

# Prevent Strategies: Time to Re-Brand them and Minimise Divisiveness

## Abstract

This article examines Prevent strategies in a number of states that were introduced to help individuals who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. Examining issues related to early Prevent strategies from their introduction related to focusing on Islamist extremism it discusses issues related to the early strategies created divisiveness in society resulting in Muslim communities becoming suspect communities and the problems this caused. Even though they have developed and been amended since, as this article demonstrates, there are still flaws in the various state's Prevent strategies that leads to the submission that Prevent needs to be re-branded with greater support to staff in the agencies involved in implementation of the strategy and to emphasise the point Prevent is a pre-criminal process designed to help and support those referred to those agencies under the Prevent strategies.

## Review Article

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## Introduction

Recent terrorist attacks have once again highlighted a major concern for many states regarding the ability of certain terrorist groups have in influencing and converting individuals to their cause. This influence ranges from inspiring individuals by drawing them towards terrorist activity that includes joining these groups in conflict zones around the world, to carry out attacks in the group's name in their home state or to simply provide support for the group. Unfortunately we have witnessed this impact of this influence these groups have in the recent terrorist attacks in Paris November 2015 to the most recent in Manchester May 2017. These attacks ranged from bombings, the use of small arms fire and driving vehicles into large crowds of people. While a number of states had suffered prolonged domestic terrorist conflicts like the UK with the 1968 – 1997 Irish Troubles, it was the international reach Islamist inspired terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and Islamic State had that has been problematic for states to deal with effectively. This problem has been exacerbated with the increase in electronic communications, ranging from social media sites, websites and sophisticated mobile phones that terrorist groups have exploited, in particular Islamic State to use as recruitment tools to their cause. As a result many states introduced Prevent strategies to help individuals who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

This article will examine the aims behind Prevent strategies that have been introduced in a number of states, where a key aim is to help individuals at a pre-criminal level before they get too involved in terrorist activity. By involving communities and public bodies the hope is that in certain vulnerable communities the strategies can build up sufficient resilience to the draw of terrorist causes. The article will cover the problems and ultimate failures of the early prevent strategies. In essence the main problem with the early strategies was by focusing on violent extremism linked to the Islamist ideology, which resulted in creating a divisiveness

in society with Muslim communities being perceived as a suspect population. This article will argue that prevent strategies should cover all forms of extremism, provide greater support for staff in agencies involved in Prevent and it needs re-branding to help those who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. The article will argue that Prevent strategies should cover all forms of extremism, not just the Islamist narrative, provide greater support for staff in agencies involved in Prevent and it needs re-branding to help those who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

## The Aim of Prevent Strategies

In terms of countering terrorism, Prevent strategies are a relatively recent introduction by states in dealing with terrorist activity. These strategies apply to a pre-criminal stage where the main aim is to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. The 2004 Madrid bombing and the killing of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gough also in 2004, along with the London bombing in 2005 were watershed moments for a number of European states in reevaluating their counter-terrorism policies<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the Prevent strand of the UK's terrorism policy CONTEST was implemented. Prevent is aimed at deterring the vulnerable being drawn into terrorism became a much stronger element as measures to tackle the 'home grown' terrorist<sup>2</sup>. Along with

<sup>1</sup>Briggs, R. (2010) 'Community engagement for counterterrorism: lessons for the United Kingdom' *International Affairs* 86(4) 971-981, p.972, Vidino, L and Brandon, J (2012) 'Europe's experience in countering radicalisation: approaches and challenges' *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 7(2) 163-179, pp.163-164, O'Toole, T., DeHanas D. and Modood, T. (2012) 'Balancing tolerance, security and Muslim engagement in the United Kingdom: the impact of the 'Prevent' agenda' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 5(3), 373-389, p.373, Staniforth, A. (2014) *Preventing Terrorism and Violent Extremism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.167.

<sup>2</sup>Rogers, P. (2008) 'Contesting and Preventing Terrorism: On the Development of the UK Strategic Policy on Radicalisation and Community resilience' *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 3(2), 38-61, pp.44-46.

the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway introduced a comprehensive national strategy to prevent the radicalisation of those more vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, with other European states developing a less comprehensive programme led at local level<sup>3</sup>. One example of the strategy being led at local level is Germany where Berlin authorities adopted an institutionalised format and created the Islam Forum Berlin<sup>4</sup>. Similar government responses to the radicalising processes have had were also considered in other states. Following the 2003 Bali bombing by Al Qaeda that resulted in the deaths of many Australian tourists, the Australian government developed its Prevent strategy to develop its resilience within its communities. Resilience is designed to prevent the growth of home grown terrorism with programmes and activities focusing largely on social harmony, the promotion of Australian democratic values and the integration of 'suspect' communities into broader Australian society<sup>5</sup>.

The European Union (EU) also examined methods of adopting Prevent strategies in countering terrorism. The EU was concerned over the diverse approaches to integration, in particular Muslim communities, among its Member States. Examples of the lack of uniformity in approaches by Member States ranged from the UK embracing multiculturalism, Germany and Spain doing little to integrate their Muslim communities, with France eschewing multiculturalism and offering citizenship to Muslims only if they embraced the French language and French norms<sup>6</sup>. In September 2005 the EU Commission issued a document to be considered by EU leaders in formulating their Prevent strategies. The EU was explicit that extremism should not just solely on religious extremism: "The ideologies and propaganda have varied and included extremism of different types - whether from the extreme left or right, anarchist and religious or in many cases nationalist. All of these groups have tried to terrorise democratic states to concede political transformations by non-democratic means. ...The Commission believes that there is no such thing as "Islamic terrorism", nor "catholic" nor "red" terrorism. None of the religions or democratic political choices of European citizens tolerates, let alone justifies, terrorism. *The fact that some individuals unscrupulously attempt to justify their crimes in the name of a religion or an ideology cannot be allowed in any way and to any extent whatsoever to cast a shadow upon such a religion or ideology*"<sup>7</sup>.

As its Member States introduced Prevent strategies focused solely on violent extremism emanating from extreme Islamist ideology, it appears that the EU's recommendation to apply

Prevent strategies to include all extremist ideologies that pose a threat got lost. The UK's Prevent strategy has been influential in the development of other states strategies, including Australia, Canada and the US<sup>8</sup>. The main focus of Prevent strategies is to deal with factors that pose the greatest risk of a person being radicalised. In doing so Prevent strategies do not solely rely on the police to apply the strategy, it is a multi-agency approach combining authorities and community groups. In achieving this Prevent strategies look to reduce the risk of individuals succumbing to extremism<sup>9</sup>. The objective contained in Prevent strategies to support this is in states responding to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat they face from those promoting it<sup>10</sup>. In most of these strategies it is believed this can be achieved by governments working with communities in order to build their resilience to the threats and hazards an extremist ideology can pose to state security<sup>11</sup>. The approach taken by Australia's Prevent strategy is to challenge the threat an extremism ideology poses through communities working together with Australian governments to improve social cohesion through which individuals vulnerable to being drawn to terrorism can be identified and diverted from the risk<sup>12</sup>.

The US' Prevent strategy builds on this as the US government sees well informed and equipped families, local communities and local institutions as the best defence against the dangers extremist ideology pose<sup>13</sup>, saying:

'Communities are best placed to recognize and confront the threat because violent extremist are targeting their children, families and neighbors. Rather than blame particular

<sup>3</sup>Vidino and Brandon *supra* note [1], p.164.

<sup>4</sup>Vermeulen, F. (2014) 'Suspect Communities - Targeting Violent Extremism at local Level: Polices of Engagement in Amsterdam, Berlin and London' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26(3), 286-306, p.297

<sup>5</sup>Aly, A., Balbi, A and Jacques, C. (2015) 'Rethinking countering violent extremism: implanting the role of civil society' *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 10(1) 3-13, p.8.

<sup>6</sup>Gallis, P. et al (2005) 'Muslims in Europe: Integration Polices in Selected Countries' 18th November 2005 Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress available at <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/testimony/332.pdf> [accessed 12th April 2016], p.2.

<sup>7</sup>Commission of the European Communities (2005) Terrorist recruitment: addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation, Brussels 21.09.2005, COM(2005) 313 final retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52005DC0313&from=EN> [accessed 12th April 2016], p.11.

<sup>8</sup>Will McCants and Clinton Watts (2012) 'US Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism: An Assessment' available at [http://www.fpri.org/docs/media/McCants\\_Watts\\_-\\_Countering\\_Violent\\_Extremism.pdf](http://www.fpri.org/docs/media/McCants_Watts_-_Countering_Violent_Extremism.pdf) [accessed 1st October 2016], Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle and Andrew Zammit (2016) 'What is countering violent extremism? Exploring CVE policy and practice in Australia' *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8(1), 6-24, p.14, Naureen Fink, Peter Romaniuk and Rafia Barakat (2013) 'Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming' available at [http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Fink\\_Romaniuk\\_Barakat\\_EVALUATING-CVE-PROGRAMMING\\_20132.pdf](http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Fink_Romaniuk_Barakat_EVALUATING-CVE-PROGRAMMING_20132.pdf) [accessed 1st October 2016], p.5.

<sup>9</sup>HM Government (2011) 'CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism' London: The Stationary Office, p.59, Government of Canada (2013) 'Building resilience Against Terrorism: Canada's Counter-terrorism Strategy' available at <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrsc/pblctns/rsln-c-gnst-trrrsm/rsln-c-gnst-trrrsm-eng.pdf> [accessed 23rd August 2016], p.15.

<sup>10</sup>HM Government, *supra* note [9], p.62, Government of Canada, *supra* note[9], p. 15, Council of Australian Governments (2015) 'Australia's Counter-terrorism Strategy: Strengthening Our Resilience' available at <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:EJ0xtNiSIK8J:https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Media-and-publications/Publications/Documents/Australias-Counter-Terrorism-Strategy-2015.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk> [accessed 15th July 2016], p.7.

<sup>11</sup>Dalgaard-Neilson, A. and Schak, P. (2016) 'Community Resilience to Militant Islamism: Who and What? An Explorative Study of resilience in Three Danish Communities' *Democracy and Security* 12(4), 319-327, p. 309

<sup>12</sup>Council of Australian Governments, *supra* note [10], p.10.

<sup>13</sup>The White House (2011) 'Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States' available at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering\\_local\\_partners.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/empowering_local_partners.pdf) [accessed 1st October 2016], pp.2-3.

communities, it is essential that we find ways to help them protect themselves. To do so, we must continue to ensure that all Americans understand that they are an essential part of our civic life and partners in our efforts to combat violent extremist ideologies and organizations that seek to weaken our society<sup>14</sup>. Adopting a similar approach, in its Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Canadian government believes this will bolster the resilience of communities to violent extremism and radicalisation<sup>15</sup>.

### Radicalised, Alienated or Marginalised towards Violent Extremism: It's a Muslim Thing

As early Prevent strategies were introduced four or five years following the Al Qaeda attacks on the US in September 2001 (more commonly referred to as 9/11) and within a couple of years of Al Qaeda's inspired bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London 2005 could explain why many states focused on Islamist extremism and ignored other forms of extremism. Following the US' response to 9/11 being to declare a war on terror, these three tragic events were all perceived as part of this ongoing war. As a result, this phrase constructed in the public imagination a cultural clash between the progressive West and culturally resistant Islam<sup>16</sup>. It was not just in the public imagination was this concept present, it was also present in government departments responsible for drafting early Prevent strategies as many initial prevent strategies singled out Muslim communities as being vulnerable to radicalisation and susceptible to isolation and marginalisation<sup>17</sup>. By implicitly focusing on reforming the values and attitudes of British Muslims, the UK's initial Prevent strategy launched in June 2008<sup>18</sup> alienated many Muslims who objected to the stigmatising effects of this focus. This is due in part to many Muslims seeing Prevent as demonising them and holding all of them as responsible for terrorism<sup>19</sup>. By having such a narrow focus the Prevent strategy not only alienated Muslim communities, it resulted in many Muslims joining Islamist terrorist groups<sup>20</sup>.

This was evident in the well-meaning but misguided strategy document issued by the UK's Department for Communities and Local Government on preventing violent extremism, where the aim was to win 'hearts and minds'<sup>21</sup>. The document states the challenge in tackling the threat posed by Islamist groups is not

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p.3.

<sup>15</sup>Government of Canada (2013) 'Building Resilience Against Terrorism: Canada's Counter-terrorism Strategy' available at <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/rslnc-gnst-trrrsm/rslnc-gnst-trrrsm-eng.pdf> [accessed 20th September 2016], pp.15-16.

<sup>16</sup>Aly, Balbi and Jacques, *supra* note [5], p.6.

<sup>17</sup>Aly, A. (2013) The policy response to home-grown terrorism: reconceptualising Prevent and Resilience as collective resistance, *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 8(1) 2-18, p.10.

<sup>18</sup>Briggs *supra* note [1], p.975.

<sup>19</sup>O'Toole, De Hanas and Modood *supra* note [1], p.377.

<sup>20</sup>Malik, M. (2008) 'Engaging with Extremists' *International Review* 22(1), 85-104, p.97, Duffy, D. (2009) Alienated radicals and detached deviants: what do the lessons of the 1970 Falls Curfew and the alienation-radicalisation hypothesis mean for current British approaches to counter-terrorism?, *Policy Studies* 30(2), 127-142, p.138.

<sup>21</sup>Communities and Local Government (2007) 'Preventing violent extremism - winning hearts and minds' London: Department for Communities and Local Government retrieved from <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/DownloadDocumentsFile.aspx?recordId=133&file=PDFversion> [accessed 12th April 2016].

about a clash of civilisations or a struggle between Islam and "the West"<sup>22</sup>. Following this claim, the rest of the document covers the potential threat emanating from the Muslim community. This is evident in the priorities it set in broadening the provision of citizenship education in supplementary schools and madrassahs<sup>23</sup> and as violent extremists exploit a lack of understanding of Islam in promoting faith understanding in the education system<sup>24</sup>. While this may be true in relation to Islamist groups, one can understand the concerns of the Muslim community in being singled out as there is no mention of other forms of extremist activity that poses a threat. As a result, by creating a distinct other, this strategy did not conclusively treat the problem of detachment of state from non-state<sup>25</sup>.

Between 2005 - 2010 Prevent and Resilience strategies main focus was on countering the radicalising of Muslims to Islamist causes. The 2008 UK Government's strategy document on countering international terrorism was clear that the principal threat it faced came from radicalised individuals using a distorted and unrepresentative interpretation of Islam to justify violence<sup>26</sup>. As a result, the whole document focuses on Islam and the role of Muslim communities in the UK. While this is only recent history, context has to be considered when looking at the official documentation during this period. The UK was not alone in only identifying the Islamist threat and discounting other forms of extremism that pose a potential threat to national security. The US' 2003 strategy for combating terrorism has a goal of diminishing conditions terrorists seek to exploit. The strategy recognises that factors such as poverty, deprivation, social disenfranchisement and unresolved political disputes can result in individuals being vulnerable to being radicalised to terrorist causes.

However the US' 2003 strategy does not look at how it can combat this threat internally through its public bodies and community groups, it looks externally as to how through its foreign policy such as the US-Middle East partnerships as to how it can diminish these factors<sup>27</sup>. Another example is the Dutch 2007 Action plan on preventing the radicalisation of people at risk of slipping away from Dutch society and democratic legal order is not really generic in relation to extremism Its main focus is on young Dutch Muslims concerned about their identity as they look for guidance in what it is to be a Muslim in today's world<sup>28</sup>. Adopting these approaches only serves to reinforce the Islamist extremist threat Western states faced at that time. Underpinning this focus on Islamism was due to the Al Qaeda inspired attacks carried out in Western states from 2001-2005, attacks carried out

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p.6.

<sup>25</sup>Duffy, D. (2009) Alienated radicals and detached deviants: what do the lessons of the 1970 Falls Curfew and the alienation-radicalisation hypothesis mean for current British approaches to counter-terrorism? *Policy Studies* 30(2), 127-142, p.139.

<sup>26</sup>HM Government "Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy: July 2008" Cm 6888, available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6888.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6888.pdf) [accessed 19th April 2016], p.6.

<sup>27</sup>US Government (2003) National Strategy For Combating Terrorism, available at [https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/Counter\\_Terrorism\\_Strategy.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/Counter_Terrorism_Strategy.pdf) [accessed 12th April 2016], pp.22-24.

<sup>28</sup>Vidino and Brandon, *supra* note 1, p.165.



without warning, targeting civilians that resulted in high death rates.

### The Divisiveness of Early Prevent/Resilience Strategies Related to Identifying Extremism

Gallis et al's study of integration policies in Europe existing in 2005 revealed that government policies can have the opposite impact on what they are trying to achieve. They found that at that time the policies actually contributed to alienation, with the UK's battle for Muslim hearts and minds resulting in Muslims believing such policies were unfair against the Muslim community.<sup>29</sup> As the early Prevent strategies were mainly implicitly, but sometimes explicitly focused on reforming the values and attitudes of British Muslims as a whole, it alienated many UK Muslims who objected to the stigmatisation of these early strategies<sup>30</sup>. Kundnani's 2009 empirical study in the impact of the UK's Prevent strategy reveals scathing views and responses from various members of the UK's Muslim community resulting in a fairly overwhelming rejection of Prevent. What stands out in this study regarding the impact of the early Prevent strategies is the divisiveness it created. This ranged from where some mosques took advantage of Prevent money to resource their libraries, but once its members found how it was financed they did not get involved<sup>31</sup>. Perhaps more disturbing is the response by younger Muslims to Prevent in Kundnani's report. A manager of voluntary sector said that his organisation became opposed to dealing with Prevent as the young people it dealt with were not 'buying' into Muslims working against Muslims with the worker saying: 'This will only lead to more extremism. [Prevent] has created mistrust and organisations like ours are consequently devalued. Our organisation is now under scrutiny because we are opposed to getting involved with the Prevent agenda'<sup>32</sup>.

A manager of a youth project that worked with Prevent said young Muslims have a large degree of animosity towards the strategy and there is a stigma attached to those who accept Prevent funding, seeing it as 'dirty money'<sup>33</sup>. While there is evidence revealing that one mistake with the UK's early Prevent strategies was in focusing on Muslim communities and the Islamic connection with terrorism, another mistake was in how it was policed. The main concern centres on allegations that Prevent is another method open to the police for intelligence gathering. Kundnani's Report claims Prevent projects were being used to 'trawl for intelligence' and that many intelligence analyst were in place to do so. His research suggests a major objective of Prevent is to foster close relations between counter-terrorism policing and non-policing local providers to facilitate information on individuals whose opinions are considered as extreme and on the local Muslim population in general adding: 'The elaborate "mapping" of Muslim communities is then used not just for the investigations of criminal activity but also to identify areas, groups and individuals that are "are risk" of extremism'<sup>34</sup>.

Included in the examples he provides to support this includes UK's Security Service (MI5) officers harassing Muslim youth

<sup>29</sup>Gallis, *supra* note [6], pp.20-21.

<sup>30</sup>O'Toole et al, *supra* note [1], p.377.

<sup>31</sup>Kundnani, A. (2009) Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism, London: Institute of race relations available at <http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/spooked.pdf> [accessed 13th April 2016], p.25.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid*, p.26.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid*, p.28.

workers to become informants and in another project Prevent funding included free IT facilities at a youth centre to enable the police to monitor websites people were visiting<sup>35</sup>. Another incident that damaged the role of the police involvement in Prevent was the evidence presented to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into preventing violent extremism that a West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit officer (who are normally working in the Pursue strand of the UK's CONTEST programmes that is involved in investigation and arrest of terrorist suspects) was permanently seconded to manage Prevent work in the Birmingham area raising further suspicions about surveillance, transparency, accountability and local democracy<sup>36</sup>. This led to a Birmingham community activist to comment that this appointment was controversial leading to the suspicion that his involvement in Prevent projects was security led as well as being intelligence led<sup>37</sup>. In response to this allegation Birmingham City Council rejected any notions of secrecy in its approach. The Council said that West Midlands Police Security and Partnership officers work within communities as part of the Counter-Terrorism Unit to assist in delivering the Prevent Agenda to provide an overt, visible and accessible link between covert counter-terrorism function, the police, communities and partners<sup>38</sup>.

In 2009 media reporting brought these suspicions of the role of the police in Prevent into the public arena. The BBC's *Panorama* programme reported intelligence gathering was being carried out by the police in Prevent<sup>39</sup> and the UK newspaper *The Guardian* made claims that intelligence was being gathered as part of the Prevent programme saying: 'Serious concerns that the Prevent programme is being used at least in part to "spy" on Muslims have been voiced not just by Islamic groups, but youth workers, teachers and others. Some involved in the programme have told *The Guardian* of their fears that they are being co-opted into spying'<sup>40</sup>. The direct involvement of the police in core services delivered by local authorities, the police role in funding decisions and the key Prevent function of mapping Muslim communities muddied perceptions about neighbourhood policing. This led to questions being asked if Prevent was directly tied to background intelligence gathering. This suspicion by the wider community was damaging the police role in Prevent. As Birt observed: 'It has raised questions about how to preserve relationships of trust, confidentiality and professional integrity for those working with disadvantaged communities, and particularly with young Muslim people. ... [I]t has raised questions of police interference in the political relationships between local authorities and Muslim communities'<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid*, p.29.

<sup>36</sup>House of Commons (2010) Preventing Violent Extremism – Sixth Report of Session 2009-10 HC 65, London: Stationary Office Limited available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/65/65.pdf> [accessed 13th April 2016], p.12.

<sup>37</sup>O'Toole et al, *supra* note [1], p.378.

<sup>38</sup>House of Commons, *supra* note [36], p.12.

<sup>39</sup>Kundnani, *supra* note [31], p.28.

<sup>40</sup>Dodd, V. (2009) Government anti-terrorism strategy 'spies' on innocent: data on politics, sexual activity and religion gathered by government *The Guardian* 16th October 2009, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/16/anti-terrorism-strategy-spies-innocents> [accessed 13th April 2016].

<sup>41</sup>Birt, Y. (2009) Promoting Virulent Envy?, *The RUSI Journal*, 154(4) 52-58, p.56.

While the police response to the negative media reporting on Prevent was that it was not a 'Trojan Horse' dedicated to intelligence gathering, rather it is a strategy aimed at blocking radicalisation and reducing the supply of terror recruits<sup>42</sup>, the damage to and suspicion of the police's role in Prevent was done. The residue of this damage has not disappeared with the recently revised Prevent strategy. In 2015 a report in *The Guardian* had a former senior Metropolitan Police senior officer claiming that Prevent is a 'toxic brand' that is 'widely mistrusted'<sup>43</sup>. Although this claim was denied by the president of the National Association of Muslim Police, these suspicions remain and appear to be deepening. As the UK Government has revised the Prevent, placed a duty on staff in public bodies to report those they feel are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism on a statutory footing under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and is proposing to introduce a Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill, the role of the police is key in ensuring Prevent is successful. It is not now not simply a case for damage limitation, but this myth and damaging suspicion must be dispelled and clarity given regarding what the role of the police in Prevent is. In their assessment of the US' strategy for countering violent extremism McCants and Watts found problems similar to that encountered in the UK. By focusing on countering violent extremism strategy in the US Muslim population to build a resilience by inoculating them against Islamist propaganda, they say this approach assumes that American Muslims are susceptible to Islamist propaganda and, as a result, risks alienating the Muslim community.<sup>44</sup> They add the US is not fighting a subversive Muslim insurgency in its homeland and the call to win hearts and minds is unnecessary as: 'American Muslim hearts and minds, while likely irritated by the incessant scrutiny of their communities, have not been lost'<sup>45</sup>.

The assessment is highly critical of the US strategy as it sees it sending the wrong signal to Muslim communities as there is a subliminal message that Muslims are a potential threat and risks perpetuating the 'us-versus-them' dichotomy the White House was trying to prevent.<sup>46</sup> Having a central government-centric approach and the resultant problems occurring from this to Prevent strategies is a global issue. In their study on the Danish strategy Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack found that government-centric strategies lack credibility and that communities and local governments have a 'better feel' to counter the attraction of extremist networks at local level<sup>47</sup>. It was the analysis of their research data that led to this conclusion as they found an existence of a 'trust deficit' between Danish government authorities and the communities, in particular the Muslim community, as 'tough talking' on extremism limited local government's ability to tailor solutions to local conditions<sup>48</sup>.

Studies on Australia's strategy on countering violent extremism reflect the problems inherent in Prevent strategies based on

<sup>42</sup>BBC (2009) UK to shift anti-terror strategy, BBC News, 16th February 2009, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7889631.stm> [accessed 13th April 2016].

<sup>43</sup>Halliday, J. and Dodd, V. (2015) UK anti-radicalisation Prevent strategy a 'toxic brand', *The Guardian*, 9th March 2015, retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/09/anti-radicalisation-prevent-strategy-a-toxic-brand> [accessed 13th April 2016].

<sup>44</sup>McCants and Watts, *supra* note [8], p.3.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>47</sup>Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. and Schack, P., *Supra* note [11], p.310.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid*, pp.32-322.

government interventions on winning 'hearts and minds'. Aly's study is critical of states that classify their Muslim population between moderate and non-moderate Muslims, where moderate Muslims are those who support democracy, recognise human rights, have a respect for diversity and an acceptance of a pluralist society. Aly found through categorising Muslim populations, where moderate Muslims are not only promoted as the acceptable face of Islam within wider society, but by focusing on the Muslim community's involvement in Prevent strategies can be counterproductive. The reason for this is it positions good Muslims over bad Muslims with the by-product being a reinforcement of the extreme Islamist narrative<sup>49</sup>. In Harris-Hogan, Barrelle and Zammit's study, where the main focus is on Australia's countering violent extremism strategy and practice, they found a having a broad approach like this makes such strategies ineffective. They say by designating socially marginalised sections of Australian Muslim population as 'vulnerable communities' risks stigmatising and labelling the whole of the Muslim population as a national security problem<sup>50</sup>. As Grossman and Tahiri observe, the danger is this produces a counter-narrative risking the erosion of a fragile sense of social cohesion and intercultural harmony and a backlash against Muslim communities, especially when terrorism awareness is heightened<sup>51</sup>. Where this occurs they found the majority of their research respondents saying it risked driving less resilient Muslims communities down the path of reactive radicalisation<sup>52</sup>.

While introduced with good intentions to support the Muslim communities within states that introduced Prevent strategies, by focusing on the violent extremism linked to the Islamist ideology an unfortunate and unintended secondary result is the resultant divisiveness in society. As the studies into the early Prevent strategies found, this divisiveness fuelled not only the rhetoric of the Islamist extremists, it has correlatively led to the adverse effect in fuelling extreme far right attitudes towards all members of the Muslim community where they are perceived as a dangerous, suspect community that threatens national security. Sensationalist print media reporting of the threat individuals inspired by the narrative espoused by Islamist groups such as Islamic state or Al Qaeda has only served to make Muslims a pariah community in many people's eyes. As such terms such as radicalised and alienated are frequently linked to individuals associated with Islamist groups and communities they come from. An understanding of issues related to these terms are important if individuals or communities are to be labelled as suspect or dangerous.

### Problems Associated with the terms Radicalisation and Alienation

There are problems associated with states defining the term radicalisation. The UK government's 2006 strategy saw radicalisation as: '... a process whereby certain experiences and

<sup>49</sup>Aly, A. (2013) 'The policy response to home-grown terrorism: reconceptualising prevent and Resilience as collective resistance' *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism*, 8(1), 2-18, p.7.

<sup>50</sup>Harris-Hogan, S, Burrelle, K. and Zammit, A. (2016) 'What is countering violent extremism? Exploring CVE policy and practice in Australia' *Behavioural Sciences of terrorism and Political Aggression*, 8(1), 6-24, p.18.

<sup>51</sup>Grossman, M and Tahiri, H. (2015) 'Community perceptions of radicalisation and violent extremism: an Australian perspective' *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism*, 10(1), 14.24, p.17.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid*, p.18.

events in a person's life cause them to become radicalised, to the extent of turning to violence to resolve perceived grievances, are critical to understanding how terrorist groups recruit new members and sustain support for their activities<sup>53</sup>. Edwards sees this definition as incoherent as to be radicalised is to both undergo a kind of influence and to be influenced to the point of turning to violence, adding that the majority of people that hold radical views are not involved in terrorism<sup>54</sup>. This is the problem with associating radicalisation directly with violent extremism and discounting non-violent extremism. During the 1968-1997 Irish Troubles the UK sustained violent terrorist activity carried out by loyalist groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force and republican groups such as the Provisional IRA that included attacks on hard and soft targets ranging from bombing 10 Downing Street, the British military and civilians on both sides of the Irish Sea<sup>55</sup>. In both official government documents and academic literature on political violence and terrorism covering the Irish Troubles there is hardly reference to radicalisation<sup>56</sup>.

Richards raises a valid point in relation to radicalisation, asking if the radicalised are only those who engage in violent extremism or does it include those who support violent extremism or understand why people become violent, or even those who disapprove of violence but have sympathy with various groups' causes or feel these groups have legitimate grievances<sup>57</sup>. While these may be radical thoughts, it would be dangerous legal ground to assume that those who have sympathy for or feel that certain groups have legitimate grievances are violent extremists. Edwards study shows the majority of those who hold radical views are not involved in terrorism<sup>58</sup>. A 2010 Demos Report recommended that governments should distinguish between radicalisation that leads to violence and radicalisation that does not. The Report states that it is possible for people to read radical texts opposed to Western foreign policy or support principle of Islamist groups fighting in conflict zones in the Middle East while being vocal in denouncing Islamist inspired terrorism in Western countries. The Report adds that provided their message does not involve intolerance or a threat to the democratic order such individuals can become important allies if it leads them to engage in political and community activity<sup>59</sup>. As Richards' research found, such radicals have come into contact with individuals contemplating violent acts and successfully dissuaded them<sup>60</sup>.

In identifying those vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism,

<sup>53</sup>HM Government (2006) Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's

Strategy available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/272320/6888.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272320/6888.pdf) [accessed 12th April 2016], p.9.

<sup>54</sup>Edwards, P. (2016) Closure through Resilience: the Case of Prevent, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39(4), 292-307, p. 299.

<sup>55</sup>Omand, D. (2012) *Securing the State* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>56</sup>Richards, A. (2011) The problem with 'radicalisation'; the remit of 'prevent' and the need to refocus on terrorism in the UK, *International Affairs* 86(4), 143-152, p.144.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid*, p.144.

<sup>58</sup>Edwards, P. *supra* note [54], p.299.

<sup>59</sup>Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J. and King, M. (2010) 'The edge of violence: a radical approach to extremism' London: Demos retrieved from [http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Edge\\_of\\_Violence\\_-\\_web.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Edge_of_Violence_-_web.pdf) [accessed 13th April 2016], p.38.

<sup>60</sup>Richards, *supra* note [56], p.148.

the early Prevent strategies first area of action to counter radicalisation was in addressing structural problems with a firm emphasis on tackling disadvantage and inequalities, improving the educational performance, employment prospects and housing conditions of Muslims<sup>61</sup>. This is to help prevent individuals from being alienated. An alienated individual is one isolated from the machinations of civil society and can become subject to an extremist view whereby both the individual and the wider social structure come to see each other as a threat<sup>62</sup>. This process of alienation is compounded when the individual has an inability to interact with the social sphere thereby seeing themselves as an 'island', separated from his fellows, unattached to them having few bonds or ties of any enduring nature<sup>63</sup>. As a result alienated individuals are more likely to engage with radical groups when they perceive themselves to be isolated from and not represented by social constructs of the broader community<sup>64</sup>. State responses to alienation has been in promoting greater integration to de-radicalise extremist religious groups. It is important to distinguish between extremist religio-political groups from religious groups who choose to separate themselves because they are orthodox. In some cases religious groups may be illiberal and inward-looking as they try to sustain a way of life for its own members and to reproduce that culture or faith for future generations. For Malik some of these orthodox groups may not adhere to the norms of a liberal democracy as they may choose to segregate themselves from mainstream society and: 'A liberal democracy, as a matter of principle, has to respect the rights of individuals who choose to isolate themselves from mainstream society, but who respect the limits of law'<sup>65</sup>.

If a liberal democratic state denies isolated, but law-abiding religious groups their way of life, rather than starting out with any political goals or interest in joining the liberal public sphere then will they become politically active posing an extremist threat<sup>66</sup>. As highlighted in this section, the problem with early Prevent/Resilience strategies was the main focus being on de-radicalising extremists within the Muslim community and not taking on the EU's 2005 recommendation of considering all forms of extremism. As a result these early strategies led to a 'them and us' position of the Muslim community within wider society. Seeing how one of the watershed moments in the development of Prevent strategies encouraging greater integration was the 2005 London 7/7 bombing, the paradox is the 7/7 bombers were UK born citizens who were socialised and schooled in the UK being relatively highly educated<sup>67</sup>.

## Current Prevent Strategies

Due to the problems with the previous strategy posed, in 2011 the UK Government revised the Prevent strategy with three main objectives:

- i. Respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat faced by those who promote it;

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid*, p.146.

<sup>62</sup>Duffy, D. *supra* note [25], p.129.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid*, p.131.

<sup>64</sup>Aly, *supra* note [17], p.5.

<sup>65</sup>Malik, M. (2008) Engaging with Extremists *International Review* 22(1), 85-104, p.89.

<sup>66</sup>Vermeulen, *supra* note [4], p.209.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid*, p.290.



- ii. Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support;
- iii. Work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that need to be addressed<sup>68</sup>.

Compared to the 2008 version there were key changes in the 2011 Prevent strategy. The term 'violent extremism' was abandoned with the focus on radicalisation being defined as the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism<sup>69</sup>. To assist in assessing radicalisation the 2011 Prevent strategy provides a definition of extremism that now includes all forms or extremism be it violent or non-violent. Regarding the accusations that Prevent funding was 'dirty money', the 2011 Prevent strategy is clear it will not fund or support organisations that hold extremist views or support terrorist-related activity. As a result, there is an obligation on local authorities and other public bodies to publish details of expenditure in order to introduce greater levels of transparency<sup>70</sup>. While the UK 2011 strategy looks at the wider aspects of extremism, Australia's 2010 Prevent strategy still focuses on resisting the development of any form of violent extremism<sup>71</sup>. This position did not change in 2015 where in the Australian government's Prevent document there is an emphasis on strengthening resilience. It states that Australia's task is to limit the spread and influence of violent extremist idea<sup>72</sup>. There are similarities in the developments of Australia's strategy and the UK's such as having an emphasis on identifying and diverting at-risk individuals and government agencies and communities working to reduce the driver of radicalisation<sup>73</sup>. By still focusing on violent extremism and the inherent problems this had in the earlier strategies, it could remain problematic as to how effective Australia's current strategy will be.

The UK's 2011 Prevent strategy addresses the issues related to the connection between the police and intelligence gathering. Acknowledging that the police collection of information for community mapping was confused with covert operation activity that led to allegations based on a misunderstanding about the process for supporting vulnerable people<sup>74</sup> the strategy document clearly states: '...we emphasise that it must be a guiding principle of prevent that the programme is not used as a means for covert spying on people or communities. We do not believe that has been the case. It must not be. Data collected about people for the

purposes of Prevent must be necessary and proportionate<sup>75</sup>.

This point is reinforced in the 2011 CONTEST document that states the relationship between Prevent and Pursue (work to investigate and disrupt terrorist activity) must be carefully managed as Prevent is not a means for spying or for other covert activity<sup>76</sup>. Unfortunately this message is still not being believed. The suspicion that Prevent is another method of intelligence gathering for counter-terrorism agencies with the programme targeting black and Asian communities has increased with the UK government placing on specified authorities (local government, prisons, education, health and social care, and, the police)<sup>77</sup> obligation to prevent people being drawn into terrorism on a statutory footing.

## Conclusion

### Eradicating flaws and problems with current prevent strategies

One major flaw in the Prevent strategies covered above is by focusing on Islamist extremism they have targeted the various states' Muslim communities. As discussed, this has resulted in making Muslim communities suspect communities creating divisiveness in society, as well as providing valuable propaganda material for terrorist groups to exploit. To eradicate this all states should include all forms of extremism within their Prevent strategies, The UK has done this and one consequence of this is the extreme far right group, National Action, became a proscribed group, which in the UK means they are now a listed terrorist group<sup>78</sup>. This would send out the message to the whole of society that all forms of extremism will not be tolerated and could prevent targeted groups in society becoming a suspect community. Another problem with current Prevent strategies is the suspicion that these strategies are another form of surveillance on society. As a result of how the early strategies were applied there is no doubt this view is maintained. For Prevent to be trusted among society it must be emphasised the strategy will deal with those begin drawn towards terrorism at a pre-criminal stage, they will not be arrested or charged with any offence. What is not stressed enough by states with their Prevent strategies is they are a multi-agency approach to help and support those referred to Prevent teams. While there is a police input in this multi-agency approach, the officers engaged in Prevent are not investigators of terrorist activity, they are more akin to neighbourhood community police officers. In addition to this, state governments should produce more detailed guidance for staff in all the agencies involved in Prevent when applying the strategy, including more in-depth training. This would not only give staff involved more confidence, it would help to get the message out that Prevent is aimed at helping not prosecuting those who are referred to it.

Under Prevent, creating resilience in communities is a laudable

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid*, p.32.

<sup>76</sup>HM Government (2011a) *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*, London: The Stationary Office, p.63.

<sup>77</sup>These are the specified authorities listed in Schedule 6 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

<sup>78</sup>Gov.UK (2016) 'National Action becomes first extreme far-right group to be banned in the UK' 16<sup>th</sup> December 2016 available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-action-becomes-first-extreme-right-wing-group-to-be-banned-in-uk> [accessed 1st June 2017]

<sup>68</sup>HM Government (2011) *Prevent Strategy*, Cm 8092, London: the Stationary Office, p.7.

<sup>69</sup>Edwards, *supra* note 25, pp.302-303, HM Government 2011, *supra* note [50], p.107.

<sup>70</sup>HM Government, *supra* note [53], p.35.

<sup>71</sup>Commonwealth of Australia (2010) *Counter-Terrorism White Paper: Securing Australia – protecting our Community*, Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet retrieved from [https://www.asio.gov.au/img/files/counter-terrorism\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://www.asio.gov.au/img/files/counter-terrorism_white_paper.pdf) [accessed 13th April 2016], p.65.

<sup>72</sup>Commonwealth of Australia (2015) *Australia's Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Strengthening our Resilience*, retrieved from <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Media-and-publications/Publications/Documents/Australias-Counter-Terrorism-Strategy-2015.pdf> [accessed 13th April 2016], p.7.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>74</sup>HM Government, *supra* note [53], p.31.

strand to the strategy. Where the focus of most Prevent strategies has been solely on a state's Muslim community that focus should shift to building resilience in the whole of a state's population. Expanding the strategy to cover all forms of extremism would necessitate this. In essence, Prevent strategies should be revisited and by considering and incorporating these simple measures, it could improve its effectiveness requiring a complete re-branding of Prevent. In re-branding it, it must be made clear the strategy is about helping not prosecuting people, along with its key aims. Terrorist investigations are expensive but is an expense that cannot be quantified when compared to the cost in lives and victims who suffer severe injuries. It is important that states not

only re-brand their Prevent strategies but increase the capability of the agencies involved in helping those referred to them with a correlative increase in funding. Such a commitment would signal how serious a state's determination is for the strategy to succeed. While not perfect in its current form, there is no current alternative and as no plausible replacement has been suggested to replace Prevent, it is the best strategy existing at the moment. As discussed, there is room for improvement as no doubt it is preferable to help and prevent those who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism than let those individuals become further imbued with an extremist narrative resulting in them carrying out attacks the consequential results those attacks incur on society.