



Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

There needs to be an understanding between enabling community cohesion and preventing violent extremism

Introduction

Seldom has a concept been made use of and discussed as much as 'Violent Extremism'. Questions are constantly raised as to the root causes of strands of extremism that lead to perpetrating acts of violence. What are those roots and what causes them? How does society deal with violent extremism? What can be done to stem the progress of extreme views towards a position where violence is seen as excusable, justifiable and possibly even necessary? What specifically is the role of government, local authorities, the police and security forces as well as community leaders in combating this phenomena? What are the challenges and the pitfalls that face such an endeavour? What are the mistakes of the past that ought to be learned for future efforts?

According to the UK Government, whilst acknowledging the various types of extremists, 'the most severe threat comes from those who hijack the peaceful religion of Islam as a basis for their attacks'. The Government's method of dealing with this threat is to undermine extremist ideology, help communities resist the spread of violent extremism and support individuals at the risk of being drawn into circles which adopt such ideologies and methods.

Key Points

- *Serious concerns about the PREVENT programme being used to gather intelligence about innocent people*
- *There is a need for greater transparency and accountability in the funding program*
- *In the future, there should be a move to address the specific needs of all communities*
- *Real issues that are causing social exclusion in a handful of our youth need to be tackled*
- *We should work to ensure that the essential fabric of trust amongst people is maintained*

Accordingly the government has developed a Preventing Violent Extremism programme (hereafter known as PREVENT) to develop 'community-led approaches to tackling violent extremists'. Launched in April 2007, the program by 2011 would have expected to have spent about £100 million on community initiatives. Moreover the whole programme has come under relentless criticisms from the Muslim community itself, sections of the media, human rights groups, think tanks and research centres and others, for a broad array of reasons, ranging from the very concept of PREVENT to decisions being made within the remit and mandate thereof.

Concerns

According to reports in the Guardian Newspaper and a report by Arun Kundnani of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) produced on 17th October 2009, the program has been used to gather intelligence about innocent people who are not suspected of involvement in terrorism, including political and religious views, information on mental health, sexual activity and associates, and other sensitive information. Other documents reveal that the intelligence and information can be stored until the people concerned reach the age of 100. Shami Chakrabarti director of Liberty, has branded it the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times and an affront to civil liberties.

Arun Kundnani's report entitled '**Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism**' describes how the Government's 'PREVENT' programme has led to "violations of privacy and professional norms of confidentiality" and presents evidence that "Prevent-funded services are being used by counter-terrorist

police for information gathering", through the institution of a little known protocol, the 'Information Sharing Agreements' (ASAs).

Key Findings

In short, some of the key findings of the report are:

- PREVENT funding has not been driven by a decision-making process in which local agencies identify their own needs and access central government funds accordingly. Rather, local authorities have been pressured to accept PREVENT funding in direct proportion to the numbers of Muslims in their area – in effect, constructing the Muslim population as a 'suspect community'.
- PREVENT decision-making lacks transparency and accountability. Decisions are taken behind closed doors rather than in consultation with the voluntary and community sector.
- PREVENT with its focus on a single group, has undermined this aspect of the cohesion agenda.
- The embedding of counter-terrorism police officers within the delivery of local services, the purpose of which seems to be to gather intelligence on Muslim communities, to identify areas, groups and individuals that are 'at risk' and to then facilitate interventions.

TCF concerns

As an organisation whose main objective is to prove that peaceful co-existence among different cultures and faiths is not only possible, but an extremely enriching and enlightening experience, The Cordoba Foundation feels that if these revelations are proven to be true then this will have serious repercussions on the progress that has been made in enhancing community cohesion and strengthening race relations. Our concerns are :

- Covert espionage on a section of a any community breeds division within a nation and goes towards empowering the extreme nationalists.
- The financial inducement exclusively to the Muslim community is counter productive since it fails to meet the needs of local areas wherein various 'groups' of people reside. This runs the risk of exacerbating intra community tensions.
- The current funding and capacity building mechanism does not show an appreciation of the various difficulties and needs of the Muslim communities (or any other community). It serves to build inter religious division and rather creates suspicion of organisations that reinforce the government line without empirical evidence.
- It fails to address the root causes of poor employment opportunity, educational under achievement, poor housing, and the feeling of alienation that are leading to problems in a handful of our youth, not only just within the Muslim community but also within society as a whole.
- Professionals, academics and service providers are being dragged into providing covert service for the state which compromise their work ethics and integrity. It also breaks the most essential fabric of trust between people in our country.

TCF Recommendations

We believe that:

- In attempting to counter extremism, that is clearly understood as putting in danger the lives of people in our country, a strategy that is impartial and generic to all communities will have to be developed.
- There should be a recognition that social exclusion and lack of opportunities could be the root cause of some of the issues to do with violent extremism but it requires a holistic approach to be dealt with.
- Greater transparency and accountability is needed for any future programmes.
- There should be a process of consultation with community leaders and civil society to develop programs to tackle social exclusion.
- Funding should be provided on a needs basis with all disaffected communities (regardless of ethnicity / race / religion) on addressing their needs, whether it is in Dagenham or in Bradford
- There should be greater and transparent open engagement with authorities and the police in developing programs to target social exclusion and to instil respect.
- There should be a realisation that the issues and challenges facing the Muslim community are not exclusive to them and that many other communities across Britain also face similar challenges and hence attempts to address these issues and challenges can be accomplished much more comprehensively in partnership.
- The Muslim community itself should work together to address some of the inherent problems in terms of the ideological, religious and cultural definitions and terms.

References

- Kundani, A (2009) 'Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism'. Institute of Race Relations, London (<http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/spooked.pdf>)
- Home Office (2008) 'Preventing Violent Extremism: Strategy for Delivery', (<http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/prevent-strategy/preventing-violent-extremism?view=Binary>)
- Dodd, V (2009) 'Anti-terrorism strategy spies innocents', Guardian Newspapers (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/16/anti-terrorism-strategy-spies-innocents>)
- Dodd, V (2009) 'Prevent Extremism Muslim Information Allegations', Guardian Newspapers (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/oct/18/prevent-extremism-muslims-information-allegations>)

About Us

The Cordoba Foundation (TCF) is an independent Public Relations, Research and Policy Think Tank promoting intercultural dialogue and positive coexistence among cultures, ideas and people. Founded in 2005 in the UK, it has been an advocate of dialogue and action to promote understanding and acceptance of inter-communal and inter-religious issues in Britain, Europe, US and beyond. It is currently focussing on engagement in peace building and conflict resolution in the Middle East (including hostage negotiations) and South Asia and exploring the relationship between conflict and development. It seeks to do this by engaging with a variety of stakeholders of society such as practitioners, researchers, journalists, policy makers and religious leaders.

The objectives of the organisation are:

- To promote dialogue and the culture of peaceful coexistence among cultures, ideas and people.
- To work with decision-making circles for better understanding and clearer comprehension of inter-communal and inter-religious issues in Britain, across Europe and beyond.
- To provide a new and unique standard of information, allowing decisions and policies to be established upon proper basis and efficient consultation.
- Advising leading Muslim organisations and figures on how to enhance their performance on a variety of levels and to make their respective efforts more efficient
- Advising leading organisations and figures on enhancing their efforts in reaching out to the Muslim World

Cultures in Dialogue

The Cordoba Foundation

Level 7

Westgate House

Westgate Road

London W5 1YY

Tel: 020 8991 3372

Fax: 020 8991 3373

Email: info@thecordobafoundation.com

www.thecordobafoundation.com