

# **POLICY MEMO**

Azeem Ibrahim

## **REDUCING TERRORISM OVER THE LONG TERM.**

The only way to beat terror long-term is to reduce the motivation to radicalise, and international and national trends will make it more urgent to do so.

# Summary

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- Current counterterrorism policy has emphasised military action, imprisonment, cutting off terrorists' sources of finance, and denying them safe territory. These have had limited effectiveness, and recent trends indicate that they are only short-term solutions.
- The only long-term solution is to reduce Muslims' motivation to radicalise.
- Various trends over the next decades will make this more urgent. This paper identifies trends in four areas: the changing nature of terrorism itself, demographics, geostrategy, and the British domestic situation.
- Western governments have so far failed to reduce Muslims' motivation to radicalise in part because they lack credibility on the Muslim street, sometimes being regarded as a 'contaminated brand.'
- Governments can learn from a growing body of evidence how to effectively reduce Muslims' motivation to radicalise.



## About the Author

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For seven years Azeem Ibrahim was also a reservist in the British Army's Parachute Regiment and is now serving as a Director and Policy Board Member of the United Kingdom National Defence Association.

Over the last few years Azeem Ibrahim has met and advised a number of world leaders and governments including the Prime Minister of Turkey and leaders in the Gulf states on matters ranging from geopolitics to trade and investment.

Azeem Ibrahim is also the Chairman and CEO of ECM Holdings - a conglomerate of six finance companies including a private online bank for commodity traders, a financial clearing house and a private equity hedge fund.

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# Trends in Terrorism

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## **Trend 1 - The war on terror has not reduced terror.**

Although there is no consistent measure since 2001, it is clear that the number of incidents has not fallen much. 22,000 people were killed worldwide in terrorist attacks in 2007, nearly a tenth more than 2006.<sup>1</sup> The threat to the UK is growing. In 2006, the security services estimated that there were 1,600 individuals in the country who were a direct threat.<sup>2</sup> In 2007, that number had risen to 2,000.<sup>3</sup>

## **Trend 2 - The threat of Islamist terror has changed.**

The threat of Islamist terror has undergone a paradigm shift. It used to come mainly from al Qaeda - the centralised command structure which trained, funded, armed, and planned terrorist plots from bases in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> It now comes mainly from freelance cells whom the group inspires. The trend is towards radicalised young people seeking out al Qaeda, not the other way round.<sup>5</sup> 'Self-starter' cells initiated the attacks in London in 2005, Madrid in 2004 and Casablanca in 2003. The trend towards homegrown terrorism has been identified by the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee, and intelligence services in the US, Holland, Denmark and Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

## **Trend 3 - Al Qaeda increasingly sees its mission today as fuelling radicalisation worldwide.**

It seeks to inspire as much as to organise. It has stated that it now conducts 50% of its war through the media.<sup>7</sup> Its attacks are often immediately uploaded onto the internet, edited, translated, and packaged for an audience worldwide by its dedicated media branch, al-Sahab. Its propaganda video releases are also increasing, from one every two months in 2002 to one every three days or so in 2007.<sup>8</sup> It has even launched videos designed for mobile phones.<sup>9</sup>

## **Trend 4 - Terrorism is globalising.**

Over the last ten years, terrorists' grievances have become increasingly transnational, and they have become increasingly flexible about where they are based. They have also become more skilful at using the internet and other communications technology to spread operational knowhow.<sup>10</sup>

## **Trend 5 - We understand more about Islamic radicalisation than ever before.**

Academic evidence drawn from a wide dataset shows that radicalisation normally happens in four stages.<sup>11</sup> First the individual reacts to stories of Muslim suffering around the world with moral outrage. For some, that spark will be inflamed by an interpretation which explains that suffering in the context of a wider war between Islam and the West. In the third stage, this resentment will be fuelled by bad personal experiences in Western countries, such as discrimination, inequality, or just an inability to get on despite good qualifications. The final stage is when the individual joins a terrorist network which becomes like a family closed to the outside world, which stokes the radical worldview and prepares the initiate for action and in some cases, martyrdom.

### **Conclusion 1 - The threat from terrorism today has become more fluid.**

It is made up of elements - such as ideology, local groups, and central command - which can be strong or weak in different parts of the world at different times. It has been illustrated by analogy to a plastic model of molecular structures - a ball of small individual nodes in which different parts pulse with energy and heat for a period of time, before calming down, but with no guarantee that they will not heat up again in the future.

### **Conclusion 2 - Over the long-term, governments must change their definition of success against terrorism.**

Military objectives achieved or plots foiled are insufficient. The direction of Muslim opinion around the globe is crucial. All these trends point to a long-term need to make minimising the motivation to radicalise a higher priority.

# Trends in Demographics

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Four demographic trends over the coming decades mean that there will be more Muslims around the world living in conditions which are fertile ground for radicalisation. This makes the need to reduce the motivation to radicalise more urgent.

## **Trend 1 - A bulge of young people in Islamic countries.**

Islam is now the fastest-growing religion in the world. Today, there are 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide, and by 2025 there will be 1.8 billion.<sup>12</sup> By that year, there will be 9% more Muslim males aged between 15 – 24 than there are today. That is the prime demographic for terrorist recruitment. Periods when there is a demographic bulge of young people – such as in the Islamic world now – often correlate with periods of political violence.<sup>13</sup>

**Trend 2 - Big populations hinder counterterrorism efforts** by making state surveillance and policing more difficult.<sup>14</sup> Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Egypt<sup>15</sup> – some of the fastest-growing in the world – can expect to find the task of policing terrorism grow ever harder unless motivation is reduced.

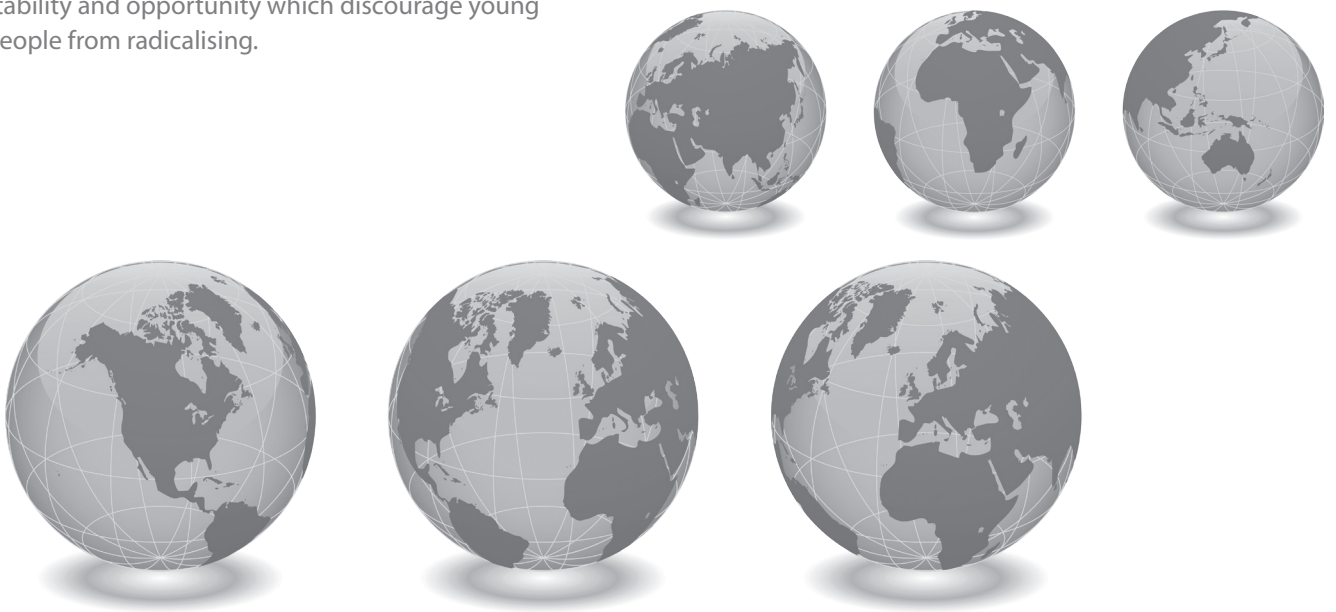
**Trend 3 - There will be many more young Muslims living in weak or failed states,** another important condition for insurgency.<sup>16</sup> It is no coincidence that Osama bin Laden chose Sudan and Afghanistan as bases. Weak states are unable to provide the security, stability and opportunity which discourage young people from radicalising.

## **Trend 4 - Islamic immigration into Europe.**

In Europe, demographic trends will make the challenge of minimising radicalisation especially urgent. Today, Muslims make up 3% of the EU population.<sup>17</sup> Over the next few decades, Europe's population will level off and an ageing workforce will begin to be replaced by immigration. Much of it will come from the growing Muslim populations which border Europe. By 2025, Muslims will make up 5 to 8% of the European population;<sup>18</sup> more if Turkey joins the EU.

### **Conclusion**

Demographic trends over the next few decades will make the challenge of reducing the motivation to radicalise more urgent. If that is not achieved, the attempts of the next generation of policymakers to do the same will be more difficult.



# Trends in Geostrategy

## **Trend 1 - The strategic conception of the task has made it harder to achieve it.**

Since 2001, the unsubtle conception of a 'war on terror' has made counterterrorism more difficult. It invokes a war metaphor which wrongly implies both that traditional military operations should be the preeminent tactic, and that a clear-cut victory against terrorism – which is after all a tactic – is achievable. It has also divided international allies which it sought to unite.

### **Conclusion 1 – We need a united strategic conception of the global challenge.**

Governments cannot address radicalisation and terror unless they are, and are seen to be, united behind one strategic conception of the challenge they face. This requires a narrative which, unlike 'the war on terror,' can win legitimacy with governments and populations alike. That necessitates working multilaterally towards articulating a long-term strategic stance against terrorism which can win support in Western and Muslim countries alike. It is in the long-term interests of all governments to take into account how they affect global Muslim opinion. This challenge will become more important as Asian countries rise.

### **Conclusion 2 – Soft power should be used to undermine the intellectual conditions in which radicalisation takes root.**

This involves discrediting the interpretations of Islam which permit the murder of innocent people. Western governments can draw media attention to authoritative Muslim religious and legal figures abroad who renounce violent jihad. This kind of tactic has been used successfully by governments in Egypt and Saudi Arabia for many years.<sup>19</sup> It would be cheap or free, and effective. By drawing attention to authentic Muslim, and sometimes ex-jihadi, authorities who renounce violence abroad, governments can reduce the motivation to radicalise, and make it harder for radical groups to recruit and grow.

An example is instructive. Dr Sayyid Imam al-Sharif is a respected jihadist thinker, whose previous works influenced leading figures in al-Qaeda. In 2007, he published a book strongly renouncing violent jihad. In an interview with the Egyptian press, he argued that his book posed an acute problem for al-Qaeda, because it had no one who is qualified from a sharia perspective to respond. The story was front-page news in many Islamic countries because they understood al-Sharif's authority with jihadis. Many Muslim scholars sided with al-Sharif, and al-Qaeda was stung into writing a two-hundred page response. But the news barely filtered through in the European and American media.<sup>20 21</sup> Western governments can learn from this.



# British Trends

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## **Trend 1 - Britain will continue to be a central focus for radical activity in Europe.**

Britain is in a unique position, for reasons that will not change soon. More British troops are deployed in Islamic countries than any other country in Europe. Britain has particularly strong links with Pakistan and India. And 15% of British Muslims are sympathetic to fundamentalist views, more than double the number in any country in continental Europe.<sup>22</sup> This makes it imperative that over the next decades, policymakers stay aware of British trends on the ground.

## **Trend 2 - The 'depurification' of radical recruitment.**

Terrorist cells used to focus on recruiting keen young religious people, often in or around Mosques. Increasingly now, they are recruiting in prisons,<sup>23</sup> and targeting recent converts and those with a history of street crime or gang culture.<sup>24</sup> As recruitment shifts from the Mosque to the street and the prison cell, deradicalisation funding must do the same if it is to stay effective. That means involving educators who can speak directly to young people, know their culture and speak their language. It could mean funding education programmes given by authoritative influential 'street' figures, perhaps ex-jihadi fighters with combat experience who have renounced the ideology. Existing organisations like this with the right leadership, such as the Active Change Foundation in Waltham Forest in north London,<sup>25 26 27</sup> have a successful track record.

## **Trend 3 - Ongoing internal divisions in the Muslim community.**

The Muslim community is divided, and there is little evidence that it will start to speak with one voice in the short-term. Whilst some divisions are familiar – radical and moderate, different countries of origin, different schools of religious tradition – some of the subtler divisions are likely to hinder prevention programmes too. The generation gap is one example. Kids born here to parents born abroad often feel the tension of having one culture and identity at home and another on the street. Policymakers must ensure that the generation of leaders which gets the 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) funding are equipped to understand the generation they want to reach.

### **Conclusion 1 - There should be some independent oversight of the effect of 'Preventing Violent Extremism' funding**

to ensure that it does not exacerbate communal divisions.

### **Conclusion 2 - Policymakers must accept that high-profile government involvement will sometimes be a help and sometimes a hindrance.**

Initiatives are more likely to be effective when they work with, rather than against, loyalties felt in the Muslim community. Often, the young people who they want to reach will see the government as a contaminated brand. When they see that it is involved in bolstering elements of moderate Muslim leadership, they will regard that leadership as less authentic as a result.<sup>28</sup> If the PVE strategy is to work, government will have to be sensitive about how its involvement is viewed on the streets, and choose carefully when it is helpful to make its involvement high-profile.

### **Conclusion 3 - The need to manage public expectations.**

The public are accustomed to headlines about terrorist plots thwarted, arrests made, and convictions secured, but prevention is different. Policymakers must be clear from the start that successful prevention will be less perceptible. Success will mean the quiet changing of minds, the dwindling of traffic to radical websites, and ultimately, fewer homegrown attacks being attempted. But if this is not said publicly, then in time, if radical Islam drifts from the centre of public concern, spending taxpayers' money on bolstering moderate opinion could become politically contentious. Policymakers should pre-empt these objections by building on the wide public support for measures to prevent terrorism to widen public acceptance for funding moderate Islam.

# ACTION POINTS

The long-term demographic, geostrategic, and domestic trends all point to the same conclusion: the key to preventing violent extremism is minimising the motivation to radicalise. Short and medium-term action points include:

- 1** Governments must redefine success against terrorism. Military objectives achieved or plots foiled are insufficient. A decline in Muslim radicalisation is crucial. A new US presidency will provide an unprecedented opportunity to prioritise this.
- 2** Western governments should direct their national media towards ex-jihadi Muslim scholars who renounce violence, because they can influence jihadi opinion on the ground.
- 3** In Britain, there should be some independent oversight of the effect of 'Preventing Violent Extremism' funding to ensure that it does not exacerbate communal divisions or cause other perverse incentives.
- 4** In Britain, government must be sensitive about when to make its involvement with the recipients of PVE funding high-profile, so they do not compromise the perceived authenticity of the moderate Muslim leadership they seek to support.
- 5** In Britain, policymakers must manage public expectations about what successful prevention will look like. This should include building on the wide public support for measures to prevent terrorism to widen public acceptance for funding moderate Islam.



# Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> <http://wits.nctc.gov/reports/crot2007nctcannexfinal.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page374.html>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/Page562.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Hoffman: *Inside Terrorism*, (Columbia University Press 2006), p. 283
- <sup>5</sup> [http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com\\_rokzine&view=article&id=37](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com_rokzine&view=article&id=37)
- <sup>6</sup> [http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning\\_og\\_dokumentation/Home\\_grown\\_terrorism\\_and\\_Islamist\\_radicalisation\\_in\\_Europe\\_-\\_an\\_assessment\\_of\\_influencing\\_factors\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/fileadmin/downloads/Forskning_og_dokumentation/Home_grown_terrorism_and_Islamist_radicalisation_in_Europe_-_an_assessment_of_influencing_factors__2_.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2373915>
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/23/AR2008062302135.html>
- <sup>9</sup> <http://www.newser.com/story/15716/al-qaeda-launches-cell-phone-videos.html>
- <sup>10</sup> <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr80.html>
- <sup>11</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008)
- <sup>12</sup> A Demographic Perspective on the Muslim World, Gavin W Jones, in the *Journal of Population Research*, Vol 23, Number 2, Nov 2006
- <sup>13</sup> 'A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence,' *International Studies Quarterly*, 2006 Sept, 50 (3) 607 – 630
- <sup>14</sup> James D Fearon and David D Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War' *American Political Science Review* 97, no 1 (2003) 75 - 90
- <sup>15</sup> [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=3835](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3835)
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.k-state.edu/media/newsreleases/landonlect/haydentext408.html>
- <sup>18</sup> [http://handshake.newsvine.com/\\_news/2007/09/08/949301-headcount-dispels-lurid-vision-of-eurabia](http://handshake.newsvine.com/_news/2007/09/08/949301-headcount-dispels-lurid-vision-of-eurabia)
- <sup>19</sup> [http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com\\_rokzine&view=article&id=18&Itemid=54](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com_rokzine&view=article&id=18&Itemid=54)
- <sup>20</sup> [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa\\_fact\\_wright?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/02/080602fa_fact_wright?currentPage=all)
- <sup>21</sup> [http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com\\_rokzine&view=article&id=18&Itemid=54](http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com_rokzine&view=article&id=18&Itemid=54)
- <sup>22</sup> <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/48/in-great-britain-muslims-worry-about-islamic-extremism>
- <sup>23</sup> [http://www.usip.org/muslimworld/projects/muslim\\_youth/uk\\_report.html](http://www.usip.org/muslimworld/projects/muslim_youth/uk_report.html)
- <sup>24</sup> [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2007/0205\\_terrorism.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2007/0205_terrorism.html)
- <sup>25</sup> [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/camilla\\_cavendish/article2062060.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/camilla_cavendish/article2062060.ece)
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.activechangefoundation.org/staff-profile>
- <sup>27</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/analysis/transcripts/07\\_08\\_08.txt](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/programmes/analysis/transcripts/07_08_08.txt)
- <sup>28</sup> <http://bradfordmuslim.blogspot.com/2007/07/reviewing-prevent-agenda.html>

the 1990s, the number of people aged 65 and over in the United Kingdom has increased from 11.2 million to 13.4 million (20% of the population). The number of people aged 75 and over has increased from 3.4 million to 4.6 million (12% of the population).

There are a number of reasons for the increase in the number of people aged 65 and over. The main reason is the increase in life expectancy. The average life expectancy at birth in the United Kingdom has increased from 72 years in 1950 to 77 years in 2000. The increase in life expectancy has been due to a number of factors, including improvements in medical care, better nutrition, and a healthier lifestyle.

The increase in life expectancy has also led to an increase in the number of people aged 75 and over. The average life expectancy at age 75 in the United Kingdom has increased from 12 years in 1950 to 16 years in 2000.

The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over has led to a number of challenges for society. One of the main challenges is the need for more social care services. The number of people aged 65 and over who are dependent on others for their care has increased from 1.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2000.

Another challenge is the need for more housing for older people. The number of people aged 65 and over who live in private rented accommodation has increased from 1.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2000.

The increase in the number of people aged 65 and over has also led to a number of opportunities. One of the main opportunities is the need for more employment opportunities for older people. The number of people aged 65 and over who are employed has increased from 1.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2000.

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