Is the Deradicalisation of Islamist Extremists Possible in a Secular Society Such as Britain?

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The aim of this research is to discover whether the deradicalisation of violent Islamist extremists is possible in a secular society such as Britain. The intention is to recognise that the traditional legal and military counter terrorism frameworks are insufficient to minimise the terrorism threat and thus a different tactic is necessary. Further, it is asserted that radical ideology should be the main focus of a multi dimensional counter terrorism campaign.

The dissertation will begin with a brief introduction to the problems of implementing purely legal and military forms of counter terrorism, the threat of extremism Islamism and how it may lead to terrorism and how this may be countered. It will then move on to explore rehabilitative deradicalisation programmes forming counter ideological counter terrorism policies. The thesis will then move on to discuss two case studies in which deradicalisation programmes have been implemented in different circumstances, how successful elements of each programme may be transferred to a secular society and finally whether deradicalisation programmes may work in a secular society.

Conclusions drawn include the assertion that deradicalisation may be possible in a secular society if a number of elements from the more developed programmes in the Muslim Middle East. These include:
a) Debate/Dialogue approaches to contesting ideology,

b) Programmes being led by religious clerics, Islamic scholars or former Islamists

c) Holistic reintegration schemes

Further conclusions include the contention that a deradicalisation programme must be flexible in order that it could be moulded to regional or contextual needs as well as the suggestion that a multi pronged approach to counter terrorism may be a successful long term strategy. This will be the case only if this includes both preventative and rehabilitative counter ideological methods that may rehabilitate extremist Islamists and terrorists and persuade terrorists to abandon not only violence but also radical ideologies.

Introduction

The purpose of this research is twofold:

a) To examine and compare deradicalisation programmes in Muslim majority countries, and

b) To explore whether the deradicalisation of Islamist extremists is possible in a secular society such as Britain.

The dissertation will examine whether the two paradigms currently used by governments to combat terrorism; the law and war models are enough to ensure a reduction in the threat of terrorism or whether another strategy is necessary. It is my contention that the war and law paradigms themselves will not be enough to fight the threat of terrorism and that if these models were used with counter ideological approaches this could provide better security against the threat of terrorism. The thesis aims to discover whether rehabilitative forms of counter ideology can be used against Islamist extremists and terrorists in order to deradicalise them and prevent them from committing acts of terrorism. Specifically this research intends to explore whether the deradicalisation of Islamist extremist is possible in a secular society. Considerations specifically related to whether it would be possible for Westerners to deal with radical Islamist and anti Western ideologies or whether the problem should be dealt with solely by the Muslim community are particularly interesting.
In order to explore the key concepts the dissertation will explore a number of issues:

- The use of the legal and war strategies, the need for another approach and whether there is a viable alternative to the law and war paradigms?
- Is it only terrorism that needs to be addressed or also radicalism/extremism?
- How are Muslims in Britain becoming radicalised and how can this be addressed?
- How are deradicalisation programmes being implemented in Muslim societies?
- How is Britain combating Islamist extremism? And ultimately,
- Is deradicalisation possible in a secular society?

In order to address these questions one needs a basic understanding of the context in which they are raised. Following the September 11th attacks, Islamic terrorism, sometimes referred to as Jihadi terrorism, (Coolsaet, 2008 and Suseelan, 2006) influenced by Al Qaeda, became a growing concern for many governments with radical Islam being deemed a major security issue. However, little research has been conducted into the notion of physical disengagement from these groups, ideological deradicalisation and whether counter ideology can be successfully used to persuade terrorists to disengage. As with much of the research on terrorism, earlier work on these issues has been conflicting in conclusions and policy suggestions and therefore this research attempts to address this problem. The need for action to counter Islamist ideologies and extremist religious belief has become increasingly more apparent to the British government, who are realising that security measures on their own are not enough. The British government has recently implemented the Prevent agenda with the aim of countering the threat of radicalism and Islamist terrorism and initiatives aimed at deradicalising those already radicalised, such as that of the Quilliam Foundation, (HM Government, May 2008). In addition to counter radicalisation and community cohesion initiatives, which are currently the main focus of Western governments there is also a need to look at rehabilitation of those already involved in Islamist violence. One disappointment of the British government’s counter terrorism CONTEST policy is its failure to deal with the issue of changing the ideas of violent Islamists and instead focussing on criminalising the acts and attempting to prevent others becoming involved.
There have been few efforts toward counter ideological counter terrorism and these attempts have been implemented with varying degrees of success. I endeavour to ascertain whether non-legal or non-military exit programs for Islamist terrorists can lead to disengagement from terrorist groups, to the reforming of ideas on the acceptability of using violence or to discourage Muslims from joining such groups and whether they can thus represent counter terrorism successes in preventative and rehabilitative terms. This research will explore whether the prevention of terrorism is likely to be more effective than a cure, in that targeting youths susceptible to radical ideologies is a lot easier than attempting to rehabilitate already hardened extremists and terrorists. However, this does not mean that there should be no efforts to deradicalise extremists. If the radical ideologies of these people cannot be changed at the very least the government must attempt to reverse their ideas on the acceptability of violence to achieve their goals. This research is being carried out in an attempt to determine what may be done to prevent extremism, what may be done to reverse it and what may be done in order to encourage disengagement from extreme or terrorist movements. Further, it seeks to ascertain whether the British Prevent agenda may be successful against the threat of Islamist radicals. The outcome of this research may have major implications for a government’s use of counter ideological strategies. If policies to counter extremism can be successful in discouraging membership of Islamist groups and in persuading militant terrorists to disengage by reversing their ideologies then the governments Prevent agenda may have a chance of success.

In considering whether the use of military tactics or legal strategies alone can be successful in countering terrorism one need look no further than the tactics used by the United States (US) and coalition forces on the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and the failures of the British legal response to Irish terrorism. The War on Terror, including the War on Iraq, may seem to some like a military success but it has led directly to heightened insecurity in the Middle East, insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan and to an increase in Islamic terrorist activities throughout the international system. The Religion of Peace website lists 2017 Islamic terror attacks in 2008 alone and there have been two thousand three hundred and fifty two attacks in the Middle East from 1st April 2003 to 31st December 2008 (Global Terrorism Database,
accessed 12 July 2009). Britain itself has been the victim of 21 terrorist attacks since 2004 (Global Terrorism Database, accessed 12 July 2009).

The British reaction to terrorism has until recently, been purely legal. The 2000 Terrorism Act and its successor, the 2006 Terrorism Act lay out the legal resources available to counter domestic terrorism and according to Mi5 between 2001 and 2007 forty-one people have been convicted under the Terrorism act and 183 more under related crimes (Mi5, 2009). However, the July 7th attacks in London and the attempted attack on Glasgow Airport in June 2007, amongst others, suggest that the legal approach may not be enough to counter the threat of terrorism, especially Islamist terrorism. The difficulty in responding to such a threat within legal parameters is that there is little scope to deal with ideology, which, it could be argued, is the most vital area to deal with in counter terrorism. Contrary to using only a war paradigm to fight terrorism the law model allows the possibility of also challenging ideology and propaganda and so a combination of counter ideological and legal policies may be successful.

One could argue that this approach has succeeded in Singapore where the government used the Muslim community to counter the ideology of Al Qaeda and Jeemah Islamiyah (JI) (Hassan and Pereire, 2006, pg 461). Kenneth Payne, amongst others highlights the importance extremist Islamist groups place on ideology and propaganda.

‘What we are confronting is an evil ideology,” he declared shortly after the 7/7 London bombings. “It is a global struggle, and it is a battle of ideas and hearts and minds both within Islam and outside it. This is the battle that must be won’ (Tony Blair, quoted in Payne, pg 109, 2009).

Here Tony Blair frames the need for ideological responses to Islamic terrorism as a battle in a similar way to does Ayman al- Zawahiri, deputy of Al Qaeda and key ideologist of the Islamist movement ‘a battle of ideologies, a struggle for survival, and a war with no truce’ (Ayman al-Zawahiri, 2006, pg 111). The significance placed upon ideologies by terrorists makes it vital that those fighting terrorism address ideology and suggests that the key to ending terrorism may lay in ending violent ideology and propaganda. Dr. Stephen Biddle
concluded in his article "War Aims and War Termination" that the real enemy in the war against terrorism is Al Qaeda's radical ideology. Unless the ideology is defeated, counterterrorist efforts will inevitably fail. (Hassan, pg 533, 2006)

Islamism, sometimes called political Islam could be defined as ‘The modernist attempt to claim that political sovereignty belongs to God, that the Shari'ah equates to state law, and that it is a religious duty on all Muslims to create a political entity that reflects the above.’ (Quilliam Foundation, 2009). Islamists differ in exactly how to bring about this utopia and usually hold some contempt for Muslim scholars and sages; disdain for most normal Muslims, and a hatred of the West. In short, Islamism is the belief that Islam is a political ideology (Kramer, Fuller and Esposito, 1999). The adherence to a belief in political Islam does not necessarily equate with violence or terrorism, indeed, there are a number of so-called radical organisations such as Hizb ut –Tahrir who do not themselves advocate violence. This poses a difficulty for policy makers involved in the Prevent and deradicalisation initiatives as it begs the question as to what deradicalisation is and how far it must go to be considered a success.

It is my assertion that though radical Islamist ideas are not illegal they constitute a security threat in that they may lead to advocating or supporting terrorism and they are generally intolerant and bigoted by nature. Further, they may be, as suggested by the Foreign and Commonwealth office (FCO), a precursor to violence.

‘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’ (Foreign and Commonwealth Office /Home Office, Draft Report, 2004)

With the number of Muslims joining Islamist movements and the number of violent Islamists (or Jihadists) growing in numbers and intensity in the UK (Kfir, pg 101, 2007) the question as to whether it is only terrorists that have to be dealt with or also those with extremist views and those who belong to extremist groups is becoming more relevant. Indeed, Islamic radicalism has recently been identified as a security concern for the British
security services and has become a focus of government policy, embodied in the updated CONTEST strategy (HM Government, July 2006). Jonathon Evans, director general of Mi5 suggests that extremist ideologies are the root of the terrorist threat to Britain. In order to defeat this threat we must acknowledge and challenge these ideologies,

‘Before we look at the violent manifestation of that threat in the UK, we need to remember where this comes from. The violence directed against us is the product of a much wider extremist ideology, whose basic tenets are inimical to the tolerance and liberty which form the basis of our democracy. So although the most visible manifestations of this problem are the attacks and attempted attacks we have suffered in recent years, the root of the problem is ideological’ (Evans, 2007).

It could be contended that to deal with this threat of Islamist ideology we must question how and why people are becoming radicalised. Though there have been previous suggestions (Sampson, 2001) that investigating and addressing the grievances of terrorists or radicals will lead to a reduction in terrorism it is my contention that these proposals are flawed. If the ideologies of these people are not addressed then once a grievance is addressed, other injustices will take their place. A common grievance of violent extremists is Western foreign policy including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Western positions on the Israel/Palestine conflict and America’s strong military presence in the Middle East; however it is unlikely that any of these policies will change. Instead, as one may deduce from Evans (above) emphasis should be placed on addressing and challenging the ideologies of Islamism and attempting to empower Muslim youths so that they do not fall prey to these ideologies, a strategy that groups such as STREET are currently engaged in (STREET, 2009).

Though the British government have introduced policies aimed at preventing radicalisation and entry into violent extremist groups and have funded groups such as Radical Middle Way who attempt to promote mainstream Islam, little effort has been made to promote disengagement from terrorist groups or to deradicalise those involved in violent extremist groups (Horgan, 2009, pg 1). Both types of programmes are necessary yet there are a number of difficulties with the choice to deradicalise only terrorists and with the choice to deal with terrorists and those who hold extremist beliefs. The main problem in dealing only
with the beliefs of terrorists is that addressing the issue after a terrorist act is too late. One could also argue, like Bjørgo (2005) that deradicalising militant Jihadists would be more difficult than attempting to deradicalise those who have not yet crossed the line into violence. Conversely, the problem with attempting to deradicalise those who have committed no crime is one of implementation; those that are not imprisoned are unlikely to readily volunteer for deradicalisation programmes. Those who are imprisoned have less choice to undergo a rehabilitation programme yet those who have committed no crime but to become involved in extremist groups present a dilemma to the government who are attempting to quash the threat of extremist violence without imposing upon civil liberties. Despite the difficulties in deradicalising those who have not committed a crime, efforts should still be made to deradicalise extremists. One program that deals with extremists is Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue, perhaps the most successful deradicalisation programme (Horgan, 2009, pg 182) which was conducted in prison and involved not only convicted terrorists but also those who held militant beliefs but had committed no crime. This imprisonment may have been an acceptable practice in the Yemeni governments fight against terrorism yet the British government is constrained by human and civil laws and so would find it difficult to implement such a programme and may instead have to rely upon community initiatives.

In terms of reversing the process of radicalisation, especially when concentrating on violent extremists who have already committed a crime or are planning to do so, one may need to consider how far a deradicalisation strategy must go in order to be considered successful. John Horgan, (2009) who has looked in detail at the processes of radicalisation and disengagement from terrorist groups discusses the need to differentiate between physical disengagement from a terrorist group and psychological disengagement. In terms of resounding success deradicalisation must change the view that violence is an acceptable way to address grievances and possibly begin to address radical beliefs and bring people back to the mainstream. Though Horgan asserts that it is more important to change violent behaviour than change views it has to be contended that merely stopping people from committing violence can be achieved through the legal or war paradigms and thus
deradicalisation may not be necessary. Promoting disengagement from violent extremist groups may be enough to stop certain terrorists committing attacks but it does not end radical ideologies which would go on recruiting people into such groups, it does not stop these people supporting terrorism or terrorist groups and it does not offer opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration into mainstream society. The argument that a one sided ideological strategy alone is insufficient is one that is hard to oppose, especially as we have seen the failures of single strategy warfare or legal strategies. As Hassan (2006) asserts, a multi faceted approach to counter terrorism may be the best solution to reducing violent Islamism and this has to include not only counter radicalisation processes but also deradicalisation programmes. Set up much like rehabilitation agendas, these must be aimed at changing terrorists ideas on the acceptability of using violence as a priority and also at changing radical views on Islam and politics. Indeed, both the means and messages of violent extremists may need to be addressed in deradicalisation programmes to provide a holistic approach that comprises deterrence and rehabilitation.

The dissertation will now go on to discuss how Muslim Middle Eastern governments have dealt with the threat of violent extremism and how deradicalisation programmes have been implemented. In order to examine these issues I will use case studies of the Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue and Egypt’s prison based deradicalisation programme as they represent very different processes, tailored to the countries specific terrorist threats and employ quite different methodologies. The use of case studies can be problematic in that any conclusions found are unsuitable for generalisation to a British case. However, the use of the diverse cases and the different approaches and successes that they take will allow for any problems that the use of this methodology may have been encountered. Further, the case studies are being used to discuss whether similar programs may be suitable for use in a secular society and if so whether they could be successful, not to attempt to generalise the findings and impose them on a different society. Though there are a number of problems with using case studies first hand data, through interview or questionnaire is obviously extremely difficult to find regarding such a topic and whilst the use of autobiography, news reports and secondary data can be problematic, especially as they are so subjective, these
are the only methods of research available at this time. Due to the difficulties with such information one must be cautious when considering how valuable this data will be. A solid ‘truthful’ account can rarely be found within such data but when viewed together common themes and processes may be found which may then allow for some form of generalisation concerning all terrorist activity, ideology and counter terrorism efforts.

First hand data has been more readily available for the discussion of deradicalisation in the UK and so a number of interviews, questions and answers and conversations have been held with sources ranging from those involved in implementing the Prevent agenda at a local level to those involved with deradicalisation programmes and preventative counter radicalisation programmes.

1. Deradicalisation Programs in Muslim Countries

Violent Islamism has been a major security issue for many of the Middle Eastern states, especially in the latter part of the 20th Century and early 21st Century. There are a number of what Bjorgo (2005) terms ‘root causes’ of this violent Islamism, which include frustration with domestic politics, foreign policies, religious leaders promoting violence and the colonial histories of the Middle Eastern states.

Figure 1: Pathways to Radicalisation in the Middle East (Hutson, Long and Page, 2009)
The pathway to radicalisation is a complex one and is likely to be unique to the individual, however Hutson, Long and Page (2009) have developed possibly the strongest model of radicalisation (see figure 1) which encompasses many of the factors that may be involved in radicalisation in Muslim countries.

It is my assertion that in order to combat the threat posed by violent Islamism it is vital to understand the process of radicalisation in order to prevent others becoming radicalised. If one uses the model above to analyse the path to radicalisation one could make a theoretical jump that in order to prevent radicalisation one must interrupt a number of the pathways and use this to develop a preventative counter radicalisation strategy. However, this alone will not end radicalisation and Islamist extremism; punitive measures will also be necessary as well as rehabilitative measures for those who have already become radicalised. This model could be developed to establish an effective preventative scheme that could be modified for local/ regional needs and may also prove fundamental in the development of a deradicalisation program. Though the process of deradicalisation will not be a direct
reversal of radicalisation the individual deradicalisation process will be directly influenced by the circumstance in which people become radicalised.

For many violent Islamists (or Jihadists), for example those affiliated with Al Qaeda, their ideology revolves around the battle between the infidel and the true Muslims and the struggle for a global caliphate. For violent Islamist extremists the concept of Jihad is not only religious but is also historical and political in context and stems from a historical narrative of persecution and violent conflict between dar al Harb and dar al Islam (house of war and house of Islam).

‘Its (Al Qaeda’s) struggle is based on ideas such as: armed jihad is the only means to change the current fate of the Muslims, Muslims should be in constant war against non-Muslims until they obtain glory for Islam, Muslims are obligated to re-establish the Caliphate, killing oneself is not suicidal but an act of martyrdom.’ (Hassan, 2006, pg 535)

Hutson et al suggest the Middle East seems to have facilitated the rise of a conservative Salafist Wahhabi Islam which, when combined with a number of other factors such as the proliferation of a single violent account of jihad, may lead to radicalisation and perhaps violent extremism (Hutson et al, pg 22, 2009). Yet this conservative, narrow interpretation of Islam alone is rarely, if ever, solely responsible for radicalisation, therefore, addressing the religious ideology, though a vital element of any deradicalisation process is unlikely to sufficiently deal with violent extremism if used as a sole strategy. Though there are a number of similar issues and causes of radicalisation with people becoming radicalised through unofficial Halaqa (Quranic study groups) based around the mosque (Hutson, et al, pg 21, 2009), there are many regional and situational differences that mean there can be no global model of preventative counter radicalisation or deradicalisation. A number of Muslim countries have recognised this and have developed localised, successful deradicalisation approaches based on a multi pronged approach to counter terrorism. This chapter will now examine the deradicalisation programmes of Yemen and Egypt. These cases have been chosen because they represent very different samples of deradicalisation efforts. Yemen’s Committee for Dialogue is perhaps the most successful deradicalisation programme in the Middle East (Horgan, 2009) and Egypt presents an individual case
whereby extremist and terrorist groups undertook a voluntary process of deradicalisation. By presenting these diverse cases it will enable a comparison with deradicalisation efforts in secular society, perhaps illuminate why efforts towards a British deradicalisation programme have struggled and aid in the development of our own deradicalisation programs. Though deradicalisation programmes will need to be based upon contextual issues lessons can be learned from the successes and failures of these more advanced cases.

**Yemen**

Yemen’s terrorism problem is a long standing one, stemming from the end of the 1979 Afghan war and the sheer number of highly trained, radicalised and battle hardened mujahideen who returned to the country. These jihadi warriors were used by the government in the 1994 civil war against southern secessionists, fighting with the belief that an Islamic state may be established. However, once fighting had ceased this did not occur and the mujahideen’s relationship with the government began to disintegrate (Horgan, pg 182, 2009). Jihadists frustrations at the government, paired with their experiences in Afghanistan made them easy targets for terrorist propaganda (Rotberg, pg 15, 2005) and between January 1980 and 2000 there were 89 terrorist incidents in Yemen, all of which were perpetrated by Islamist groups (MIPT terrorism knowledge base, October 2007). The USS Cole attack in October 2000 was one of a number of attacks aimed at US targets, increasing in intensity up until 2002, when the international pressure on Yemen to take part in the global War on Terror forced the government to address the situation. The Committee for Dialogue, set up in reaction to this situation, is a regional solution to a unique situation. Paired with the repressive measures of the Yemeni government the strategy has the ability to deal with short term immediate threats as well as longer term ideological motives. (Taarnby, 2005)

The Committee for Dialogue was set up in August 2002 to deal with a number of radical Islamists who were imprisoned without trial despite having no involvement in terrorist attacks. These suspects were innocent of any crime according to Yemeni law and were
imprisoned only for their radical ideas and the government realized that they had either to release them or bring them to trial. Thus a decision was made to attempt to engage them in dialogue and attempt to persuade them of the futility of jihadism (Taarnby, 2005). Though President Saleh could not put the radicals on trial he did not want to release them to engage in terrorism. The Committee for Dialogue was initiated in order to provide an out for both the government and the extremists; the aim of the Committee is to remedy the radical ideas of Islamist extremists before they commit acts of terrorism. As Saleh stated at the time “We have a group of young people who hold dangerous beliefs. Those people have not committed any crime, but if we leave them on their own, they could cause great harm to themselves and to the country. We need to talk to them.” (Horgan, pg 184, 2009). Yemen has no preventative counter radicalisation program but has nevertheless taken a multi pronged approach. This has included closing down extremist Madrassa, deporting foreign militants, imprisoning those “at risk” of committing terrorist attacks, rehabilitative religious discussions, severe repression of violent extremists, including harsh sentencing for those convicted of terrorism and the formation of a Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU), an armed unit focussing on intelligence and armed combat whose operatives have been specially trained by the USA. This strategy has been developed and tailored by Saleh to address the unique Yemeni problem and embodies a regional solution to a regional problem. Though the Committee was viewed by some in the West as being too lenient on terrorism this ignores other facets of Yemen’s counter terrorism strategy. The Committee for Dialogue is just one element of a wider initiative and does not deal with those actually convicted of a terrorist attack (Taarnby, 2009).

‘His (Saleh’s) tactics in the war on terror are uniquely local solutions to what is a global problem. While an anti-terror policy that combines debating with suspected militants with bribing tribal sheikhs may appear unorthodox or even controversial in the West, it is a strategy that draws on a long and rich tradition in Yemen.’ (Johnsen, 2004)

Indeed, the Committee for Dialogue, a purely counter ideological method, engaged extremist groups, like Al Qaeda or al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya on their own terms; ideologically (Labi, 2005).
As discussed earlier, counter ideological methods of counter terrorism are vital in the long term fight against terrorism, it is not enough purely to wage war against terrorist groups if the ideology is not addressed there will always be people who follow that belief. In addition, violence and repressive measures against terrorists often leads to increasing popular support for the terrorist cause, as highlighted in Northern Ireland (Coogan, 2000). Though many governments have failed to develop a counter ideological facet of their counter terrorism policies in the Committee for Dialogue Yemen has found a way not only to deal with domestic terrorism but also the radical Islamist ideology which currently dominates international terrorism.

"It's only logical to tackle these people through their brains and heart," says Faris Sanabani, a former adviser to President Abdullah Saleh …"If you beat these people up they become more stubborn. If you hit them, they will enjoy the pain and find something good in it - it is a part of their ideology. Instead, what we must do is erase what they have been taught and explain to them that terrorism will only harm Yemenis' jobs and prospects." (Sanabani quoted in Brandon, 2005, pg 1)

Former supreme judge Hamoud al – Hitar, head of the Committee feels it necessary to converse with extremists and as part of the deradicalisation programme engaged in religious debate with Islamist prisoners (Horgan, pg 185, 2009). At the first meeting the initiative was explained to the prisoners as an all or nothing deal whereby the clerics and prisoners would engage in religious dialogue and if the prisoners could persuade Hitar and the clerics that their Jihad is religiously legitimate then they would join them. If not, then the Islamist radicals must give up their armed struggle.

‘They said: Why did you come? We said: We came to talk to you, and if right is on your side, we will follow you, but if right is on our side, you will follow us... They said: What guarantee do we have? We said: We will make a pledge to God, and we did.’ (Ma’ruf, interview with Al – Hitar, 2004). Once the detainees agreed to participate a number of rules and ethics were drawn up (see appendix 1) and the dialogue, based on the Quran and the Sunnah began. A number of issues were addressed, for example the legitimacy of the Yemeni government and the permissibility of killing non Muslims, with an emphasis being
placed upon the illegitimacy of violence due to the Quran containing 124 verses that specify that non Muslims should be treated with respect and only one that advises Muslims to kill non believers. Al – Hitar stressed the importance of not targeting non Muslims by quoting from the Quran: ‘Whoever kills a soul, unless for a soul or for corruption done in the land - it is as if he had slain all mankind entirely. And, whoever saves one, it is as if he had saved mankind entirely.’ (Brandon, 2005). The ulema invited the detainees to legitimize violence yet the prisoners could not and they found that quite often the detainees have memorized certain chapters of the Quran, but could not place them in context due to their lack of outside reading and inability for personal interpretation (Taarnby, pg 130, 2005). Al – Hitar has always maintained that the militants have mistaken views of Islam and that they need to be reformed through rehabilitative processes of dialogue and education, believing that the extremists are not evil but merely misguided. In an interview in 2004 Al-Hittar stated that dialogue would be used “to uproot the intellectual causes and reasons for terrorism. Because terrorism has faulty intellectual foundations.” (Al- Hitar, 2004) Once the participants have been ‘re educated’ and renounced violence and their old ideals they are released from prison and they are helped by the Committee to build new lives. Whilst other counter ideological counter terrorism measures have failed to offer an alternative to belonging to a violent extremist group the Committee for Dialogue offers jihadists a new life as well as a way out of their violent lifestyles. The Committee for Dialogue not only offers attempts at deradicalisation but also a disengagement program that includes reengagement, something that few other counter terrorism initiatives have been able to achieve. As Bjorgo (2005) has found in his research on disengagement from extremist Neo Nazi groups one of the major factors hindering disengagement is the lack of support received in their attempts to build a new life. Though there may be a wish to leave an extremist group the stigma of belonging to such a group may make it difficult to gain employment, re-establish relationships and reintegrate into wider society. The Committee for Dialogue addresses these issues and uses ‘pull’ factors to make disengagement and deradicalisation an attractive prospect. The Committee aids reintegration into society by providing money, employment and support for an extremist’s family however, this has lead
to criticisms that those who undergo the process will say that they have reformed to secure release from prison and to receive financial remuneration. Nasser al-Bahri an ex member of Al Qaeda who once served as Bin Laden’s bodyguard told the BBC that the dialogue programme didn’t work for him and that he hadn’t participated in deep religious dialogue with anyone stating that participants recognised that the program was their way out of prison. However, Al – Bahri has been aided by the government to set up a business and is no longer involved with an extremist group. This is perhaps a more relevant indicator to the success of the Committee for Dialogue. Though he may not have changed his underlying ideology Al – Bahri has renounced violence and no longer fights with Al Qaeda (Taarnby, pg 138, 2006). Al – Hitar explains that participants have committed to the program and to the results so that they may still hold extreme views but renounce the Jihadi ideology.

They also stressed their commitment to maintaining security and stability and respecting the rights of non-Muslims, including the impermissibility of shedding their blood or infringing upon their property and honor.’ (Al – Hitar, 2004)

The success of the deradicalisation programme is difficult to measure as rates of recidivism are difficult to estimate due to the Yemeni government’s refusal to publish any statistics relating to the program and some, like Whewell (2005) have argued that Al Qaeda militants who have been released following their rehabilitation have since been active in the Iraq insurgency. Though the Yemeni government has refused to disprove these criticisms some reports such as Eaves (2004) suggest that none of the reformed terrorists have relapsed, ‘Over the last year or so, the government of Yemen has released 182 captured Islamist militants. Thus far, their rate of recidivism is zero.’ (Eaves, 2004) Indeed, terrorist attacks in Yemen were relatively few between 2002 and 2006 with MIPT data suggesting that between 01/01/2003 and 01/01/2007 there have been fourteen domestic incidents compared to 46 domestic incidents for the period 01/01/1998 – 01/01/2002. This suggests that the threat of terrorism had been significantly reduced through Yemen’s innovative multi dimensional counter terror initiative.
Egypt

The Egyptian case differs greatly from other deradicalisation processes as the reversal of ideology was self imposed by group leadership and the behavioural and ideological revision was not an individual process. Though the members of the groups had to agree with the decision to renounce violence and change previous ideas it was an organisational deradicalisation process; the group reversed its policies on the use of violence and developed a new system of thought.

Since the Muslim Brotherhood’s cessation of violence in the early 1970’s a number of other Islamist terrorist groups have declared war on the Egyptian government, targeting government buildings as well as the tourist injury resulting in the deaths of more than 1,200 people (Gunaratna and Bin Ali, pg 277, 2009). Despite being responsible for around 95% of terrorism within Egypt within this period in the late 1990’s Gama`a al Islamiya (IG) and the Jihad renounced their previous judgments on the use of violence and gave up violent tactics completely (Rashwan, pg 113, 2009). In July 1997 six historical leaders of Gama`a al Islamiya and the Jihad in Egypt, growing tired of using violence to achieve their aims brought about a top down group renunciation of violent action against both domestic and international targets. The process of deradicalisation in Egypt has mainly occurred in prisons where ex Jihadi leaders have undertaken long periods of dialogue and discussion with their members to lead them to accept the new system of thought and to persuade them to renounce past practices and revise ideas (Rashwan, Pg 129, 2009). This was possible only due to the accepted legitimacy of the ex leadership who were considered to be authentic Islamic scholars and leaders. Where the leadership of IG previously espoused narrow ideas of Jihad based on their limited knowledge of Islamic history their imprisonment gave them the time to learn other schools of thought and debate with others on Islamic issues (Rashwan, Pg 124, 2009). The behavioural deradicalisation of Gama`a made it difficult for its allied group the Jihad to strategically and theoretically engage in violence as many of its members began to join the initiative with Gama`a al Islamiya. The
revised ideologies of these organisations transformed the groups from violent extremists to moderate Islamism.

Though not a government initiative the Egyptian government played a significant role in the struggle against violent extremism (Gunaratna and Bin Ali, pg 278 2009). For many decades the Egyptian government has employed brutal repression against Islamist groups, radicalising many into violent extremism and has employed severe punitive measures against those involved in such activity. However, with the announcement of a cessation of violence by IG the Egyptian security services, apparently believing in the sincerity of the renunciation began to take a softer approach with the group. Whilst continuing to employ severe measures against violent extremists the Egyptian government began to facilitate meetings between leadership and the imprisoned Gama`a members, which ‘ultimately fostered the success of the revisionist process’ (Rashwan, Pg 129, 2009). Though the Egyptian Jihadi groups seemed to have deradicalised themselves this could not have been possible without the parallel coercion and support of the government.

‘Several factors led to this ideological reversal. The first was the Egyptian authorities’ iron-fisted measures against the organization. Top Islamist figures were imprisoned, exiled, or sentenced to death. When those sent to prison completed their sentences, they remained in prison under administrative detention... At the same time, the regime launched an ideological struggle against Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya for the hearts and minds of the public’ (Gunaratna and Bin Ali pg 288, 2009).

This harsh repression may have led to the group’s leaders to grow weary of violent tactics and the harsh sanctions this brought, rather than developing a counter ideological deradicalisation program themselves the Egyptian government and security services created an environment whereby disengagement from violence and ideological deradicalisation became a positive alternative to remaining in an extremist group.

In order for the process of deradicalisation to occur the Egyptian authorities have had to renegotiate their counter terrorism policies and their relationship with the moderate Islamist groups and as we can see from the relative lack of attacks in Egypt post 9/11 this could be
deemed a success. Indeed, Gama`a’s leadership and thousands of its members have forsaken religious jihadi ideology as well as most of the Jihad. In addition, the leaders, publishing a number of volumes detailing and supporting their new ideologies that have gone to great lengths to oppose and dispute Al Qaeda’s violent ideology and to attempt to limit the effect of this ideology on other Muslims. (Gunaratna and Bin Ali, pg 277, 2009)

Though the groups still hold radical ideas they have renounced violent action and therefore undergone behavioural deradicalisation. Ashour (2009) argues that Gama`a al Islamiya and the Jihad have also undergone ideological deradicalisation as they have revised their ideologies on Jihad and the use of violence as a means to an end. However, I would assert that this is not the case; both groups still hold extreme views on many issues (e.g. the implementation of Sharia law) and though reversing their beliefs on violence there has not been a complete renunciation of extremist Islamism. Further, this collective shift away from violence (Gunaratna and Bin Ali, pg 278 2009) by the groups leaders may have led to enforced disengagement of members as opposed to a true revision of ideals. If the group has changed its stance on violence the members of that organization no longer belong to a violent organization and so the member may be forced to give up violence and yet not change their own inherent views on the issue.

Ashour (2009) determines, somewhat incorrectly, that deradicalisation can occur on a behavioural level only, distinct from ideology by merely abandoning violence to achieve political goals. However, this may be situational deradicalisation only and may lead to the uptake of violence at a later date. It is my assertion that at the very least one must undergo both behavioural and ideological deradicalisation; Islamists must no longer engage in violent action and must revise their ideas on the acceptability and legitimacy of the use of violence. In the case of Egyptian deradicalisation one cannot be certain that this has occurred. However, the Egyptian government has begun to support and develop deradicalisation programs, including dialogue initiatives to correct misperceptions of Islamic texts and ideas (Gunaratna and Bin Ali, pg 278, 2009)
The apparent successes of the two deradicalisation programmes lie in quite different areas. In the Egyptian case the government's severe repression of violent extremist groups paired with their support for the 6 leaders who renounced violence created a situation whereby a number of violent extremists were deradicalised by their former leaders. These former leaders were seen as legitimate religious and political scholars, without any ties to the government, who had begun to repudiate their former beliefs and were thus well equipped to undertake the task of re-educating and rehabilitating other members of the group. Conversely, in Yemen's case the Committee for dialogue, founded on mutual respect, is meant to be a conversation between people of equal standing (Taarnby, 2005). Though education also forms part of this program debate and equality is the main tenet of the Committee rather than a top down system of a different ideology being imposed. This principle of re-education, successful in the cases stated above, as well as in Singapore’s Religious Rehabilitation Group, is one that should form the main basis of a British deradicalisation programme, where the debate system undertaken in Yemen could possibly become the main strategy for the process.

The next chapter will go on to discuss issues relating to Islamist extremism in Britain and whether a deradicalisation programme could be implemented in secular society.

2. Counter Radicalisation and Deradicalisation in the United Kingdom

This chapter will discuss the causes of violent Islamist extremism in Britain, how the government has dealt with this threat, why this is different in a secular society to Muslim countries and ultimately whether a deradicalisation programme could be implemented in a secular society such as the UK.

Looking at the causes of radicalisation in Britain there are a number of common themes that are repeated in much of the literature:

- The role of the mosque and madaris,
- Salafism/Wahhabism and extremist ulema,
- Government foreign policy,
- Lack of social cohesion/integration and identity crises

Following the 9/11 terror attacks some western academics and politicians began to apportion blame for radicalising Muslims on the Madrassa, with politicians beginning to see the foundations of Islamic terrorism in them. Donald Rumsfeld (former US Secretary of Defense), reflected whether the US could capture or deter would be terrorists as quickly as the Madaris could recruit and train them (Bergen and Pandey, 2006, pg 117). Much research has therefore centred around the role of Madaris throughout the Middle East, especially in such places as Pakistan (Khokar, 2007). In the July 2004 9/11 Commission, madrassas were described as “incubators of violent extremism,” despite the report failing to reveal whether any of the 19 hijackers had attend a madrassa. There was also much condemnation of the influence of the mullah who push a particular brand of Salafi Wahaabism (Armanios, pg 5, 2003) as groups such as Al Qaeda have been borne of the Salafi Jihadist tradition (Armanios, pg 3, 2003). Though Salaafism and Wahaabism are particularly conservative views of Islam they themselves do not cause violent radicalism. However, many of Britain’s Islamist extremists, such as Omar Bakri and Abu Hamza have claimed to be Salaafis. The Salafi Muslim community's initial isolationist approach to wider British society did not aid in the refutation of this perception and led to further marginalisation (Bakker, 2008). However, there are many socially conservative Muslims who do not adhere to the violent extremist ideology and work actively to de-legitimise it, for example Abdul Baker, former chairman of the Brixton Mosque who now runs STREET (Strategy to Reach Empower & Educate Teenagers), a youth program that aims to empower young Muslims (STREET, 2009).

In their study on radicalisation the Change institute describes Imams forcing radical ideas on impressionable young Muslims whose actions it dictates.

‘One source tells of Imams who are trying to recruit very young and impressionable youth using parallel narratives of Islam taken out of their rightful context “they tell the young people what to do
and what is rewarded in the war against the Western society – including acts of violence” (Mohammed).’ (Change Institute, 2008).

The role of the mosque and Muslim clerics in radicalisation has been published widely with particular focus on extremists at Finsbury Park Mosque and the detention of Abu Hamza al Masri and others who have been accused of ‘preaching hate’ (Tendler, 2004). Indeed, Taj Hargey argues that “the masses have been brainwashed by the Mullahs” (Hargey, quoted in Pendlebury, pg 38 2009). The rise in radical Imams in Britain preaching Jihad and hate led to the British government attempting to both ban these people from attending and speaking at mosque and to importing moderate imams from abroad. This strategy has proved futile as these speakers often deliver lectures in Urdu, Arabic or other languages which young British Muslims cannot understand, perhaps leading them to feel alienated from moderate mosque led religion and forcing them to turn elsewhere for religious learning and clarity (Malik, 2008). Maajid Nawaz has described the lack of English speaking preachers in his childhood mosque and the impossibility of him relating to what they preached (Nawaz, pg 2, 2008). In some cases, study circles were established after prayer by various individuals under the guise of teaching converts Arabic and it is here that radical/ extremist messages may have spread (Baker, 2008). This may mean that young British Muslims are at risk of hearing and understanding only one interpretation of the Islamic belief system, which may be extreme and violent in nature and may be followed due to the lack of understanding from elsewhere.

‘Despite the fact that many British young Muslims speak and think in English, there is not a well worked out Qur’anic pedagogy in English. Thus, many of these young people are left either ignorant of this fundamental source of Islam or at the mercy of radical transnational Islamic groups, which try to indoctrinate them into a rigid ahistorical understanding of Islam.’ (Lewis, pg 45, 2009)

This paper contends that though the roles of extremist Ulema, lack of understanding moderate teachings and narrow jihadist interpretations of Salafism/ wahhabism are significant ones there are other factors that may contribute to the radicalisation process,
especially in Britain. These include a failure to integrate into wider British society, the government’s foreign policy and, of course, personal experiences and issues.

A government’s foreign policy has been one of the most cited causes of jihadi violence, both in literature on the subject and by Islamists themselves. Much of the literature on radicalisation in the UK focuses on groups such as Hizb ut – Tahrir and Al Muhajirun’s promotion of the idea that Muslims around the globe are being persecuted. These Islamist groups politicise Islam and push the idea that the governments foreign policy deliberately victimises Muslims. Further, Anwan (2008) discusses the results of a recent survey where 83% of Muslim students were unhappy with British foreign policy. Not only do the Islamists promote the issue but other, more mainstream Muslims share at least the same basic dissatisfaction with British foreign policy. Most specifically the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, their position on the Israel Palestine conflict, and the special relationship with the U.S. may have led Muslims to believe they are the victims of Western aggression and persecution (Anwan, pg 16, 2008). In addition to the feelings of victimization there are also criticisms of Britain’s lack of action in conflicts such as Bosnia where Muslims were targeted leading to suggestions that the UK is complicit in the murder of Muslims (Hussain, 2009). This criticism of UK policies that affect Muslims around the globe suggests that some Muslims may see their identity first and foremost as Muslim and then British. In an interview with Abdul Rehman Malik of the Radical Middle Way I was introduced to the idea that British Muslims may find it easier to relate to international and local identities rather than a national identity (Malik, interview with the author, July 2009). Therefore, it may be that some British Muslims identify with a religiously based global Islamic umma (community) over the secular national identity and so their loyalty may lie with this Muslim brotherhood as opposed to the nation state. Indeed, Siddique Khan, in his “martyrdom” testament, ‘repeatedly invokes a communal identity in which he identifies the subjugation of “my people” and “my Muslim brothers and sisters” as being principle among his grievances.’ (Awan, pg 14, 2008) The difficult relationship with Britain and its policies that may affect Muslims is possibly linked to the problems of feeling British, of integration, social cohesion and the ensuing identity crises. Former Islamist and founder of
the Quilliam foundation Maajid Nawaz details his struggle to find a British Pakistani identity and the impact of Britain’s policy in Bosnia on the foundation of his politico religious Muslim identity.

‘The culmination of such incidents (racist incidents, wrongful arrests etc) led me to a crisis of identity. Not feeling fully accepted in the country of my birth left me wondering whether I was British, English, Pakistani, Muslim or even something else entirely. Whilst such a crisis of identity initially concerned only racial and ethnic dimensions, the tragic slaughter of white Muslims that was to eventually play out in Bosnia Herzegovina brought to the fore of my mind Europe’s “Muslim Question”. Through this rude awakening, and for the first time in my life, I became critically aware of a Muslim identity.’ (Nawaz, pg 2, 2009)

The inability to identify with British culture has lead to some becoming what Lewis (2007) terms ‘culturally schizophrenic’, facing an identity crisis whereby they feel neither British or Pakistani/ Bangladeshi/ Indian etc. This inability to identify with British culture or at least to incorporate British culture into a traditional ethnic identity makes it difficult to integrate into British society and leads to a lack of social cohesion. The attempts at social cohesion and integration are also hindered by socio economic factors, with Muslim immigrants and second generation British Muslims struggling to achieve educationally and with high rates of unemployment (Lewis, 2007). These factors have created a situation that Islamist groups exploit; by utilising ethnic and cultural discontent and pushing a strong Muslim identity as a political, ethnic and religious entity, Islamist groups may provide a sense of belonging to young disaffected Muslims who need a sense of place.

‘Religion—in this case a purified and politicised version of Islam… was a natural way of transcending this cultural dislocation. "Here come the Islamists and they give you an identity... you don't need Pakistan or Britain. You can be anywhere in the world and this identity will stick with you and give you a sense of belonging.”’ (Malik, pg 9, 2007)

The strong ideologies of Islamist groups such as the now banned Al Muhajiroun provide a group identity that sets itself above those who do not hold their beliefs and distances people from their families, friends and others who support moderate beliefs.
‘This (Islamist) view is also typically characterized by the severing, or at least weakening of familial and social networks, though the disavowal of parents, siblings, wives, and children, which also signifies a break with the past.’ (Awan, pg 14, 2008)

The suggestion here, along with the role of authority figures in radicalisation, is the gradual distancing of Islamists and radical extremists from their community or society. In the British case Muslims may find it hard to integrate in the first place and if this leads to alienation from British society then complete removal may not be so difficult. As Ed Husain details in *The Islamist* alienation from regular society (and even the mainstream Muslim community) came through involvement with Islamism and it was this alienation that made it difficult to end relations with the radical group. ‘In my heart, though, I felt that my time inside Islamism has ruined me and my relationship with those around me, particularly my parents’ (Husain, pg 156, 2007). This disengagement from the wider society has also been detailed by Tore Bjørø in his texts on radical racist neo Nazi groups (Bjørø, 2005). Whilst socialization into the group is a vital aspect of joining extremist groups the process of severing ties with ‘normal’ society, which happens simultaneously, is also important especially in regards to feelings of isolation which may push people into staying in such groups (Bjørø, 2005). According to Bjørø the disengagement from society makes it especially difficult for people to leave these groups and so people may be left with only one route, moving deeper into the group and becoming more likely to commit violence. It could thus be argued that preventing people from joining extremist groups or influencing people to leave groups early in their membership will be a much easier prospect. As Bjørø asserts, ‘it is easier to influence a teen-ager to quit than to get an adult veteran of the movement to do so’ (Bjørø, pg 27, 2005).

In an attempt to diminish the threat from violent extremism the British government has recently adopted a counter terrorism policy Contest II that includes the Prevent initiative, a strategy which recognises it is easier to prevent radicalisation and involvement in violent extremism than it is to deradicalise people once they have already been involved.
Prevent outlines a number of strategies to challenge the causes of violent extremism, three of which are of particular interest to the context of this thesis:

- challenging the violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices;
- disrupting those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they are active;
- supporting individuals who are being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism;

These counter radicalisation objectives, aiming to prevent radicalisation and radicals from progressing towards terrorism are being implemented hand in hand with Britain’s traditional legal approach to counter terrorism. Most importantly, all of the above targets are achievable in a secular society such as Britain and may diminish the appeal of extremist Islamist ideologies and therefore the threat of Islamist terrorism.

Following the 7/7 bombings the British government began to engage with the British Muslim community in an attempt to develop a strong counter argument to radical Islamist ideologies that justify violence. This has included funding and/ or supporting Muslim groups who present moderate views such as the Radical Middle Way and the Quilliam Foundation (Malik, interview with the author, July 2009). As the strategy has developed, there has been a realization that community, grassroots initiatives may be the most effective counter terrorist measures and have a greater chance of success (Baker, 2008). The government has tried to counter extremism strategy through centralized challenges of Islamist ideologies along with parallel initiatives at the local level, such as STREET, to support those who may be targeted by, or susceptible to, the extremist ideology. Strengthening communities and equipping British Muslims with the tools to combat the extremist Islamist discourse may allow them to deal with issues themselves as and when they occur. If this is paired with attempts to build better relations between the state and British Muslims then the Muslim community may be more likely to aid the government in its fight against terrorism and violent extremist. Indeed, Nicky Reilly who attempted to set
off a bomb in a Giraffe restaurant in 2008 was reported to the authorities by the local Muslim community.

These preventive strategies are unlike that of any Muslim countries whose preventative counter terrorism initiatives predominantly rely on repressive techniques and severe penalties for those involved in extremist groups. Though Britain has also employed deterrence techniques such as strong prison sentences for those committing terrorism related offenses they have also looked at ways of undermining extremist ideology. Rather than solely punishing those involved and attempting to deter others from such action they have also attempted to diminish the attraction of extremist groups. Considering Hutson et al’s model of radicalisation one can see the British government has chosen to disrupt the Islamist message whilst attempting to promote community cohesion and helping to raise British Muslims socio economic status. The Dialogue Societies’ ‘deradicalisation by default’ suggests this could include promoting dialogue among the Muslim community and encouraging intercultural dialogue along with equipping Muslim organisations with the theology and practise of dialogue in order that they can engage Islamists in debate and perhaps challenge the extremist discourse. However, challenging the Islamist ideology is insufficient to counter the threat of Islamist terrorism, the success of preventative and deradicalisation initiatives lies in an alternative paradigm to the Islamist discourse. This may be difficult for the British government to achieve, given the religious message of Islamism and the secular nature of British society. Due to this the government has supported and helped fund preventative initiatives solely within the Muslim community, a discrepancy that needs to be addressed if cohesion is a significant goal. There is a strong sense in the Muslim community that violent Islamist extremism is a Muslim problem (Fraihi, 2008) that should be dealt with by the Muslim community and the government has realised the necessity of using moderate Islamic scholars to counter this ideology. However, Ozcan Keles, executive director of the Dialogue Society stresses that this is a societal problem not an Islamic one, society must be responsible for countering extremism and terrorism and as Muslims have a place in society they also take responsibility (telephone interview with the author, 21st July 2009). The problem in secular societies like Britain is
governments may be unable to deal with the issues as they have no Islamic legitimacy. It is also a problem when police, counter terrorism units, prison officers and probation officers have proportionately fewer Muslim employees and so deradicalisation processes linked with any of these institutions may be extremely difficult to implement. This is where the problem as to whether deradicalisation is possible in a secular society presents itself. Whilst counter radicalisation and deradicalisation programmes may be achievable in a secular society they would almost certainly fail without Islamic leadership and the support of the mainstream Muslim community.

Though the British counter radicalisation initiative may be effective this does not negate the need to develop a deradicalisation program in tandem. Though the Home Office has recently given funding to the Quilliam Foundation, which is establishing the first deradicalisation programme in the UK, they have so far failed to develop a holistic approach such as Saudi Arabia’s PRAC system or Yemen’s committee for Dialogue. These programmes also focus on reintegration into society yet the Quilliam program takes only the form of religious rehabilitation. It is rather a ‘process through which the ideology behind extremism is questioned and, ultimately, refuted with the individuals involved re-evaluating their Islamist ideology in favour of ‘a more traditional, pluralistic understanding of Islam.’ (Hussain, 2009). The process involves both religious and historical debate as well as attempts to address the grievances that Islamists exploit and focuses on the distorted understanding of Islam that is held by many Islamists. In contrast, both the Saudi and Yemen deradicalisation programmes offer support to detainees’ families and post rehabilitation aid through education, employment and family support networks (Boucek, 2008). Indeed, the Saudi program encourages frequent home visits to help reconnect with family and friends (LaGuardia, 2008) and the Singaporean Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) engages both detainees and their families. This may reduce the risks of the radicalisation of the family due to social needs and also deter re-radicalisation caused by the failure to support reintegration. The Quilliam programme is therefore unlikely to be as successful as the Saudi program where numbers of recidivism and re-arrest are low, at around 1 to 2 percent (Boucek pg 1, 2008). This is possibly because a network of family
support may be harder to achieve in British society than in Yemen and Saudi Arabia’s tribally ordered society. Indeed, for British converts to Islam the small familial units common in Britain make such family support networks negligible and perhaps this is why the government and the Quilliam Foundation have failed to address this aspect of the Middle Eastern programmes.

The previous chapter detailed the debate processes in Yemen and Egypt’s deradicalisation programmes whereby former violent Islamist leaders or legitimate Muslim clerics engage in dialogue with violent Islamists in an attempt to reverse their beliefs on Jihad in Islam. It is likely that the only way to stop violent extremist Muslims wanting to commit acts of terrorism is to get them to understand that terrorism is un-Islamic and so Britain has to develop a system of religious reeducation and rehabilitation to do this. However, in order for extremists to participate in dialogue or debate about this subject those engaging them would have to possess religious legitimacy which would give some authority to their beliefs and their refutation of the Islamist message. This is obviously more difficult in a secular society where Muslims make up only 2-3% of the British population (www.muslimsinbritain.org) and are made up of a variety of different cultures, backgrounds and religious beliefs making it difficult to find one encompassing religious authority. Unlike the Yemen case where Al–Hitar was a recognised cleric as well as a judge the government here has failed to identify and utilise key Islamic figures that may be well placed to deradicalise Islamist extremists. Indeed, much of the criticism of the Quilliam foundation and its deradicalisation programme is based around whether they have any legitimate authority to rehabilitate Islamist extremist because they have no specific religious training. However, a number of members of the Quilliam Foundation are ex members of Islamist groups themselves and therefore have a solid sense of Islamist ideologies, how religion and grievances are manipulated and how they themselves began to doubt these ideas and eventually contest them. Much like the Egyptian case study those who have undergone an ideological turnaround may perhaps be best placed to attempt to deradicalise and rehabilitate violent Islamist extremists. Indeed, if former Islamists cannot tackle the skewed religious and historical narratives then there is little hope for others to
achieve this. Rather than follow either the Yemeni or Egyptian models for deradicalisation in order to build a successful model of deradicalisation the British government needs to take the best from all models and mould them to become achievable in a secular society. For example, the system of discussion and debate from the Egyptian, Saudi and Yemeni models could be implemented along with the use of religious scholars to lead the discussions yet could also include former Islamists in these debates. Rather than adopting a process of lectures to re-educate discussion and debate, having all participants on an equal platform is more likely to engage Islamists and lead them to question their beliefs. Islamic texts and moderate sermons should be made available to radical Islamist prisoners in order that they can form a wider base of religious knowledge than they may have previously possessed. As highlighted in the Egyptian case time in prison allowed Islamists the time to read and understand a number of Islamic texts that they would previously not have accessed. In addition if one makes the assumption that these prisoners have been misled by extremists into straying from more moderate paths of Islam by Islamist propaganda and lectures one needs to challenge these teachings. Rather than simply providing these extremist prisoners with another belief system thought provoking dialogue and debate may be more successful due to allowing prisoners to develop their own ideologies based on an increased level of information on Islam and challenging discussions. By using former extremists as well as Islamic scholars to debate Islam and historical narratives manipulated by Islamist groups there is a balance of religious authority and experience of being in similar situations. This would possibly lead to a more focussed, balanced debate on issues such as the acceptability of violence and Jihad, and the real or perceived grievances of Islamists.

In Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt the deradicalisation process takes place in prison where Islamists are invited to take part in the rehabilitation process. If they repent their former actions and reform their attitudes on religion and violence they are offered a reduced sentence or freedom, unless they have killed (Taarnby, 2005 and Boucek 2008). However, the prisoners involved in Yemen’s committee for Dialogue have committed no crime so although deradicalising Islamists in jail could possibly be done with the same ease in
Britain as in Muslim countries Britain is restrained by human and civil rights to imprison only those who have committed a crime. In regards to attempting deradicalisation outside of prisons the problem would be who to target and how to get them to agree to participate. This may mean that the British government is only able to counter the radicalisation threat and deradicalise those who have crossed the line and committed terrorist offenses, thus failing to deradicalise those who are members of extremist Islamist groups but have committed no crime. Rather than adopting a deradicalisation programme that attempts to prevent Islamists committing violent offenses the British government may have to take a reactive approach that may fail to fully confront the problem of violent extremism and its links with jihadi terrorism.

The difficulty in evaluating whether the Quilliam Foundation has developed a successful deradicalisation programme in Britain is that neither they or the government has released any information on how many extremists they have attempted to rehabilitate, whether these people had committed terrorist offenses or simply belonged to an extremist group, how they engaged these Islamists, whether they truly renounced their previous beliefs and how the successes/ failures have been measured. The Home office has paid more than a million pounds to the Quilliam foundation to fund their deradicalisation efforts yet little is known about the programme they deliver (Kerbaj, 2009). Does it differ greatly from the programs in Muslim Countries? Ishtiaq Hussain asserts that the programme is similar to that of the Committee for Dialogue in Yemen but has been developed to tackle the historical narrative that Islamist groups disseminate (Hussain, 2009). There will inevitably be some differences in a secular society and whether the deradicalisation process is transferable to secular society is questionable. Due to the lack of information about the Quilliam Foundation and its successes only a few, indefinite conclusions may be drawn.

**Conclusion**

Due to the lack of research that has been conducted into the subject of deradicalisation and rehabilitation of Islamist terrorists, especially in secular societies it has been difficult to conduct a full literary analysis of the subject. Much of the data analysed has come from
American and European sources and most of the literature examined is written by either American, European or Muslim authors, leading to cultural biases inherent in the texts. The information used in the Muslim countries chapter is also limited by its ethnocentric nature, with the Western authors writing about another culture as if it is the same as their own. However, the author has attempted to counterbalance this by using a wide range of sources highlighting different perspectives as well as the use of sources by authors from different countries in order to minimize ethnocentricity.

The author also conducted a number of semi-structured interviews and posed questions to sources that were unavailable for interview. This technique was chosen in order to create an informal, conversational tone whereby some open-ended questions could be prepared beforehand to stimulate a discussion allowing for further questions based on responses received. Due to the lack of other research in this area the author wanted to enter into research without prejudgement about what is or isn’t important about the subject and therefore though the interviews covered a small sample, semi-structured interviews was a way to achieve this. Though the information gained from interviews is difficult to generalise it provides a depth of qualitative data that would be difficult to find by other means.

The lack of data on the rehabilitation of extremists and jihadi terrorists, especially in secular societies from literature analysis and first-hand research has made it difficult to draw any solid conclusions about deradicalisation in secular societies. However, this dissertation does not aim to provide a model for deradicalisation in secular societies; the goal is merely to present the benefits of both preventive and rehabilitative counter ideological strategies of counter-terrorism and to explore whether these are possible in a secular society. Therefore, due to a lack of specific research, there are some original yet tentative conclusions to be drawn in the area.

The examination of two deradicalisation processes, Egypt and Yemen, has helped to determine whether deradicalisation is possible in secular societies and thus whether the use
of counter ideological strategies of counter terrorism can be successful in persuading Islamist extremists and jihadi terrorists to disengage. It has also helped the author to form a view on which strategies have been successful, where the successes came from and what aspects may be transferable to British society.

Exploring a viable alternative to the traditional law or war paradigms is vital to whether deradicalisation is possible in a secular society as this is only achievable if a workable paradigm for deradicalisation is achieved. The author concludes that secular western countries must be open to exploring counter terrorism strategies outside of the traditional frameworks. The deradicalisation programmes employed in the Middle East and Singapore, though implemented in differing ways all offer proactive, innovative approaches to the problems of violent extremism. These programmes have been employed in parallel with punitive methods and as a result have contributed to a reduction in violent extremism. Based solely on the regard for international security it is clear that multi faceted approaches including counter ideology provides a better option than legal or war frameworks in reducing the threat of terrorism. Biddle agrees (Biddle, 2005) that a strategy combating terrorist’s ideology and religious extremism is the only way to guarantee fewer terrorist attacks in the international system. However, it must be recalled that the sole use of counter ideological tactics in an attempt to fight terrorism will make less of an impact upon the problem than will a multi pronged approach. In the short term counter ideological preventative strategies serve to immunise against Islamist propaganda and act as a rehabilitative strategy to persuade terrorists to give up violence and radical beliefs. The only solution to provide a long term reduction in terrorism in secular society is combining the British legal approach with counter ideological methods as they target members of Islamist groups, terrorists and those members of the Muslim community that may be susceptible to extremist ideologies.

The British approach of employing preventative strategies to counter terrorism may accelerate the process by which terrorist groups disengage. Though Prevent is not
technically a deradicalisation initiative as it aims to engage British Muslims before they become radicalised it reduces the chance of Islamist extremists engaging in terrorism. Though terrorism clearly needs to be addressed as a priority Islamist extremism must also be managed. In this respect Prevent potentially presents a well founded long lasting policy which could be adapted to meet regional requirements.

Government attempts to minimise the status initially placed upon preventing Islamist extremism and instead emphasising community cohesion may prove more successful in the long run, especially if strong relationships are built between local imams and counter terrorism workers (such as prevent officers or community cohesion partners). To surmise, if the policy is to work the support of the wider Muslim community is necessary and the easiest way to gather support is through local imams and community leaders. A good example of this is the local Muslim population voicing suspicion to the authorities about Exeter bomber Nicky Reilly. This demonstrates that intelligence from local Muslims will provide undoubtedly invaluable in future counter terrorism initiatives.

Though the British Prevent initiative may be successful, a deradicalisation programme is also necessary in order to handle people who have already become radicalised and who support or actively engage in violent extremism. The Quilliam Foundation’s attempts to implement a deradicalisation programme do not present a holistic strategy that deals with reintegration into society; a factor that inhibits disengagement from extremist groups (Bjørgo, 2005). Though Ishtiaq Hussain of the Quilliam Foundation asserts that the group’s programme has been influenced by Middle Eastern programmes they have failed to adopt the most successful elements of programmes employed elsewhere.

Research has focussed on the implementation of deradicalisation programmes in Muslim societies as they have successfully utilised rehabilitative counter ideology approaches. The most successful elements of the foreign deradicalisation programmes are the religious prison based debates/dialogue with religious leaders and the post deradicalisation reintegration projects. It is my assertion that deradicalisation is possible in a secular society
such as Britain only if these three elements form the basis of the process. In addition, it is vital that the British government overcome the stigma of entering into dialogue with terrorists as this is the most significant element of any deradicalisation programme. The decision to enter into dialogue with Irish terrorists led to the Good Friday Agreement and all but ended Irish terrorism. The policy has worked in Ireland and has brought success in a number of Middle Eastern countries therefore; the author would recommend that consideration is given to this strategy in relation to Islamist extremism. The author proposes the introduction of prison based deradicalisation programmes as they could provide opportunities to engage those who may not otherwise participate in such initiatives whilst also offering the chance to counter the problem of prison based radicalisation. Though there is currently no national cohesive prison based deradicalisation program in the UK the rehabilitative focus of prison could without doubt facilitate such an initiative yet a major problem with deradicalisation in secular societies, especially in a prison setting lays in finding people who are willing and able to debate Islam legitimately. These problems are not insurmountable and do not render deradicalisation impossible in secular societies. It is entirely possible to deradicalise Muslims in secular Britain if Muslim scholars and religious leaders are used as these are best placed to counter the extremist Islamist ideology (Hussain, 2009). One solution may be for prisons to employ moderate Imams to facilitate regular religious discussion sessions to allow Islam to be debated by a range of prisoners, whether Islamist extremists or not. Another would be to have senior ulema invited into prison to engage Islamist extremists in religious debate, much like the Yemeni system. The prison service may find it difficult to find a moderate imam with enough religious authority to undertake this task and in this case authoritative Islamic scholars with a good grasp of Islamist ideology may be better placed to lead such discussions.

Due to the secularity of British society the government and civil society are not as well equipped as those in Middle Eastern countries to deal with radical Islamism because there is such a strong mainstream Islamic presence willing and able to counter the extremist discourse in the Middle East. Therefore a British deradicalisation programme would fail
without the aid of Muslim groups such as the Quilliam Foundation and Iqra as well as the mainstream Muslim community. Ishtiaq Hussain of the Quilliam Foundation asserts that

'It is possible to de-radicalise Muslims in a secular society, so long as the programme makes full use of mainstream Muslim scholars of the highest repute who are best placed to counter the Islamist ideology.' (Hussain, 2009)

To conclude, though the deradicalisation of Islamist extremists may be possible in British society the implementation is unlikely to be identical to that of other countries. The successes of the Committee for Dialogue and the Saudi PRAC system are due to their addressing local issues that may breed radicalisation. Different areas are likely to have different causes of radicalisation and thus deradicalisation programmes must be moulded to individual regions. In the cases mentioned above this has meant a singular national program however the cultural and religious diversity of British Muslims, as well as the threat of far right extremism that forms a large part of many local Prevent initiatives may mean that a single programme may be insufficient to deal with violent extremism in the UK. Instead a number of regional initiatives modelled around a national framework will probably be better suited to combat both Islamist extremism and far right extremism depending on situational necessity. The roll out of the Prevent strategy provides an ideal opportunity for further research into this area.

Due to the small scale of this research there are many questions on the subject that need to be considered. For example, how would local deradicalisation initiatives be implemented? Could deradicalisation rehabilitation centres provide an alternative to prisons for Islamist terrorists? Future research could also focus on the complementary nature of preventive and rehabilitative counter ideological methods and on whether it is possible to implement the two with any success without the use of punitive strategies. A fundamental question that also needs further exploration would be whether someone can still work in a terrorist organisation or support a terrorist group and not be considered a terrorist. Or, more specifically, how far back do deradicalisation programmes and counter ideology have to take a person to be successful? Must one merely agree to end violent action, review their beliefs on the acceptability of violence, leave an Islamist/terrorist group or fully revise the
Islamist ideology? In essence, how far does one have to go back in the process of disengagement for deradicalisation to be successful?

In essence, the author believes that deradicalisation is possible in a secular society. To achieve success however, the government will need to be flexible in developing a multi pronged strategy that can adapt to the needs of different communities. It will also need to simultaneously consider how to tackle other factors, e.g. economic and cultural issues that often lead to a lack of community cohesion.
First Hand Data

Anonymous (Hull City Council), interviewed by Johnson, S., 9th July 2009, 15:00, Hull

Anonymous (Prevent Development Officer, Humberside Police) interviewed by Johnson, S., 21st August 2009, 09:00, Hull

Mohammad, A. interviewed by Johnson, S., 4th June 2009, 14:00, London

Hussain, I. (Ishtiaq.Hussain@Quilliamfoundation.org), (29th May 2009), Quilliam Questions, Email to Sarah Johnson pt08s2j@leeds.ac.uk

Keles, O., telephone interview with Johnson, S., 21st July 2009, 20:30

Malik, A.R., interviewed by Johnson, S., 16th July, 11.30am, London

(Selection of first hand data included in the Appendices, transcripts in the possession of the author)

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

**Rules of the Committee for Dialogue (Yemen)**

- Recognition of one another
- Legitimacy of the dialogue
- Definition of the goal of the dialogue
- Definition of the locality of the dialogue
- Definition of the terminology of the dialogue and definition of the point of reference in case of disagreements
- Allow both parts of the dialogue the chance to discuss the topic of the dialogue
- Organize the dialogue’s main topics, then the sub-topics
- Choose an appropriate time and place
- Begin with the objects of the agreement
Follow the scientific methods in the dialogue
Search for the truth and avoid prejudices
Delineate the conclusive and the hypothetical wordings, and separate independent judgements from personal Fatwas
Accept the results of the dialogue

The Dialogue’s Ethics
Mutual respect between the two parts
Respect difference of opinion and commitment to good conduct in case of disagreement
The two parts must respect freedom of opinion and freedom of expression
Strive for equality in the discussion, exchange of views and comments while also considering boring prolongations, incorrect abridgements and interruptions in the discussion
Strive for high quality in the presentation and correctness in the expression
Be a good listener and respect the other person’s point of view
Strive for self-control, calmness and non-aggressiveness
Be patient, trustful and humble
Consider the other person’s feelings and conditions and avoid irony and satire in expression
Commit to objectivity and prioritize the ideas according to their topics
Set up the argument and the discussion in the best manner
When encountering disputed matters, stick to the agreed upon point of reference
Be fair and avoid aggressiveness and stupidity
Keep a calm voice
Recognize mistakes and welcome what is correct

(Taarnby, 2005, pg 131 – 132)
A List of Basic Questions asked to Interviewees:

How big a threat is violent extremism/ Islamism to British Society?

How are young Muslims in Britain becoming radicalised?
Mosque?
Family?
Failure to integrate into society/ community?
Iraq/ Afghanistan/ Pakistan/ Palestine and other foreign policy?

Do / have groups such as Hizb ut Tahrir/ Al-Muhajiroun played a part in the radicalisation of young Muslims? Are they a threat to British security?

Do they contribute to the problem of violent extremism/ terrorism in Britain?

Why do you feel the British government has failed to counter radicalisation?

How do you feel is the best way to deradicalise violent extremists? Should we even try?
Why/ Why not?

Has the government failed to implement a (successful?) deradicalisation program? Why?

Do you think the government should do so? Or is it the challenge of probation services/ prison services/ civil society?

Should civil society/ communities play a greater role in deradicalisation programmes than government?
What role can the Muslim community play in countering the threat of radicalisation/extremism?
Can it play a part in deradicalisation?

What role can the wider (secular/ Christian/ Jewish etc) society play?

What do you feel about the efforts of the Quilliam Foundation in their deradicalisation programme?
Are they going about deradicalisation the right way?

Is deradicalisation possible in a secular society?
Is deradicalisation in secular society more difficult than in places like Saudi Arabia and Yemen (eg the Committee for Dialogue?)

Appendix 3:
Email Q and A: Ishtiaq Hussain, Quilliam Foundation to Sarah Johnson

From: Ishtiaq.Hussain@Quilliamfoundation.org
To: sarah.e.johnson@hotmail.co.uk
Date: Fri, 29 May 2009 11:23:35 +0100
Subject: RE: Quilliam questions

Hi Sarah
I hope you are well. Sorry for the late reply, have been very very busy.
I have answered your questions below:

What does the Quilliam Foundation understand the term ‘de radicalisation’ to mean?(Does the Quilliam Foundation even use the term?)
Quilliam does use the term ‘de-radicalisation’, and describes it as a process through which the ideology behind extremism is questioned and, ultimately, refuted. The process is better described as a rehabilitation process, where the individuals involved re-evaluate their Islamist ideology in favour of a more traditional, pluralistic understanding of Islam.

Does the Qulliam foundation take its ideas on debating Islamism from programs such as the Committee for Dialogue in Yemen?

The Committee for Dialogue in Yemen is a good example of what the de-radicalisation process should look like, as it lays great emphasis on tackling the theological aspect of the Islamist ideology. Through the use of well established clerics, the ideology is critiqued and easily shown to be a flawed Islamic concept. Quilliam understands that many extremists actually have a limited or skewed understanding of Islam, and therefore for de-radicalisation to be successful a focus needs to be on theology. Quilliam’s ideas on debating Islamism slightly differ from the programme in Yemen in that we also tackle the historical narrative that Islamists propagate, as well as addressing the real or perceived grievances that Islamists exploit.

How could the success of de radicalisation processes/ programs be measured?

Measuring the success of de-radicalisation programmes are not easy, since it is difficult to judge whether the mindset of an individual has completely transformed. A number of steps can be taken, however, to assess whether de-radicalisation projects are successful, including:

- Calculating the re-offending rate of people who have been convicted of extremist related offenses and have also been through the de-radicalisation process.
- Calculating the membership rate of Islamist organisations. If they are on the decline, it could be indicative that the de-radicalisation programme is successful and its’ message has spread.
Ultimately, success rates are hard to measure and can only be done on an individual basis.

What do the Quilliam Foundation’s deradicalisation debates entail?

Quilliam’s programme entails an in-depth critique and analysis of the Islamist ideology, and how it differs from a traditional understanding of Islam. The historical context of these movements are also discussed, as are the methods that Islamist movements use to recruit more members, such as exploiting legitimate or perceived grievances. Lastly, positive alternative engagement initiatives are also discussed.

Is it possible to de radicalise Muslims in a secular society?

It is possible to de-radicalise Muslims in a secular society, so long as the programme makes full use of mainstream Muslim scholars of the highest repute who are best placed to counter the Islamist ideology. The programme should be independent of government in order for it to maintain legitimacy, and can therefore work equally well in both a secular and Muslim society. Also, along with tackling theological issues such programmes also critique the historical and social narrative that Islamists propagate, which can be performed in a secular and religious society.

Is there a difference between deradicalising Islamists in a Muslim country and a secular country?

There should be no difference to de-radicalising Islamists in a secular society and Islamists in a Muslim society, particularly since the process should be independent of government. In both contexts equal emphasis should be placed on theological and political issues, although it should be noted that de-radicalisation programmes should always be tailored to meet the concerns and grievances of different societies. Therefore, a de-radicalisation programme implemented in Yemen cannot be implemented in Birmingham without
necessary changes to suit the change in environment. Different societies have different reasons as to why individuals are vulnerable to radicalisation.

Would deradicalisation be at all possible using only secular means? (ie rather than religious debate)

It would be difficult for de-radicalisation programmes to focus solely on secular issues rather than religious ones, since it is a skewed view of religion that provides the necessary foundations for the ideology to spread. Part of the process should be based on secular and historical issues, however most emphasis should be placed on religious debate in order to show participants that their ideas are inconsistent with their religion.

Could you explain the role civil society has to play in deradicalisation?

Civil society also has a role to play in de-radicalisation, in terms of providing social security (jobs, education fees, housing etc), which is essential in ensuring the successful reintegration of participants in society. This can also limit the grievances an individual has with society.

Let me know how you do in your course and keep in touch.

Kind Regards
Ishtiaq Hussain
Quilliam Outreach and Training Unit
Challenging Extremism  I  Promoting Pluralism  I  Inspiring Change
Hello Ishtiaq,

I know you’re probably really busy but I was wondering if there was a problem with the questions I sent you as I haven’t received a reply?

Best Wishes,

Sarah

Appendix 4:

Interview: Mohammad Amin, (Muslim Council for Britain) 4th June 2009 2pm, PWC Hays Galleria, London Bridge, London

Sarah Johnson interviewing Mr Mohammad Amin.

SJ: Maybe, I don’t know, if you could discuss a bit about what you do at the MCB (Muslim Council for Britain)?

MA: Well, yeah I got involved with the MCB in an official capacity about 12 months ago. Before that I was a member of the business economics committee which used to meet perhaps once or twice a year and I’d go there for only a short time because what I used to do

(Paused: Interruption)

Where was I? Yeah Living in Manchester with the MCB things happening in London it wasn’t practical to do very much anyway but as I was spending more and more time in London and in fact I bought a flat in London last year cos I moved my office address to London from Manchester I got

(Telephone interruption: Paused)

I got elected onto the central working committee which is a group of about 75 people who are elected from all around the country those people will actually run the MCB for of
course 75 people can’t (?) either they are office bearers, the secretary general and other office bearers who are elected from the central committee and then the central working committee also appoint the chairman of individual committees and I’m the chairman of the business and economics committee which I run and that means we now meet once a month, the second Wednesday of the month, which I know has no remit over the sorts of issues you’re interested in but I’m just interested in these issues myself for I’ve lived in this country now for 40 to 50 years.

SJ: (Laughs) Are you admitting to that, I am taping this, ok so, the MCB in general is it made up of a number of groups?

MA: The MCB is an umbrella body, individual people cannot join the MCB, its not an organisation that has individuals as members, the members of the MCB are themselves organisations so all kinds of organisations, mosques, youth clubs or national Islamic societies, any kind of organisation can join the MCB and the level of subscription depends on whether they are either a national organisation or a regional organisation and voting power comes accordingly as well.

The MCB is an organisation made up of organisations which was originally set up as an umbrella body and its modelled very closely on the board of deputies of the British Jury.

SJ: So any Muslim group at all can join?

MA: Yes, I mean of course you can get turned away

SJ: right

MA: If you were a Muslim group that wanted to join the MCB but the MCB didn’t think it was appropriate to join then we would turn them down.

SJ: Would you have a big vote on that or…

MA: It would be the office bearers, the central working committee, it’s the central working committee that make all the major decisions

SJ: Right, ok

MA: It’s like any other club, if you want to join the members have to let you in
SJ: Is there any way you could be, not thrown out but maybe asked to leave or, I mean I don’t want to say moderate and radical but you know if there was a group or organisation that was
MA: Well lets just say that a particular mosque was for the sake of argument, was encouraging terrorism
SJ: Yeah
MA: And happened to be a member of the MCB they could be thrown out
SJ: Right, would that be grounds for being
MA: Certainly, as far as I’m concerned it would be
SJ: Yeah, I just wondered if any group could join then if there were moving towards that
MA: Well again, groups that join have to be acceptable to the MCB
SJ: Yeah

SJ: So, in terms of outreach do you… in terms of integration into the community do you, I don’t know, go into schools or go into youth clubs outside of the Muslim community? Or are you just
MA: The MCB regularly gets questions and enquiries from the outside world, we have email, we have mailboxes and to use examples, I’ll use two incidences which I’m aware of that are fresh, one of them is something I’m doing personally which is in February of next year I’m going to Kings college school in Wimbledon to speak to the 6th form debating society about Islam for half an hour, there’ll be half an hours worth of question and answers and that came about because one of the teachers at that school sent an email to the MCB. What normally happens in that situation is that the MCB’s office secretary will send an email around the leadership group, the office bearers, the committee chairman and the advisors which is a group of maybe 20 people and this comes up if anyone wants to volunteer. Similarly the tower of London has regular diversity training and part of their diversity training, I think it takes place in two weeks time, they were looking for a volunteer to speak for a half hour focusing on Muslim issues so that kind of thing comes up all the time. Conferences wanting someone to speak.
SJ: I was just wondering do you go out and promote integration or do you like, do you do anything like… is it only if people approach you or do you maybe arrange like maybe Muslim events that anybody is welcome to attend and they can come and find out about cultural issues or religious

MA: Well bear in mind that most of what you’re describing would be done by our member organisations so the Islamic society of Britain every year it is one of the key people who helps to organise Islam awareness week. The mayor of London, its technically the mayor who organises it, holds eid in the square every year so Trafalgar square, for one day, is given over to a massive eid celebration. The MCB has been the key organiser of that event although other Muslim bodies are involved as well. So there’s all kinds of outwards communication we build on. We hold a programme called books for school where we have some books on Islam and we provide a schools pack it costs about £200 for the school and this literature will go to educating children in the schools which we can get it into and the school being happy to receive it. There is a range of programmes like that.

SJ: You just said about books for schools, you know the prevent initiative, well I live in Hull and its being lowly released into school system, would the MCB have any input into this kind of thing?

MA: A number of our member bodies are working on Prevent projects with the government we aren’t working on a project at the moment but there’s no reason why we shouldn’t. You know the books for schools project is something that’s much older than Prevent and the Muslim council for Britain itself came up with books for schools because we feel it was important.

SJ: May I ask you a few more specific questions now?

MA: Yes

SJ: From your individual point of view, moving away from the Muslim council for Britain now, what would you consider to be radical Islam or, I know the Quilliam Foundation call it Islamism.

MA: There are two aspects to that, First Muslims, like any other religious group have a range of views on theology and they have a range of views on Politics, I’m actually a paid
up member of the Conservative party and I’m chairman of the conservative Muslim forum. Islamism is a word that is used quite widely around the world to describe Muslims coming together and forming political parties where the agenda of the political parties is driven primarily by their religious beliefs. You can call this the sort of Muslim equivalent of the Christian democratic parties around Europe. In terms of, if we use the term Islamism as the Quilliam Foundation does, what was the other term you used in your question?

SJ: Radical

MA: As far as radical Islam is where, first of all people who want to control what other people do which I regard as fundamentally un-Islamic I regard religion as firstly being a matter for yourself and rather than someone else to come along to me and say Amin you aren’t practising your religion right you should be doing this instead and I’m going to force you to do it our way and that is what I regard as totally unacceptable. I totally believe that Islamic political parties are a dead end especially in a country when you’ve only got 3% Muslims but even in a Muslim majority country I am actually not convinced that Islam that Islamic political parties are the way to go. There’s nothing wrong at all with Muslims political views being influenced by their religion and the same things happen for Christians, Jews and indeed (atheists?). You can’t divorce your political views from your religious views completely. The problem comes at what point do you want to impose things on other people because of your religious views for example in the United states there was an anti-abortion doctor, sorry an abortion doctor who was assassinated this week and there are people who want to ban abortion in the States completely because they’re imposing their views about abortion on other people and that I regard as wrong in principle regardless of which religion it was.

SJ: So, Would you say, like for example the Muslim Brotherhood, in terrorism texts they wouldn’t really be considered as a radical group but if they did come to power in say like Egypt or something it would impose an Islamic state I guess.

MA: Well the problem we’re talking about, for the Muslim Brotherhood is that their precise political ideas at any precise time vary, bearing in mind this was founded around 1928 by Hassan al- Banna and their political views today are not identical with what they were in 1928 and what’s more the way that other people present their political views is obviously
quite different from the views that they represent of themselves. So, I don’t want to go into the policies of any particular party because you’re never quite sure whether we’re ever actually describing the right thing. But, in principle if democratic elections took place in Egypt and if they choose to elect the party which is in effect, the Muslim Brotherhood Party, why should that be an issue?

SJ: Ok, so do you feel, if we’re talking about radical Islam and Islamism do you feel that it’s possible to have conservative (maybe Wahhab Islam) without having radicalism or Islamism?

MA: Well it comes down to what are the policies that they want to follow and to what extent do those policies imposing views on other people. Let’s take a simple example from Turkey, the party in Turkey at the moment is the AKP, which I think is the Justice and Welfare Party translated into English. One of the big issues in Turkey at the moment is that as a result of the policies of the AKP it’s against the law to wear a headscarf on state buildings. I firstly regard that as a fundamental offence against personal freedom on the grounds of not being able to dress as you like, whether you want to wear a headscarf or not wear a headscarf. If a party comes to power which says we’re going to change the law so that anybody who wants to wear a headscarf can wear a headscarf then it’s something that I would support. If a party comes to power which says we think the wearing of headscarves should be made compulsory for all Muslims that is something I oppose. So you have to look at what the policy actually is that they’re proposing.

SJ: So, you think there pretty much is an innate problem with Islamism in that it might force, say maybe the Hizb ut-Tahrir

MA: The problem with a phrase like Islamism is that it gets used to describe an enormous range of views and it gets used particularly to describe things that people don’t like so it’s an automatic sort of bad word like fascism and actually the word is not any more useful than fascism is useful these days. All kinds of things get described as fascism and they can be anywhere on the political spectrum it’s a word that gradually sort of loses meaning.
SJ: Do you think, I don’t know what word to use anymore, erm radical Islamist groups perhaps working in Britain, do you think they would constitute a problem for British society?

MA: Again, words like radical islamist groups themselves don’t actually have enough meaning. If you say, or if you ask me the question Do I think groups of people that believe in terrorism, setting off bombs on the underground are a threat to Britain obviously they are. If I think that a group of Muslims (……..?????) there was a political party made up of Muslims who said we share a policy that all women in the UK, regardless of religion are required not to wear a headscarf but to wear the full face veil excetera given that they were going to follow this policy by democratic means, by this I mean they say they are going to persuade people to vote for their policy of their political party, would this be a threat to Britain? No, the reason is quite simple, how many votes do you think they’d get? Given that 97% of the population of the country is not Muslim? They wouldn’t get anywhere. So a party that was advocating that policy by peaceful democratic means I would say that there would be no chance of them coming to power but I would also say they are not a threat to the country because they would never get any votes. So you have to look at the detail and what you’re talking about before you describe it as bad, words like radical Islamist are a danger to the country don’t mean anything because you have to look at what it is they’re going to do. Conversely, if 5 people in the country are going to set off bombs then they are dangerous as they are going to kill people.

SJ: Ok, so I know that the government have tried to ban certain groups in Britain, for example the Hizb ut Tahrir

MA: No they have not tried to ban the Hizb ut-Tahrir

SJ: Well,

MA: Tony Blair looked at banning the Hizb ut-Tahrir but obviously thought the better of it as soon as he realised that actually by banning it he would encourage more people to join, he changed his mind before it got off the ground and realised it’s a nonsensical policy.

SJ: Do you feel that that group plays a part in radicalising young Muslims?
MA: They take a part in persuading young Muslims to adopt their views, I don’t like words like radicalise, because it’s always unclear what you mean is somebody radicalised because they decide to pray five times a day? We throw these words around, they get used in political discourse by organisations like the government or by the Quilliam Foundation and most of the time they don’t mean anything. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s main policy is that there should be in Britain a return to having a Caliphate, (there are all these things that the Muslim world it is one country????) covering all the Muslim world with a Caliph who is appointed the same way as the Caliphs who were appointed after the Prophet (had died from a body of religious leaders????) and they say that their policies should be done by peaceful means by democratic change. Now do I think that is a sensible policy no I don’t, do I think they are a danger to this country by following that policy by peaceful means? No I don’t I think the party is irrelevant to this country as it’s a country that is 97% non Muslim, Do I think they’ll get anywhere in the Muslim world, No I don’t so I don’t see any reason for trying to ban them, putting forward policies you and I may think are nutty is not a reason for banning them. If they were encouraging people to set off bombs then clearly you need to find out who is doing that encouragement and you prosecute them for incitement to murder but you don’t ban them just because you don’t like their religious views or their political views.

SJ: If we discussed, I’m trying to think of a different term now we’ve discussed radicalism, if you talk about young Muslims becoming, taking a certain view of Islam which may or may not be a slanted view would you say that through the Mosque, would you say that it’s through failure to integrate into the wider community

MA: Lets just look at what we just described, what we just stopped talking about, that’s what I’ve been saying all the way through this conversation, first we need to be clear exactly what it is you’re talking about then you can describe whether you like it or not. If we should describe a behaviour pattern which involves being very religious so praying five times a day, following all of the rules but also cutting yourself off from non Muslims refusing to interact with non Muslims, to work with non Muslims not assuming a career in the normal sense of the word which involves work, spending all your time praying instead
in theory not going to work at all and living on social security that isn’t a very good
behaviour pattern and this is something that I would want to discourage what do I think
causes that? Mosques themselves are actually not to blame, not much happens in a mosque,
basically most mosques are buildings with a big prayer room, people turn up and they pray
then they go away and next to nothing else happens and you’ll have a Khutbah , think of
that as a sermon and people go at the end of the lunch time prayer on Fridays, a lot of the
time that will actually be in a foreign language they don’t understand, so Arabic or Urdu
sometimes in English, some of these Khutbah’s are practical in that they encourage people
to live better religious lives others will be basically fermenting hatred of non Muslims, they
vary. So, to some extent mosques can have an impact, but a very small one because most of
the time what actually happens in a mosque there’s no interaction or organisation at all, you
turn up, you pray, you go away. And the Khutbah is basically just Friday lunchtime prayer.
What is more likely to drive that kind of behaviour is being influenced by other people. If
your friends are doing it or people you know you tend to sort of go along with it, kind of in
the way Jehovah’s witnesses are dragged into it. There’s absolutely no difference it’s the
same kind of behaviour we see and in the same way it can be negative in terms of own self
development and their success in life to get into extreme Christian views of that kind. In the
same way it’s not good for them if they get dragged into extreme Muslim views of the kind
that we’re talking about. The best antidote to that is actually high quality education of Islam
at an earlier stage in their lives. I mean my wife was the head teacher of a Muslim primary
school for 10 years in Manchester and I’m firmly with the view that children who go to a
school like that grow up self confident, they grow up with a proper understanding of Islam
which recognises its fundamental tolerance and they grow up sufficiently self confident so
they can make their way through this world without actually feeling they’ve got to shut
themselves off.

SJ: Do you feel that maybe erm going to a purely Muslim primary school or secondary
school would possibly lead to problems integrating later on in life in the wider community.

MA: Yes and no, I mean the majority of people we’re talking about here live in places like
Manchester or Leeds anyway so they’re coming across plenty of non Muslims outside of
school and my wife’s school also took pains to teach the children about other religions and
they actually promoting better understanding of all the other religions better than many state schools which were non religious schools. So it’s a question of trade off. What I would actually like personally is for the Muslim schools to become so good that they have lots of non Muslims wanting to go to them so they became mixed but they were mixed Muslim schools. That used to the thing that happened in (????) where there were a large number of Muslim schools which were regarded as the best choice for education and lots of non Muslims went to them. But if you look at the facts the July 7 bombers well one of them was a recent convert but the others they’d all grown up in this country but they had gone to normal state schools. So, the fact that you go to a state school which has both Muslims and non Muslims doesn’t prevent you from going down that route.

SJ: Just talking about the 7/7 bombers do you think that foreign policies or like the War in Afghanistan, Iraq, whatever is happening with Pakistan, Palestine, Bosnia, in regards to a few years ago do you think they have an impact on the way British Muslims will feel about Britain itself and whether there was a sense of unity with other Muslims across the globe in opposition to Britain, rather than identifying more with the wider British population?

MA: Yes, the answer to that question is undoubtedly yes our country’s foreign policy is such that, with the conflicts you’re talking about, its quite easy to see how somebody who was unhappy with that foreign policy wasn’t involved in ways that would change it through proper, normal peaceful means, so they weren’t politically active in the normal sense could actually find themselves thinking that they could improve their position by committing acts of terrorism. The government recognises that now. The government has always known it its just that Tony Blair could never bring himself to admit it. So at times when he’s been on the television he’s made himself look really stupid by saying that foreign policy’s got nothing to do with it but quite clearly foreign policy has got something to do with it. The fact that people might commit acts of terrorism isn’t necessarily a reason for changing foreign policy. The foreign policy that we have could well be the right foreign policy anyway in which case you simply accept the fact that of life that there is an increased risk of terrorism and you have to plan accordingly. The security services themselves always advise the government that yes if we have this foreign policy there is a greater risk of
terrorism, that is just a fact of life. You are just saying that if you do this this is more likely to happen.

SJ: Ok, if you have the 7/7 bombers for example looking at possibly young Muslims being drawn by certain groups or certain ideas towards a violent side of Islam do you think that deradicalisation is a good policy to pursue?

MA: In that situation, if you have young people who have beliefs that lead them towards wanting to do these things then we have to do something, I mean if they actually do something we can arrest them but sooner or later they are going to get out of jail, I mean someone might be in jail for 10 years and come out and is wanting to start doing these things again so somewhere along the line you have to get these guys to change their thinking, that’s what you describe as deradicalisation. Its obviously essential, in going about it what you actually do is up for grabs and we can talk about it but undoubtedly it’s a desirable policy.

SJ: My second question was actually how do you feel the best way to go about it would be? Whether you think government, civil society… whether the Muslim community should the major role

MA: The most important thing you have to do is to have that delivered, in the end, by Muslims because a non Muslim can stand there forever and say to one of these terrorists terrorism is bad, non Muslims can stand there and say terrorism is un Islamic the terrorist isn’t going to listen. The way to reach these people is to have people whose religious knowledge and qualifications are unambiguously strong and them explaining exactly why, in detail, Islam is against those things. The way to stop Muslims wanting to commit acts of terrorism is to get them to understand that terrorism is un –Islamic.

SJ: Right, ok So, what do you think about, we were just talking about putting people in jail, if people commit a crime then obviously they should be sentenced to jail, should they be deradicalised within or should they serve a sentence and when they come out we try and rehabilitate them, reintegrate them into society and if there are suspected terrorists who haven’t committed a crime is it, how do we suggest deradicalisation in that instance?
MA: Lets take the criminals first the purpose of jail is to rehabilitate people so as soon as anybody goes to jail for any offence the whole prison system needs to think about how this person is going to be when they come out of jail and try to rehabilitate them. If a person is in jail for attempted terrorism or for actual terrorism of the kind we’re talking about the prison system needs to get working on them the day they go through the prison gates, not waiting until they’re released.

SJ: So, would you suggest an external Muslim cleric possibly coming in,

MA: yes

SJ: So you wouldn’t suggest the prison service itself you’d suggest an external service coming in?

MA: Well you probably wouldn’t have anyone working for the Prison Service, I mean of course if you got enough people of that kind then it makes sense for the prison service to employ full time people. Now your second question was what about people who haven’t committed any criminal offence. Well we’ve got a democratic principle in this country which is that we don’t lock people up for thinking bad thoughts.

SJ: yes, actually I was thinking of the committee for Dialogue in Yemen a lot of the people, I think in fact most of the people hadn’t actually committed an act of terrorism but they belonged to groups who the government obviously felt would be involved in terrorist activity. Do you think it’s possible or even acceptable to attempt to deradicalise these people?

MA: You want the people in that category to have as much contact as possible with people who will deradicalise them but you can’t force them to undergo a deradicalisation training anymore than you can force people who drink but don’t actually commit any crimes to go to alcoholics anonymous but the extent that there are people in the community who are willing to reach out to these guys, communicate with them, try to teach them the right way to think about Islam obviously that is something that should be encouraged and it would help the government to provide funding for it. And when you talk to Ozcan Keles he’ll tell you a lot about something that their society calls deradicalisation by default which is simply ways of getting people engaged with community action, civic action, more contact
with non Muslims and the bi product of that deradicalisation by default is that they are
deradicalised. But you don’t say to people we’re running a deradicalisation program
because nobody is going to want to get involved in it.

SJ: Do you think a community level response would have a more positive affect than say a
national initiative that you know says we are running this you come and join us

MA: Yes, the other thing that I think is particularly important is encouraging as many
Muslims as possible to join political parties because people do not become terrorists if they
think they can actually change the system, produce real political change by peaceful means.

SJ: There’s been quite a lot of criticism of deradicalisation as a form of conversion…
MA: I don’t understand the question
SJ: Erm, some of the things I’ve been reading criticise deradicalisation initiatives saying
that the techniques of deradicalisation say in Yemen or the Quilliam Foundation are just
converting these terrorists to their form of Islam or converting them, basically brainwashing
them changing their ideas or, you know…
MA: Brainwashing isn’t likely to succeed at all anyway because its hard to brainwash
people even with locking them up and to then to get them to change characteristics, so what
we’re talking about in our society where people are not locked up in prison, lets focus on
that group of people is simply encouragement, cajoling, making them more aware of
political action. Even when you talk about prisoners, the people actually in prison in this
country you still can’t actually brainwash them in the literal sense of the word because its
against their human rights you cannot put them on a bread and water diet or starve them
until they give in, you can’t torture them, so it always has to be done by dialogue, teaching
etctera and I wouldn’t call that brainwashing. Nor would I call it converting people, trying
to make them change their religious views. In any event the people trying to do this are
themselves Muslims. It’s simply that they have a slightly different view of what Islam says
certain things than these attempted terrorists do.
SJ: Ok, so dialogue is the best…
MA: Dialogue and education, I mean the only people that actually read the Koran is the (???) because those who preach hatred and Jihad etcetera they’ll take a verse here and a verse there and five words from here somewhere else. Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them, sounds really dramatic doesn’t it so if you left it at that you would think, this is the Koran saying find all the unbelievers you can wherever they are and kill them when you read that verse in the context of what becomes before it and afterwards its describing a situation where the Muslims were going to visit Mecca, they were going to go peacefully they were told that if they stayed peaceful and if they weren’t attacked that was it. However if they were attacked they were allowed to fight back. That’s what the Koran says in that bit of the Koran that its taken from and once you actually read the whole thing in context its utterly innocuous. If you take one verse, you know five words out of it or something and try to build your life around those words without what comes before and what comes afterwards obviously gives a very different view so what’s important is obviously that kind of teaching.

SJ: Just going back to the Quilliam Foundation what do you feel about the way that they’re going about deradicalisation? Is it, I mean I know they’ve had a fair bit of criticism, and some organisations within the Muslim Council for Britain I know have not been quite so supportive. Just thinking about…
MA: First of all, well actually I don’t know what it is they actually do in terms of deradicalisation. I know that they have a budget of over a million pounds a year.
SJ: I know, I was going to ask, do you think that they’re too involved with the government to have any sense of legitimacy?
MA: Well the problem is that I don’t know what they do I mean and there’s a whole group of people in this country who have been to, their one claim to fame is that once upon a time they were misguided. I read Ed Hussain’s book The Islamist and you can summarise the book quite simply as I was led astray into believing in Hizb ut Tahrir and supporting them and now I realise I was wrong all the time. But actually what I don’t understand is building on that what then credentialises him to actually either teach Muslims anything or in
particular the what they actually do with their million per year in terms of organised programs.

SJ: Well Ishtiaq Hussain from the Quilliam Foundation who I’ve been talking to says it’s an in depth critique and critical analysis of the Islamist ideology and how it differs from a traditional understanding of Islam now…

MA: Well that you can do for, in terms of the critique, criticising the Islamist critique well that assuming with a literature search you can find loads of critique there already, just download it in your pocket. Once they’ve got that what do they actually do with it? Do they run lots of programs with people going through it? If so how many people do they process? How do they get those people to get through the front door?

SJ: Apparently its dialogue, they have discussions. Traditional Islam that they suggest I was under the impression that there was no one kind of traditional Islam? So, in the sense that the Quilliam Foundation are going about deradicalising how far do you go? I mean do you just say the Koran doesn’t say its ok to kill the non believer but its ok to you know as long as you don’t try and impose these views on other people as long as you don’t commit violence your ideas are ok or do you try and push them to a more inclusive, you know freer Islam?

MA: Well I mean its hard to tell everybody first of all has their own views about everything. Coming back to the Quilliam Foundation first of all the fact that they have no credibility at all with people that I would regard as friends and normal human beings themselves, I mean that I hang around with at the Muslim Council for Britain are they’re accountants, they’re lawyers, they’re bankers, tax advisors etcetera and people that I regard as fully integrated into society. The fact that none of these guys has any respect for the Quilliam Foundation either suggests to me that actually they’re a bit of a joke.

SJ: So who do you think would have the credentials, would you take mosque leaders or would you I don’t know…

MA: They need to be people who have deep in depth knowledge first of all and Ed Hussein certainly doesn’t show any indications of that to me. I’ve read The Islamist and all
the things that the Quilliam Foundation turns out and the people who do have credibility are proper religious scholars and the so and there are also great religious scholars in this country. I mean if you like Abdal Hakim Murad at Cambridge Tarik Ramadan, people like that have enormous Islamic credibility, Tarik Ramadan, his grandfather was Hasan al Banna the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Those are the sort of people that I would regard as having meaningful credibility and if you put them into a room with a group of wanabe terrorists they can actually convince them why you know terrorism has absolutely nothing to do with Islam.

SJ: In terms of my broad kind of title area is whether deradicalisation is possible in a secular society.
MA: Of course it is, I don’t see any reason why not
SJ: Obviously it could be successful in a secular society as long as the Muslim community has, not control over it, but as long as they take the major role in the deradicalisation program.
MA: Deradicalisation has to be delivered by people that the that you’re trying to deradicalise will regard as credible experts on Islam because the extent that its delivered by people they regard as either non Muslims or that are simply government stooges then its gonna have no impact on them.
SJ: So do you think that the wider secular society would have any role to play at all
MA: Yes, I mean certainly they have to pay for it (laughs)
SJ: (Laughs) No, I mean aside from that
MA: I mean there is the money but secondly it is important to, I don’t think the program should be delivered entirely by non Muslims. I mean I’ve never actually tried devising a dreadicalisation program but if I was creating a program for example what I would want to do is to obviously have lots of people talking about Islam but actually I would like to have people come along that these radicals, to call them that for a moment, regard as their complete and utter enemy. I would turn up with some religious Jews, I would get these religious Jews to talk to the Muslims, get them to talk about Judaism and most Muslims, unless they’ve studied Judaism know nothing about it. If as a Muslim you start studying
what Judaism actually believes you would discover very quickly that there is almost no chink of light between Islam and Judaism. I’d never stepped foot inside a Synagogue until about five years ago just because I when I helped to create and run the Muslim Jewish forum of greater Manchester I started to going to synagogues for that reason. When I was taking part in a Jewish religious service I can take part in it with total enthusiasm there’s nothing that I find when I’m going through the hymns or prayers that I have any objection to which is different to from when I go to a Christian religious service, normally funerals so you know Christian religious service half the time you find that they’re occasionally you sort of divide when they’re singing about Jesus Christ being divided for example so while they’re bits of Christianity I can agree with there are other bits that as a Muslim I completely disagree with. I don’t have that with Judaism yet these extremists wannabe terrorists actually know nothing about Judaism and they somehow believe that Judaism believes things that are totally different from Islam, it doesn’t. The gripe that Muslims have against Judaism is that the Jews don’t believe that Jesus was a prophet and they don’t believe that Mohammad was a prophet. But actually what Jews believe about God is basically identical to what Muslims believe about God. So, I wouldn’t just have Muslims turning up to take you know do the preaching I would get other people because what you want them to understand is first of all that religious views are much wider than just their own personal religious views how closely Judaism and Islam relate to each other. You want to get some political democrats along, you want to get them to really explain why democratic societies are organised the way they are and how the constitution works. It’s a shame we don’t have the American constitution because its actually in print and you can show it to them. So the whole range of people you want to get in front of them having people that have got Islamic credibility is actually quite fundamental and essential.

SJ: Do you also think that changing the ideas of political and historical narratives possibly, I think that maybe I don’t want to say a skewed idea of history but in a sense it is so I mean does it have to be an Islamic scholar to teach about history would somebody who had an amazing grasp of…
MA: It would need to be an incredible historian whether they’re Islamic or non Islamic the non Islamic one might not be believed but at least then if you’re having a dialogue I can tell you these facts now if you don’t actually believe this particular fact then ok how do I prove this fact because you’re absolutely right a false narrative of history is an integral part of this mindset.

SJ: Can I ask you one final question? Its slightly on a different tact but why do you think that Britain has had this problem and will possibly continue to do so when with the United States of America it’s much less of an issue there. I mean obviously with foreign policy its almost the same, obviously it’s a bigger Muslim community in America but its still a minority…

MA: There are several reasons first of all the American Muslim community falls into two parts they are the black Muslim community, the native black Americans who converted to Islam and they are on average pretty poor, I mean there are some rich ones but on average they are pretty poor but they are fully integrated into American society because they have been there a long time and I mean they are Americans pure and simple. The other half are immigrants, recent immigrants and children of recent immigrants they are actually on average highly educated and in some instances successful. According to statistic the average Muslim immigrant in the United States is richer than the average white and better educated than the average white in America and people like that don’t become terrorists. They are also relatively dispersed I mean they aren’t totally dispersed but there is some clumping there’s a big group in Michigan and New York City but you wouldn’t find many in Wichita Kansas. They are distributed all around the United States and avoiding big concentrations is good simply because when I was growing up there were very little Muslims in Manchester and I interacted therefore with non Muslims. If you grow up in a part of Yorkshire or in a part of Lancashire which is solidly Muslim naturally most of your interactions will be with Muslims because you won’t see many non Muslims so for a variety of reasons like that, why the United States is structurally different and financially different on top of that there is something about the fact that the United States is a nation of immigrants that makes it a lot easier I think for people to adapt to coming into the USA
than into the UK and if people are having trouble fitting in anyway that can be another reason why it can be easier in the US than here. There’s a whole complex collection of different reasons on top of each other. For example I was thinking about, trying to write down what I thought were British values, its not obvious what British values are because most of the things that you regard as British are values like tolerance, human rights, equal rights, well they belong to most countries in the world. Many would say these are Muslim values as well. Whereas with the United States there is actually much clearer, easier to see what are American values, not only because they are written clearly in the declaration of independence, in the constitution and those are the kinds of values you can adhere to and adopt very naturally even though you come from outside so I think that the United States has got a built in advantage that helps them.

SJ: Ok, and just an aside to finish with the local elections obviously taking place today and the European elections the BNP do you feel its also important to educate the, talking about Oldham for example, my grandparents are from Oldham and there is a lot of support there for the BNP do you think its important to educate the communities there you know about Muslims, about immigration and about things like that and do you think that would help possibly stop Muslims becoming, you know facing friction in the community and then disengaging with them completely.

MA: I mean, for the first part most of the conversation has been about Muslims there is a fundamental point of course that non Muslims need to learn things as well and what is truly astonishing is the level of ignorance about Islam among non Muslims in this country. Now Islam is a religion of about one quarter of the world’s population. Non Muslims should know something about Islam. You don’t have to believe any of it you just need to know what it is that Muslims believe because most non Muslims are completely unaware that Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet, they are completely unaware that Muslims believe in the Virgin birth and most of them don’t realise that actually when Muslims talk about Allah they’re talking about exactly the same God that the Jews are talking about in the Old Testament.
SJ: OK, I just wanted to talk about whether education and you know integration with nominally white Christian communities, I mean do you think it’s easier for Christian Britons to be able to discuss and integrate with Muslims as opposed to you know a vast majority of people who have no religious views at all
MA: About 70% of Britons claim to be Christian
SJ: I am shocked about that I mean that people call themselves Christians because they are christened whether they actually engage in religious activity..
MA: I know exactly what you mean because I was having dinner with a highly educated woman in her late 40s and I mentioned a talk I was doing and I mentioned the book of Ruth and she’d never heard of the book of Ruth. She was nominally Christian but she didn’t know there was a book of Ruth. The question was Christians can relate better to Muslims than Atheists? Yes it is actually much easier for people who have religious views to relate to each other even though they disagree in their religious views, assuming you can get over the problem threshold, than those who have no religious views what so ever. The most intolerant people in this country are the militant atheists.

SJ: Ok, that’s great thank you very much.

Appendix 5:
Interview: Abdul Rehman Malik, (Radical Middle Way) 16th July, 11.30am, London

SJ: Could you maybe tell me a bit about the Radical Middle Way?

ARM: The core team have been involved in activism in Britain from the 1980’s and were involved in Q News, have you come accross this?

SJ: No

ARM: Ok Its an independent Muslim current Affairs newspaper so we have a journalism background and were involved in campaign journalism between about 1988 to 1992 ish
challenging Wahhabism and political Islam and narrow interpretations. We also dealt with community issues like domestic violence forced marriage refugee issues etcetera.

SJ: So, how did you become involved?

ARM: Well I was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood for about 3 years (ish) in the 1990’s it was a very secret organisation and in the end I was thrown out for questioning the theology of the group and accused of Sufism. I was basically being groomed for a leadership position in Canada but I was influenced by my coming to Britain and meeting the Muslim Brotherhood and other Muslims here. I started to question the theology there’s something with the Islamic movement, an element of the thinking that may lead to violence and they didn’t like it.

SJ: Ok so tell me about the Radical Middle Way now

ARM: Well 9/11 and 7/7 were personal, real… a terrorist attack in London by Muslims. The government looked to engage the Muslim community and looked to local leaders making the old colonial “take to your leaders” errors

SJ: (Laughs)

ARM: They wanted to present a strong theological counter argument to the Islamist ideology and set up a 12 month program bringing scholars to Britain with mainstream legitimate traditions scholars who were respected across the board and have revival meetings. Trying to be proactive not just reactive and using Islam as a guide. They had something called preventing extremism together and invited Muslim groups to get involved and Radical Middle Way are the only one still together.

SJ: Ok, thanks… What do Radical Middle Way understand by the term radicalism/ radicalisation?
ARM: Well you need very specific definitions. Usually “radicals” have theological messages that justify violence and Jihad illegitimately. Even if you solve all their grievances it will still happen.

SJ: How are young British Muslims becoming radicalised? At mosques? foreign policy…groups like the Hizb ut-Tahrir?

ARM: Well it isn’t really at mosque, mosques and study circles or groups might be catalyst points but its outside of this community. Hizb are not talking about violence they might have extreme views but they don’t go around telling people to commit acts of violence.

SJ: Oh ok but being a member of such a group might lead someone towards violent Islamism though?

ARM: Maybe but not necessarily.

SJ: Yes, well do you think Deradicalisation is possible in a secular society?

ARM: It is possible yes but only in a neutral public square if no element is given hierarchy, if its an egalitarian debate. If Muslims can win this debate then ok good.

SJ: So, you think that such debates have to be led by Muslims?

ARM: Yes, I think Muslim groups are best placed to conduct dialogue like this.

SJ: What do you think about the efforts of the Quilliam Foundation?

ARM: The thing with Quilliam is that they aren’t connected to communities, they have their own agenda to promote. They attack Islamism but unless people become violent
Islamism isn’t against any law. It is the assumption of violence that needs to be challenged. The Quilliam Foundation won’t work on hardened Salafi’s. It is possible to be socially conservative and not believe in violence.

SJ: Can I ask why you think there is such a problem with radical Islamism in the UK and not in, say America?

ARM: Well for a start Muslims in the US are richer and better educated, in Britain its all live and let live there’s no social cohesion. In America people are united by a compelling national story. American Muslims are more American than Islamic ummm US Muslims are more politicised religion is very much in the public sphere but radicalism is kept at bay. In Britain the Islamic discourse is more honest.

SJ: Oh so British Muslims find it difficult to relate to a British identity than in America?

ARM: Islam is like a global identity, international and British Muslims find it hard to accept national identity they can relate to being Londoners or from Leeds but not to a national identity.

SJ: That’s great thank you very much.