional Islamic teachings are in themselves dangerous or problematic. The number of young Muslims in Britain who are actively espousing extremist politics may be very small, though we need to get a better feel for this.

Policy objectives include persuading young Muslims that they can be Muslim and British, and that Islam is not regarded with hostility. In this context the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' is unhelpful and should be avoided, because some perfectly moderate Muslims are likely to perceive it as a negative comment on their own approach to their faith.

### **Possible Causes**

One key action point is the need to improve our evidence about the extent and causes of extremism, and of the links if any between extremist sentiment on the Muslim community and terrorist activity. At this stage all we can say is that there are a variety of issues that impact upon British Muslims, including young Muslims, and may increase the likelihood of their moving towards extremism. The factors discussed below are based partly on survey evidence but partly on the subjective impressions of Home Office and FCO officials and Muslim advisers, taking account of their contacts with Muslim leaders, clerics and academics and monitoring of publications.

### Foreign policy issues

- It seems that a particularly strong cause of disillusionment amongst Muslims including young Muslims is a perceived 'double standard' in the foreign policy of western governments (and often those of Muslim governments), in particular

Britain and the US. This is particularly significant in terms of the concept of the "Ummah", i.e. that Believers are one "nation". This seems to have gained a significant prominence in how some Muslims view HMG's policies towards Muslim countries.

- Perceived Western bias in Israel's favour over the Israel/Palestinian conflict is a key long term grievance of the international Muslim community which probably influences British Muslims.
- This perception seems to have become more acute post 9/11. The perception is that passive 'oppression', as demonstrated in British foreign policy, eg non-action on Kashmir and Chechnya, has given way to 'active oppression' – the war on terror, and in Iraq and Afghanistan are all seen by a section of British Muslims as having been acts against Islam.
- This disillusionment may contribute to a sense of helplessness with regard to the situation of Muslims in the world, with a lack of any tangible 'pressure valves', in order to vent frustrations, anger or dissent.
- Hence this may lead to a desire for a simple 'Islamic' solution to the perceived oppression/problems faced by the 'Ummah'- Palestine, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir and Afghanistan. A case in point is the March 2004 ICM poll of Muslim opinion asked "Jenny Tonge, a Liberal Democrat MP said she condemned all forms of terrorism, but if she had to live in the same situation as a Palestinian she might consider becoming a suicide bomber herself. Do you agree or disagree with her?" 47% agreed with the statement, whilst 43% disagreed.

#### Domestic issues

#### Islamophobia

- Perceived Islamophobia (particularly post-9/11) in society and the media may cause some British Muslims including young Muslims to feel isolated and alienated and in a few cases to reject democratic and multi-cultural values.
- The Cattle report identified polarisation between Pakistani/Bangladeshi and white communities as a factor in the 2001 disturbances. The young people involved in these disturbances included educated professionals as well as under privileged people
- Lack of understanding of Islam - insensitive use of language and perceptions of Islam and an ill-informed assumption that Islam's teachings are inherently extremist. Media coverage of extremist fringe groups increases this.
- Muslims perception of bias in the way counter-terrorism powers are used to stop, detain and arrest people, both at ports and in-country.

#### **Social issues**

- Attainment - Muslims are more likely than other faith groups to have no qualifications (over two fifths have none) and to be unemployed and economically inactive, and are over-represented in deprived areas. However, this is largely associated with the disadvantage of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, whereas the experience of Indian and Arab Muslims is much less disadvantaged.
- Lack of participation and representation – There is still low Muslim representation in mainstream institutions of influence, especially for women - eg in public appointments, volunteering and mainstream politics (although the Home Office Citizenship Survey 2001 suggests that low Muslim participation rates largely reflect non-faith factors such as education, economic empowerment, age and gender).

#### **Issues of identity**

- Parts of the Muslim community are still developing an understanding of how to reconcile their faith and Islamic identity with living in a secular multi-cultural society, and with modern social challenges. There is a developing critique by some within the Muslim community, both abroad and here, that traditional Islamic jurisprudence is not equipped to fulfil the needs of Muslims living in the West and needs to be developed and updated. There are tentative moves towards developing Islamic jurisprudence for Muslims living in Europe and the Western World.
- A lack of any real 'pressure valves', in order to vent frustrations/anger/dissent
- There are particular issues for young Muslim women who face some of the most complex clashes of culture. We need to think hard about the positive impact they can have with the right support.

### **Organisational issues**

- Some young Muslims are disillusioned with mainstream Muslim organisations that are perceived as pedestrian, ineffective and in many cases, as 'sell-outs' to HMG

### **Who are we dealing with?**

#### ***Demographic facts***

There are 1.6 million Muslims in Britain/the UK. About half belong to the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, which are among the most deprived educationally and economically. The remainder belong to Indian, Arabic and other ethnic communities, some of which are less deprived.

Over half of Muslims are under 25, compared with a third of the population as a whole.

Compared with the population as a whole Muslims have three times the unemployment rate<sup>1</sup>; the lowest economic activity rates<sup>2</sup>; a higher proportion of unqualified<sup>3</sup>; and a higher concentration in deprived areas.<sup>4</sup>

Reliable survey data on Muslims is scarce. One exception is new data from the Home Office Citizenship Survey 2001. On identity it revealed that faith ranked second after family. This is particularly strong amongst young people aged 16-24<sup>5</sup>.

The majority of all faith groups were satisfied with government and employers' protection of their rights. However, a significant minority of especially young Muslims (37%) were not satisfied.

Young Muslims are less likely than all faith groups to participate in civic activities (39% and 30% respectively) and Muslims are the least likely to volunteer.

The data does **not** show that faith is itself the *cause* of disadvantage<sup>6</sup> or disengagement or that they are linked with extremism. On engagement, the HOCS suggests that other factors such as economic empowerment, age and gender are more significant drivers than faith.

### *Extremism*

The Strategy Unit's Strategic Audit paper identifies three key trends

a small yet vocal minority has become radicalised and has sought to construct a relatively narrow interpretation of Islam, drawn partly from transnational and international sources

a larger group has retained an Islamic identity whilst successfully adapting to

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<sup>1</sup> 5% for the population as a whole and 15% for Muslims

<sup>2</sup> 67% for the population as a whole 48% for Muslims

<sup>3</sup> 36% for the population as a whole 43% for Muslims

<sup>4</sup> 4.4% of the population as a whole 15% of Muslims live in the 10 most deprived districts

<sup>5</sup> 74% for Muslims and 63% for Sikhs and Hindus.

<sup>6</sup> Other factors such as class, race and discrimination may be more relevant

and integrating with mainstream British society

a large group no longer identifies positively with their Muslim origins.

### ***Extremist organisations***

There is a spectrum of extremist organisations to consider, e.g. Al Muhajiroun, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as well as less organised groups who follow a particular extremist doctrine, eg jihads, radical deobandis, etc. (See Annex C for evidence). In the majority of the cases, the ideological doctrine and even the methodology are not constructs of Muslims born in the UK, rather they are the British based brands of organisations that are found in Europe and the rest of world (the majority of which originate from the Middle East and the Asian sub-continent but have bases all over Europe and the world).

Most of the structured extremist organisations, e.g. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, will not directly advocate violence. Indeed membership or sympathy with such an organisation does not in any way pre-suppose a move towards terrorism. What it may indicate is the possibility of a few of its members being open to gradual consideration of far more extremist doctrine (e.g. these 'non-violent' extremist organisations allow members or even sympathisers to contemplate opening 'Pandora's box').

However those with very extremist or even terrorist tendencies may also be put off by these extremist organisations as they may view their activities as 'pointless pontification and debate'. They may demand more direct action and less talk and hence may not become involved with them.

### ***Who joins extremist groups?***

Surveys after 9/11 provide an *indication* – though not a reliable measure – of Muslim attitudes<sup>7</sup>. There is no data on how they compare with views of other faith groups. The data shows the great majority of British Muslims (up to 85%) regarded terrorist

attacks on western targets, including the 9/11 attacks, as unjustified. The great majority (up to 87%) felt loyal to Britain. A majority felt patriotic (67%) and thought it wrong for British Muslims to fight against allies in Afghanistan (62%). A survey of young Muslims in 2001 showed strong feelings of outrage at the 9/11 attacks and that the majority believed that Islam either prohibited or discouraged such attacks.

However, a minority of Muslims defend terrorism (up to 13%). A minority did not feel loyal to Britain (up to 26%).

### ***Reasons for becoming attracted to extremism***

Some young Muslims who join extremist groups or are targeted by them are poorly educated and from deprived backgrounds.

Students and young professionals from better off backgrounds have also become involved in extremist politics and even terrorism. They provide better recruits, as they may have the capability for wider and more complex proselytising. Extremists are known to target schools and colleges, where young people may be very inquisitive but less challenging and more susceptible to extremist reasoning/arguments. There is evidence of the presence of extremist organisations on campuses and colleges (often when an organisation is named as a banned organisation on a campus, its members will set-up a society under another name - the 1924 Society, Muslim Media Forum and Muslim Cultural Society all have extremist tendencies).

Individuals who are looking for an alternative to the brand of Islam their parents may have taught them, and/or are looking for a more prominent form of identity but who have little knowledge about Islam may be ideal recruits for extremists. However this form of identity can also be non-extremist and may take the form of criminality, or other cultural/belief systems. With regards to Muslim youth who may have recently started practising, these organisations offer a fulfilment of the 'Islamic obligation' of being in a jama'ah (collective work for Islam/Muslim Ummah).

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<sup>7</sup> Six surveys were conducted by MORI, ICM, YouGov between November 2001 and March 2004 on



For those looking for a 'practical' goal or purpose to work towards in order to solve the perceived problems of the Ummah, extremist organisations/ideologies offer panaceas to all the problems of the Muslims. (e.g. the panacea offered by organisations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Al Muhajiroon is re-establishment of the 'Khilafah'- the Caliphate.)

For young Muslims looking to rebel against their taught values, the wider community or the government these groups can provide a cathartic and vocal 'pressure valve' for anxieties, frustration and helplessness felt by a number of British Muslim youth over a whole range of issues.

### **Terrorist Activity**

Intelligence indicates that the number of British Muslims actively engaged in terrorist activity, whether at home or abroad, or supporting such activity is extremely small and estimated at less than 1%.

It is difficult to generalise about the profile of young British Muslims who are attracted to Islamist terrorist activity either in the UK or overseas. Backgrounds and motivation to undertake terrorist or related activity vary. They range from foreign nationals now naturalised and resident in the UK arriving mainly from North Africa and the Middle East, to second and third generation British citizens whose forebears mainly originate from Pakistan or Kashmir. In addition, whilst many have grown up in Muslim households, a significant number come from liberal, non-religious Muslim backgrounds, or only converted to Islam in adulthood. These converts include white British nationals and those of West Indian extraction.

By and large most young extremists fall into one of two groups: well educated-undergraduates or with degrees and technical professional qualifications in engineering or IT; or under-achievers with few or no qualifications, and often a criminal background.

The former group is often targeted by extremist recruiters circulating among university-based religious or ethnic societies. Amongst the latter group some are drawn to mosques where they may be targeted by extremist preachers; others are radicalised or converted whilst in prison. However, a significant number of young radicalised British Muslims have been recruited through a single contact, often by chance, outside either of these environments. Such individuals are encouraged to maintain a low profile for operational purposes and do not develop the network of associates or political doctrines common to many other extremist Islamists.

Our understanding of the radicalisation process (what we have begun to call the "Terrorist Career Path") is still developing. Much more work needs to be done to identify the steps along the path where Government and community groups can intervene and prevent radicalisation. As our research progresses, it will inform the cross governmental work being done on engaging with the Muslim communities.

### ***Key conclusions***

Our key conclusions are

- (a) Muslim extremism matters for two separate reasons – it is a potential threat to community cohesion and a potential cause of terrorist activity.
- (b) It is important to understand the broader context and maintain perspective. Criticism of foreign policy is not confined to Muslims or minority communities. A number of Britain's faith and ethnic communities have multiple identities (eg many Hindus feel an affinity with India and many Jews with Israel) and the Government's approach to integration, which rejects assimilationism, accepts and encourages that. It is when some Muslims feel that they cannot be British and Muslim that we need to be concerned.

- (c) From available polls and anecdotal evidence, many Muslims are unhappy and angry about aspects of British and foreign policy, because they perceive it as biased against or unfair towards Muslims in the world. Palestine, the conflict in Iraq and Chechnya are just some of the issues.
- (d) Information about the state of opinion in the Muslim community is limited and generalisations need to be treated with caution. We should both monitor movements in opinion through repeated surveys or focus groups and seek to understand what causes those opinions through further research.
- (e) Parts of the Muslim community fear that the government, the media and the wider community regard them with suspicion and hostility, and feel beleaguered as a result. Some Muslims also currently feel anxious and angry about arrests and searches under anti-terrorist powers, which they perceive as being applied excessively and abusively. We should not lightly dismiss as unrepresentative the campaign on this currently being mounted by the mainly moderate Muslim Council of Britain and other organisations.
- (f) Despite these concerns, it is likely based on the 2001/02 surveys that only a minority of British Muslims hold extremist views, though the size of the minority varies according to what particular views one is measuring); and probably only a minority of those holding such views take any active part in extremist organisations like Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Al Muhajiroon.
- (g) However, we need to guard against focussing on these high profile, vocal and highly visible organisations because of as much concern from a counter-terrorist perspective are those groups which are not formally organised and have no badge or label. We do not currently know what distinguishes these minorities from the moderate majority. The Security Service has some evidence that those who go on to become involved in terrorist related activity have been radicalised as a result of associating with loose networks that revolve around a respected key individual. Indeed, many have been encouraged to retain a low profile and not to be seen to openly expose extremist views.

We do however know quite a lot about the ways in which extremist movements attract followers. A common motivation for these diverse groups may be a common need to belong and to gain a sense of purpose. Often disaffected lone individuals unable to fit into their community, will be attracted to university clubs based on ethnicity or religion, or be drawn to Mosques or preaching groups in prison through a sense of disillusionment with their current existence. Volunteering to a jihadist cause abroad, or embracing a stricter Muslim lifestyle, is often seen as an answer to this lack of purpose.

## PART II - ACTION

### **Current actions/activities/response**

#### FCO

On the FCO's side there are a number of initiatives, which directly or indirectly impact on some of the issues highlighted. These range from Ministerial outreach, customised information resources for young Muslims, participation in 'campus' debates' to sponsorship of activities of Muslim student groups. (See Annex D- FCO minute of 5 November on '*Engaging with Mainstream Islam*' & Annex E- FCO minute of 27 October on '*Islam & Europe*'). In addition to these, there are a number of horizontal activities and policies in place, which overlap on this issue.

#### British Council

The British Council through its international cultural relations activity has facilitated opportunities for young and emerging leaders of British Muslim communities to work with counterparts from around the globe. It has also supported preparatory classes in Pakistan for Imams due to take up posts in the UK.

#### Home Office

The Home Office is engaged in a series of meetings with Muslim leaders to address Muslim concerns about the use of counter-terrorism powers. It has conducted some practical interventions as well as some long-term work that aims to create a better environment for young Muslims within the UK, for example through consultations with Imams, Mosque officials and local representatives (including young people), and by developing contacts with Muslim youth organisations, assisting in DfES policies, looking into Islamic mortgages and encouraging inter-faith dialogue (see annex F).

#### Other departments

Engagement with the Muslim communities, including young Muslims, by the Education Secretary on faith issues in schools and higher education is an example of work by other Whitehall departments.

#### Muslim organisations

The mainstream Muslim community has been vocal in its public condemnation of extremism. For example, the Muslim Council of Britain expressed sympathy with the people of Spain after the Madrid bombs and has recently written to Imams calling on Muslims to report suspicions to the police. The Islamic Society of Britain and figures such as Abdal Hakim Murad of Cambridge University, Dr Manazir Ahsan of the Islamic Foundation and Dr Zaki Badawi have also spoken out.

Muslim engagement in mainstream public life politics is still under developed. There have been a few practical steps taken such as the formation by the Muslim Council of Britain of the MCB Direct information service. The involvement of the Union of Muslim Students (UMS) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) in student politics is helpful. However these activities seem to be in a fledging stage and under-resourced or else are carried out in an ad hoc manner. There are [ ] Muslim MPs and [ ] Muslim Peers, but Muslims remain under represented in public appointments.

#### **Aims of policy**

Policy should have two main aims:

- (a) to isolate extremists within the Muslim community, and to provide support to the moderates, equipping and encouraging them to oppose the extremist threat within their communities. But it is important to identify moderates correctly – some of those who are influential in the extremist world purport to be moderates.
- (b) to help prevent young Muslims from becoming ensnared or bullied into participation in terrorist or extremist activity.

The government needs to redouble its efforts to develop a more constructive relationship with the moderate majority and their representatives and leaders. So long as Muslim leaders appear defensive or hostile, and ambiguous in their condemnation of terrorism, some non-Muslims will remain suspicious and extremists will draw comfort. Mainstream Muslim religious leaders indicate that extremists use a distorted and selective interpretation of Islamic teaching to support their positions. We need to encourage moderates to challenge such positions and provide leadership.

#### **Action headings**

Our two departments are jointly taking forward a number of measures. Details are at Annex A.

The main themes are as follows:

We need to understand the evolution of the “terrorist career path” and develop a comprehensive Interventions Strategy, to enable us to turn people from the path. The Home Office, in conjunction with the security services and other government departments will be developing a program of research in this area.

More generally we need to intensify our engagement with young Muslims, in order to better understand opinion and seek to influence it.

We need to address Muslims' sense of injustice about anti-terrorist arrests and searches. The Home Secretary and Fiona Mactaggart have initiated a series of contacts with Muslim leaders to address and respond to these concerns.

The issue of foreign policy concerns of the Muslim community needs to be addressed. This is often the area of government policy which generates the most anger and sense of injustice among Muslims generally, but particularly amongst the younger generation. The FCO is already in the process of extensive engagement and outreach, and has produced a strategy on building bridges with mainstream Islam (Annex D). The Home Office is actively engaged with leaders of the Muslim community, for example around their concerns on the use of counter terrorism powers and in the wider context of the Working Together review. We need to continue to build on the momentum created by this work.

We need to focus specifically on influencing opinion among young Muslims. Mike O'Brien and Fiona Mactaggart are undertaking a number of joint meetings with Muslim students across a variety of campuses.

The government must make a more concerted effort to persuade the Muslim community that it is trusted and respected. That requires a change of language. Public challenges to Muslims to decide where their loyalties lie are counterproductive.