University of Sussex

The One Per Cent World: Managing the Myth of Muslim Religious Extremism

The University of Sussex Lecture

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'The One Per Cent World'
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This talk covers...

- ☐ Some introductory points
- ☐ Tacit support for violence
- ☐ Grievance politics and solutions
- ☐ Reputational risks
- ☐ Religious sensitisation
- ☐ What should be done?
- ☐ Closing remarks

Preliminary comments

Before I start, let me make a brief preliminary comment. A number of friends and colleagues have suggested that taking on a subject such as tonight's lecture has been brave. I think they meant that the scope for rational debate appears pretty limited at present. I agree with this. However, the purpose of the lecture is to present some fresh insights and evidence in order to move the debate along. I have always held that this should be the job of socially and policy relevant analysis.

So, in case it needs to be said, my overarching thought in preparing this lecture has been to see what could be usefully said to add something to our collective understanding and also to help focus the role of government in response. Crucially, although there are startling facts to be shared, the aim is not to be provocative for its own sake. One of the things that working in and with government has taught me, is that the signal you sent is not always the signal that

is received. My - and our - interest lies in reducing this mismatch. We are, after all, handling one of the most sensitive and tricky policy areas facing us today, tackling terrorism inspired by religious extremism.

Introductory points

What is the scale of Muslim religious extremism, including violence, in Britain today? And how should we respond to this challenge? These questions, in short, are the theme of this lecture. I should, incidentally, clarify that the myth attaches to the scale of extremism - one per cent or otherwise - and not to the fact of religious extremism.

There are various takes on both the estimate and indeed the definition of extremism. The gap in understanding has become a serious matter, serious enough for me to warn, as this lecture does, that we are collectively working to an ill-conceived model. This model has the consequence of creating and nurturing an atmosphere of benign neglect, at best, and, at worst, looking only for a security solution to a security problem. Frankly, such a solution, the evidence suggests, is improbable.

Let me start with Lord Stevens. Shortly after the July 2005 bombings, Stevens, formerly London's policing supremo, estimated that about one per cent of Britain's Muslims were tied up with serious forms of religious and political extremism. With a total population size of 1.6 million, the inference is that the public policy and intelligence communities should focus upon around 16,000 individuals - in short, the outer limits of the security problem. This is probably an ill-informed estimate; but its greater inaccuracy lies in assuming that the remaining members of British Muslim communities were and are distant from extremism and violence. In reality, the lines are not so sharp.
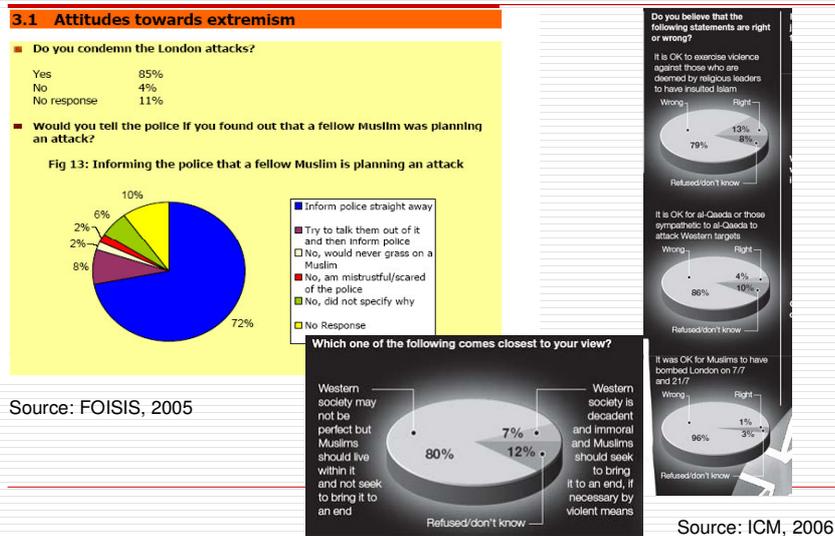
One in a hundred?

There are some practical illustrations for my concern. For example, a Populus poll of attitudes among British Muslims, carried out for *The Times*, at the height of the Danish cartoons controversy, reported some alarming results. Some 7 per cent of the weighted sample signed up to the statement that, and I quote: "There are circumstances in which I would condone suicide bombings on UK soil." This, in itself, approximates to well over 100,000 British Muslims.

Another example comes from an ICM poll of British Muslims, again against the backdrop of the controversial cartoons. Alarmingly, this survey showed that fully a fifth of respondents had "some sympathy with the feelings and motives of those who carried out the London attacks." Quick arithmetic yields a raw number of a little below a third of million people, a figure that was described by Sadiq Khan, the new Labour MP for Tooting, as "alarming". (I believe he is with us this evening). This describes not so much a fringe element but a considerable minority. The same poll showed that only 1 per cent stated that the 7/7 and 21/7 bombings were "right". More worryingly, another 10 per cent refused to say whether the bombing were right or wrong.

Fence-sitters: some evidence

3.1 Attitudes towards extremism

Do you condemn the London attacks?

Yes   85%
No   4%
No response 11%

Would you tell the police if you found out that a fellow Muslim was planning an attack?

Fig 13: Informing the police that a fellow Muslim is planning an attack

- Inform police straight away
- Try to talk them out of it and then inform police
- No, would never grass on a Muslim
- No, am mistrustful/scared of the police
- No, did not specify why
- No Response

10%
6%
2%
2%
8%
72%

Source: FOISIS, 2005

Do you believe that the following statements are right or wrong?

It is OK to exercise violence against those who are deemed by religious leaders to have insulted Islam
Wrong   Right
79%   13% 8%
Refused/don't know

It is OK for al-Qaeda or those sympathetic to al-Qaeda to attack Western targets
Wrong   Right
86%   4% 10%
Refused/don't know

It was OK for Muslims to have bombed London on 7/7 and 21/7
Wrong   Right
96%   1% 3%
Refused/don't know

Which one of the following comes closest to your view?

Western society may not be perfect but Muslims should live within it and not seek to bring it to an end   80% 7% 12%   Western society is decadent and immoral and Muslims should seek to bring it to an end, if necessary by violent means

Refused/don't know

Source: ICM, 2006

Finally, a survey of Muslim students by the Federation of Islamic Student Societies, contains an even more disturbing picture. Remember that this poll takes in only those participating in higher or further education, so we are basically describing sentiment among a better educated, human capital-rich group.

Nevertheless, 4 per cent of Muslim students felt unable to condemn the London attacks, whilst a further 11 per cent refused to back or condemn such actions. But the more revealing aspect lies in attitudes about how individuals might deal with a suicide bomber in their ranks. The good news (if that is what it is), is that 72 per cent stated that they would contact the law enforcement agencies immediately; while a related 8 per cent thought that they would have a go at talking a would-be bomber out of his or her plans, but would call the police if persuasion failed. So 80 per cent, it seems, were conscious of a line involving law enforcement.

The less encouraging news is that the remaining fifth divided between various categories of equivocation. A hardcore 2 per cent would, and I quote, "never grass on a fellow Muslim"; a further 2 per cent would not call the police as they were "scared or mistrustful" of them; while a further 16 per cent said that they would not inform the police but were unable, or unwilling, to say why.

Mapping such sentiment onto population numbers is tricky methodologically. But, by using the Federation's own calculations, suggests that the fifth who would not take pre-emptive action could be as high as 18,000 students. By any reckoning, this is a colossal figure.

The sample of Muslim students was not naive, it must be said. Some 43 per cent accepted that, in general, society's perceptions about Islam had worsened after the London attacks; and 90 per cent reported a worsening of perceptions about Muslim students. Well, given sentiment about calling 999 to avert a bomber, such a deterioration is not so surprising, I guess.

Of course context is everything, and we need to keep in mind the reasoning behind such grassroots sympathy for violence. Survey after survey reveals that deeply held resentment over British and American policy in Iraq stands out in a long list of grievances. Some 30 per cent of Muslim students believed that the war in Iraq was the single biggest cause of extremism; and 38 per cent attributed this to a misunderstanding of Islam in the west. Media and judicial bias against Muslims ranked just behind. For instance, a quarter of British Muslims believed that Abu Hamza had not received a fair trial.

So, to what degree would such a group be willing to support violent behaviour, albeit indirectly? A number of detailed studies have tried to probe this point, all of which end up grinding to a messy halt of imprecision. The evidence does point, however, to a long-ish tail of soft, unintentional acts of omission within and across communities that can serve to support men of violence. This is my first conclusion then: that we have focused too heavily on narrow conspiracies of violence, and have thus taken our eyes off those who surround, and tacitly support, violence and its perpetrators.

Tacit terror

Let me move on to what this might mean.

The evidence on Irish, Basque and Quebec violent nationalism is revealing, It shows that hardcore minorities bent on confrontation are usually surrounded by some form of support mechanism. In other words, Lord Stevens' belief in a binary distinction between

violent and peaceful British Muslims is simplistic to the point of wishful thinking. The support systems will vary from practical assistance with finance, transport, housing and the like. They will typically involve a safe house or houses, or access to laundered funds - all part of an inner ring of logistical help.

The security agencies have been well aware of this backing for a long time, and have been on the front foot in trying to dismantle or disrupt such support. The monitoring, investigating and eventual raiding of the Finsbury Park mosque is a well-known example. This was just the physical location for an array of support for violent jihadis. By taking away the practical support, the hope was that the opportunity costs of violence would become higher, and thus less probable.

The main drawback with this strategy is that higher opportunity costs can, of course, be an incentive to those who basically wish to demonstrate their commitment. Evading detection in their practical support for violence becomes just another challenge to conquer. Once word gets out that places of worship or equivalent are unsuitable places to whip up excitement and new recruits, soft supporters quickly displace their efforts to gyms, bookshops, cafes, kebab restaurants, private homes, and, of course, the internet. Even the latter now cannot escape detection. The response has been as imaginative as it has been sinister. My colleague, Kevin O'Brien, at the Centre for Intelligence Research and Analysis, has argued that private internet networks, that by-pass servers and hubs, are now the rage among conspirators. Neil Doyle, author of *Terror Base UK*, made a similar point, illustrated with graphic evidence of filmed suicide missions in Iraq, Israel and beyond.

Looking at support infrastructure abroad, the Pakistani High Commissioner in London, HE Dr Maleena Lodhi, has also drawn our attention to the difficulty of pinning down the dynamics of who is supporting whom.

The July 7 London suicide team, in preparing to execute their mission, did not operate in a vacuum. The intelligence and security communities accept that progress in unlocking their support network or networks has been patchy. There is widespread unease, in some quarters, about the possibility of a fifth member of the team. A late substitute in the composition of the final team appears to be a viable possibility, although the identity of the missing man has been elusive.

The circumstances of the parked, loaded car at Luton railway station points to a larger series of attacks, possibly sequentially timed. Scarcely anything is known for certain about the meeters-and-greeters for the two members of the team who spent time, and plotted in detail, in Pakistan beforehand. And the link to the failed attackers of July 21 is yet another Rumsfeldian known, unknown.

With rare exceptions, the final suicide mission team are meant to be reasonably ordinary folk with a dark side that no-one knew about. This is very, very unlikely. The evidence points to more. The estranged wife of one member of the team from Aylesbury has suggested that many tell-tale signs of violent conspiracy were in evidence beforehand, but were not acted upon. The parents of one of the 21/7 team declared that their sustained lack of contact with their son had been a barrier - but not an insurmountable one - to acting on their suspicions about his plans. Similarly in relation to the Gloucester grammar school would-be shoe-bomber, who thankfully lost his nerve just as he was detected. Once indicted, a surprisingly large circle around him have admitted their suspicions. And a host of co-worshipers at the Al-Madina mosque in Beeston, Leeds, have revealed an insight into the violent incitement of preachers that preceded the London attacks.

The support network is, in fact, rarely completely unknown within these communities. Its purpose, effectiveness and membership may vary over time. But its existence is not much in doubt.

The problem, unfortunately, is bigger and deeper than logistical networks. It extends to support conveyed through shared ideas and values that have the effect of turning a blind eye to those engaged in the organisation and delivery of violence. Whole swathes of such communities may be characterised by an ambivalence towards the use of violent means to pursue shared goals. The support is essentially tacit in nature, articulated only in moments of severe crisis, and responsible for minimal engagement with law enforcement agencies. Meanwhile, those involved in or close to violent conspiracies are able to operate reasonably freely, safe in the knowledge - sometimes exaggerated - that their communities back them in both ends and in means.

This tacit support does not necessarily involve providing a safe house. Such backing can only be provided by those with a close stake in the project. Rather, it is a form of support that causes ordinary people -

guys next door, so-to-speak - to switch channels when a grainy, yet familiar, black-and-white CCTV photo is shown on the late evening news. Turning in one of their own, especially when they represent, however misguidedly, a common cause, is too great a sacrifice. Too great in the sense that the law enforcement agencies do not carry sufficient trust and credibility within particular communities who already feel under pressure. Co-operating in the pursuit suspects requires Muslims to break ranks at a time when press stories, many believe, have been pre-written about them. Their help, they conclude, can probably wait.

In essence, zero-sum calculations normally prevail. Little weight is given to the effects of artificially externalising the costs of non-cooperation. Perhaps not surprisingly, the price, over time, impacts on the reputation of the group.

A serious reputational risk

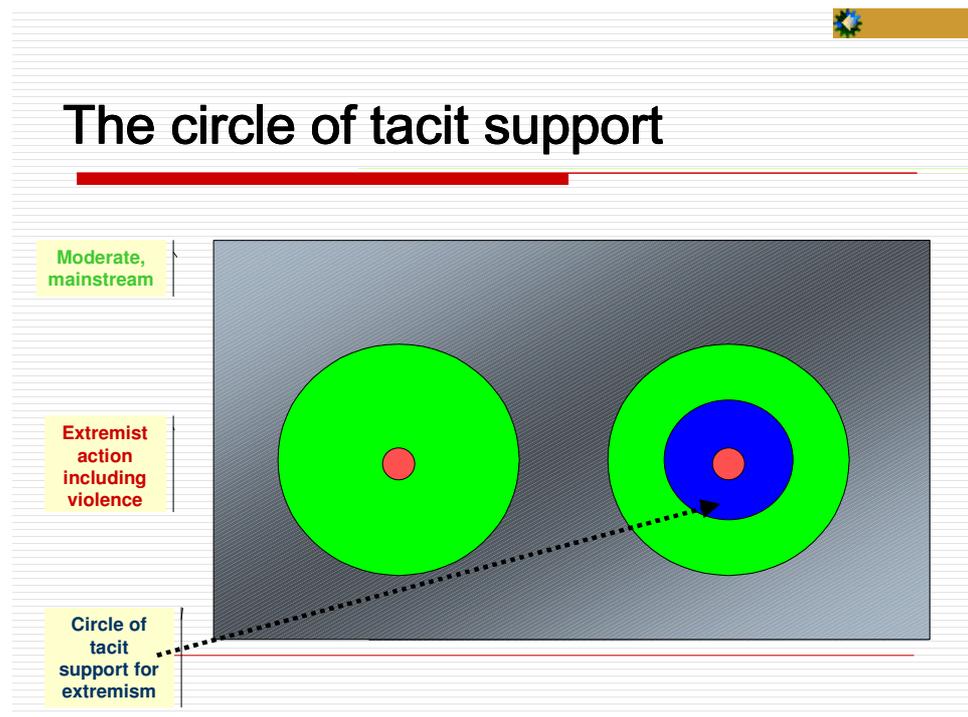- ☐ 4/5 agree that "Most Muslims are not terrorists"

BUT...

- ☐ 2/3 agree that "Most terrorists are Muslims"

Source: private polling, 2005

A private piece of polling I was involved in last year revealed the following astonishing fact. On the one hand, four-fifths of Britons readily endorsed the view that, and I quote, "most Muslims are not terrorists". But, on the other hand, by a two-thirds majority, respondents also agreed with the statement that, again I quote, "most terrorists are Muslims." This is deeply damaging for the reputation of Muslims in Britain. It is a Grade A risk to all sects, factions, national groups, generations, theological followings, social classes, and political orientations. But it also gives credence to many

Muslims, who despite not being linked to extremism or violence, worry that they are up against a self-fulfilling prophecy.

I say this _not_ in order to get the tacit supporters off the hook. Instead, it is important to acknowledge their invidious position, facing moral and practical dilemmas on an enormous scale. It is pretty much part of the human condition to feel and act on loyalty to kith and kin, even in the face of evidence about the substantial external costs of doing so.

The circle of tacit support

Moderate, mainstream

Extremist action including violence

Circle of tacit support for extremism

So my second conclusion this evening is that: in truth, we are looking at fence-sitters. Fence-sitters will normally identify with leaders in their ranks who are notably moderate and committed to tackling violence. But, as fence-sitters, they will also empathise with the frustrations and objectives of alienated members within their communities. So despite feeling that they want to see moderate solutions prevail, fence-sitters are probably poorly placed to judge the consequences of their failure to condemn violence. Such non-condemnation is arguably seen as an irrelevance cooked up by a hostile media and political elite. It may even be dismissed as a free good, i.e. the burden of which can fall on the next guy - who, not surprisingly, passes the buck yet again.

Using the sketch now displayed, let me quickly colour code the point. We operate on the basis of the left-hand set of concentric circles.

Thus violent extremists - the red dot - are tiny element in a much larger sea of non-violent moderation. The world, as it really is, of course looks more like the right-hand graphic. Understanding, persuading and, if need be, challenging the blue group is at least as big a job as bearing down on the red group. Success with the blues is, in addition, a key path to reducing the scope of the reds. The objective must be to return to the simplicity of more greens and fewer reds - and no blues (i.e. the left-hand model).

As noted earlier, these are all human reactions, and not the behaviour of a indelibly violent minority. Similar fence-sitting prevailed for decades in Northern Ireland. British security policy there very rarely managed to engage the tacit supporters of the violent nationalism or unionism. In fact the evidence suggests that tacit backers were only moved to act when the costs of misguided action by others became all too apparent. A year ago, the MacCartney Sisters led a spontaneous campaign against the culture of silence among Catholic communities about the role of the IRA. Their obvious and immediate success has had far-reaching consequences - by showing that tacit backing for violence had shrunk to a tiny rump where, before, it had been commonplace.

At this moment the supporters of General Ratko Mladic have begun to realise that evading law enforcement in Serbia comes at a cost to ordinary members of the nationalist community. Mladic, nevertheless, continues to be a perfect hero in the remote mountains of north-west Montenegro, close to his birthplace, where no-one would dream of turning him in. But several hundred metres lower down, in the populated valleys of Serbia, a realpolitik has begun to bite. For a new generation of Serbs, persisting with tacit support for suspects in cases of ethnic cleansing, has to be balanced against the forces of transparency and democratic accountability.

Post-Apartheid South Africans, white and black, have experienced a similar dilemma. Support for one's kith and kin, in the face of closure and accountability about unspeakable horror, has come at a price. Lowering that price by creating incentives to turn against men of violence has been difficult but, nevertheless, it has been possible.

Parallels exist all around. A substantial literature on the social pathology of gangs reveals the enormous grip of internal loyalty. There is, crucially, also plenty of evidence to show that brothers, sisters, neighbours and others act to provide a soft Praetorian Guard

around gang members and leaders. The Met's long-running campaign - Operation Trident - to tackle gun crime in London is a tangible example. It has relied not so much on a belief that hardened gangsters are about to turn in their arsenals, but rather in a well-placed effort to incentivise others to draw away from the gun culture. Anonymous tip-off 'phone lines, among other things, really have worked to penetrate the circle of silence.

Threats of religious and political extremism can be mapped from two main sources. The first has to do with the proximity of international Islamic political grievance. There has been a rapid absorption of collective grievance, in turn distilled into a common bond of faith. Thus, conflict in Israel/Palestine is linked to Kashmir, and to Aceh, Chechnya, Bosnia, and beyond - all in the a click of a mouse.

The other main source, as I have emphasised in this lecture, has been the circle of tacit support, where extremist behaviour is condoned or accepted in some way. For example, after the May 2003 suicide attacks at Mike's Place, a Tel Aviv seaside bar, *The New York Times* ran the following quote from a 23-year-old Pakistani Muslim man from the West Midlands. He said:

> "When you see what's going on in Israel, something comes into your mind, something just goes."

As we now know, members of the family of Omar Sharif, one of the bombers, were cleared late last year of charges of knowing about his mission and failing to alert the law enforcement authorities before the attack. Fears about such a trial amounting to collective punishment, with risks of further alimentation of Muslims, arguably played a major part in the final verdict. This is a curious logic, to my mind, whereby the potential, intangible reactions of others tomorrow is equated with the facts about the actions, or inactions, of individuals yesterday.

In 2004, Jenny Tongue, then a Lib-Dem MP for Richmond, found herself sacked from her party's front bench for appearing to condone such attacks. Her precise words were as follows, so perhaps it is best if you judge for yourselves. She said:

> "I was just trying to say how, having seen the violence and the humiliation and the provocation that the Palestinian people live under every day and have done since their land was occupied

by Israel, I could understand and was trying to understand where [suicide bombers] were coming from."

And, cryptically, she added:

"If I had to live in that situation - and I say that advisedly - I might just consider becoming one myself."

To my mind, that crosses a line, or at the very least graphically reminds us that such a line exists, something that she and others may have avoided admitting to.

"Might just become one myself..."

But sometimes, unknowing interventions can also be controversial. Cherie Blair, in 2002, caused offence with the following rhetorical statement. I quote:

"As long as young people feel they have no hope but to blow themselves up, we're never going to make progress, are we?"

Perhaps unintentionally, the PM's spouse risked crossing the "dangerously narrow line" between suggesting there could be some sort of rational explanation for targeting civilians in such attacks and justifying them. More recently, she has suggested that intelligence derived from torture may save lives but also that it should be deployed to fulfil this objective. This is certainly one way of

furthering a reputation for even-handedness. My own view is that prominent figures continue to add to a disaggregated debate, without interest or regard for the bigger picture that necessarily involves them assessing how their thoughts will be received in some circles.

In other words, the signal sent cannot be guaranteed to be the signal received. It is a pretty big risk, to my mind, where the consequences of misjudgement can easily escalate massively.   And frankly, the notion that the pursuit of martyrdom is the consequence of hatred born of despair, is one that the vast majority of British people would not accept.

Muslim grievance politics

I now want to turn to look at the basic grievance or grievances that are now associated with western Muslim communities.

There is, regrettably, plenty of scope for stereotypes to take root on all sides. A clash of civilisations, Huntingtonian style, can be detected in perceptions held by Muslims and non-Muslims in many western countries. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that British Muslims are rapidly emerging as a new, national pariah group. Bluntly speaking, 1.6 million Brits today enjoy a public reputation paralleled by Catholics in the seventeenth century. Echoes can also be heard in the story of Anglo-Jewry about a century ago.

There are three basic complaints that are regularly heard. Firstly, that British Muslims experience such high levels of social disadvantage that their plight goes beyond that of other excluded groups. Secondly, that anti-Muslim bias in the media, and in elite and mass attitudes, warps public policy. This is also dubbed as "Islamaphobia" by some. Finally, that the volatile dynamics of global Islam produce a steady stream of causes that sustain victimhood.

Concentrating on the first charge, the evidence shows that, on some counts, many British Muslim communities are endemically part of a left-behind fringe. On other counts, the evidence is more ambiguous.

The economics of British Muslims are a mixed picture. On one hand, by concentrating purely on Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin Muslim

communities, the position of other Muslim groups gets relegated to the periphery. Most data has been collected on these two groups, who together only account for two-thirds of British Muslims. Indian Muslims, for instance, perform significantly better in the labour market than Pakistanis or Bangladeshis. Equally, the generally impressive story of the Ismaili community, or those with an East African dimension, points in the other direction. Likewise in relation to British Muslims of Arab or Turkish background. This implies a country of origin effect, rather than a religious effect.
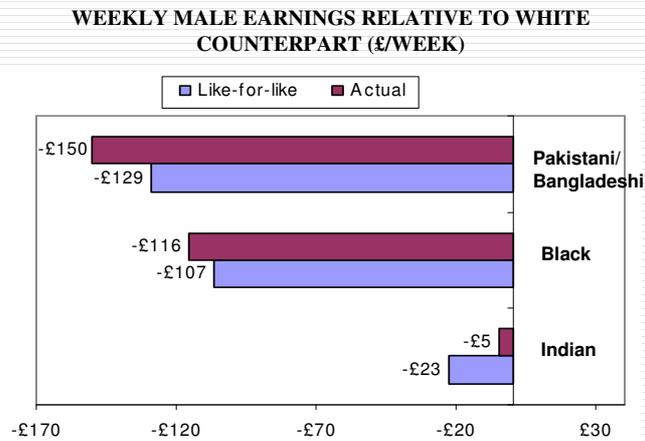
The theories of immigrant succession have assumed that long-term progression in employment would follow smoothly for the offspring of first generation immigrants. Tomorrow, so the idea goes, would be a brighter day for one's kids, thereby offsetting some of the hardships endured by pioneers.   Ideas of this kind have been important all over the advanced industrial world.

The Sunday supplements' fixation with East African Asian success stories is a case in point. The advantages of English language as the public *lingua franca* of the sending country, coupled with high levels of urbanisation and white-collar employment, all made for a terrific match with the labour needs of Britain's economy. The link between their micro-enterprise and business innovation has also exploited a latent gap in British commerce.
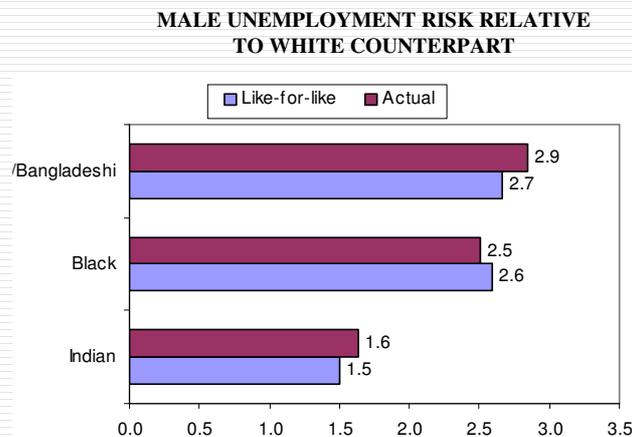
What about the evidence for differences in pay and unemployment?

First of all, there are large headline gaps in unemployment, earnings, occupational attainment between different ethnic groups. From this picture, the influence that relevant characteristics such as age, generation, gender and education have on labour market achievements can be seen. For sure, using the maxim of the "3 Gs", gender, generation and geography, it is apparent that large variations in achievement exist. For example, a first generation, Pakistani women in Oldham cannot expect to be on the same page as a second generation Indian male in suburban London. Only 4 per cent of the former are economically active as against 84 per cent of the latter. These headline differences in labour market achievement persist after taking into account things such as qualifications, skills, experience, language, geography, and so on.

Ethnic penalties: earnings

**WEEKLY MALE EARNINGS RELATIVE TO WHITE
COUNTERPART (£/WEEK)**

Legend: ☐ Like-for-like ☐ Actual

Pakistani/Bangladeshi
- Actual: -£150
- Like-for-like: -£129

Black
- Actual: -£116
- Like-for-like: -£107

Indian
- Actual: -£5
- Like-for-like: -£23

x-axis: -£170, -£120, -£70, -£20, £30

Source: R. Berthoud, 'Ethnic Employment Penalties in Britain', 2000

Ethnic penalties: unemployment

**MALE UNEMPLOYMENT RISK RELATIVE
TO WHITE COUNTERPART**

Legend: ☐ Like-for-like ☐ Actual

/Bangladeshi
- Actual: 2.9
- Like-for-like: 2.7

Black
- Actual: 2.5
- Like-for-like: 2.6

Indian
- Actual: 1.6
- Like-for-like: 1.5

x-axis: 0.0, 0.5, 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5, 3.0, 3.5

Source: F. Carmichael and R. Woods, 'Ethnic Penalties in Unemployment and Occupational Attainment', 2000

**These unexplained gaps are referred to as ethnic penalties. Some
analysts and commentators have played on this particular term to
emphasise the importance of discrimination in explaining persistent,
adjusted differences. The model incorporates many of the usual
factors that account for labour market achievements, namely
education, qualifications, skills, experience, language, transport,
family background, and so on. Discrimination provides an important,**

but only partial, explanation. Other factors are also at work, in all probability, and employment-related social networks are likely to be crucial as well.

The awkward aspect of this evidence is that it does not control for religious background. Let me emphasise that we are <u>not</u>, therefore, describing a religious penalty in jobs. The degree to which this may exist is not known.

There are some large issues in the pipeline as well. First, a demographic quirk arising from a comparatively young minority population means that the projected growth in the black and brown workforce will be considerable. They are over-represented in the optimum age cohorts for child-bearing and rearing. In this decade alone, around half the increase in the labour force will come from minorities, more than half of whom will be Pakistanis or Bangladeshis, almost all of whom are Muslims by background. Fifteen or twenty years from today, the bulge will have declined considerably as fertility rates and family patterns converge.

And there are signs of persistent disadvantage not just in pay and unemployment but also in progression. For instance, around one in twenty men of Indian origin is employed as a doctor or in professions allied to medicine. Significantly, the contrast could not be starker when looking at men of Pakistani origin: of those in jobs, one in eight works as a taxi driver. And one in three Bangladeshi men is a waiter or a chef. Meanwhile, Indian and Chinese men now are more likely than whites to hold jobs at professional or higher managerial levels.

My colleague, Ceri Peach of Oxford University, has examined the socio-economic data in some considerable detail. His conclusion is that, taking into account schooling, settlement, mobility and employment, there is little to sustain the charge of systematic exclusion of British Muslims. Certainly, the economic numbers behind Muslims' marginalisation are very poor. However, this is largely down to exceptionally low rates of female employment. Less than 4 per cent of first generation Pakistani women are economically active, for example. But, as *The Economist* recently observed, the fact remains that families made up of two earning partners are heavily protected against economic shocks and with it the risk of economic exclusion.

I guess I have spent sufficient time dissecting aspects of the problem. My conclusions, in rough terms, are:
- first, that we should be more concerned about those surrounding and supporting men of violence, and
- second, that settled disadvantage among British Muslims, notwithstanding some mixed evidence, now looks and feels like patterns of religious exclusion.

Both are serious matters for the public policy community. In the remaining 10 minutes, let me set out some pointers for a better-informed public policy response.

So, what should be done?

There are several large strategic choices facing government. At present, naturally enough, the focus has been on prevention, coupled with partnership. Behind this, current understanding within government about its role is fairly broad. This comprises at least four elements:

- First, isolating and removing the direct causes of religious intolerance
- Second, identifying and tackling indirect obstacles to achievement, especially in schools and jobs, and, by extension, addressing the specific aspects, if any, of under-achievement
- Third, sensitising public policy generally to the needs of religious minorities, and
- Finally, leading public understanding about Islam in western society

The Home Office's sponsorship of seven different consultations with representatives of British Muslims has had varied results. This effort has brought onto the policy agenda a set of partly connected grievances voiced within many Muslim communities but, sadly, has not managed to engage public opinion favourably, if at all. Objective measurements show that public support for addressing Muslim grievances remains extremely low.

Almost uniquely, Dr Siddiqui, leader of the Muslim Parliament, has been willing to admit that, thus far, the British Muslim lobby has acted as if it could safely ignore the shape of wider British public

attitudes. He has gone on to say that British Muslims cannot afford such a luxury, and he has made several concrete proposals to promote wider public buy-in. His observations are equally pertinent to members of the government, some of whom have appeared to be pursuing a national Government Muslim Policy.

In addition, agitation and disquiet within and between British Muslims has served to complicate the role of government even further. The general election campaign last May, for example, saw the first overt demonstration of radical opposition to the moderate MCB. The gap between mainstream Muslim leaders and a relatively small brigade of radicals has been exposed. And recent protests against the Danish cartoons have exacerbated internal tensions.

The only credible way forward is to disaggregate the big agenda of Muslim grievances. Some of these are necessarily slow burner items. Early accession of Turkey into the EU, a policy championed throughout by Britain, can only be measured in decades and years. It is also a right-minded policy because it gives the lie to Huntingtonian nay-sayers who cannot envision a populous Muslim country integrated into the European mainstream.

Similarly, securing a lasting Middle Eastern peace is a valuable prize but one that is not likely to be quick win, witness this week's events in Jericho. The evidence shows that progress towards a universal peace has depended firstly, on breaking down Arab-Israeli flashpoints into a series of more digestible disputes, and secondly, on establishing confidence-building measures in trade, employment, border controls, cultural institutions, universities, and so on.

Nevertheless, Turkey and the Middle East are undoubtedly big elements in addressing globalised Islamic grievance.

In our own domestic public policy, fortunately the priorities and levers are a little clearer and nearer. Settled disadvantage places fresh challenges on social inclusion policies. Many of our former industrial northern cities are today economically cut adrift and contain populations that are inward-looking and suspicious of outside involvement. The ingredients are: weak economics, that quickly exacerbated by inward-facing networks, oppositional cultures and finally grievance politics.
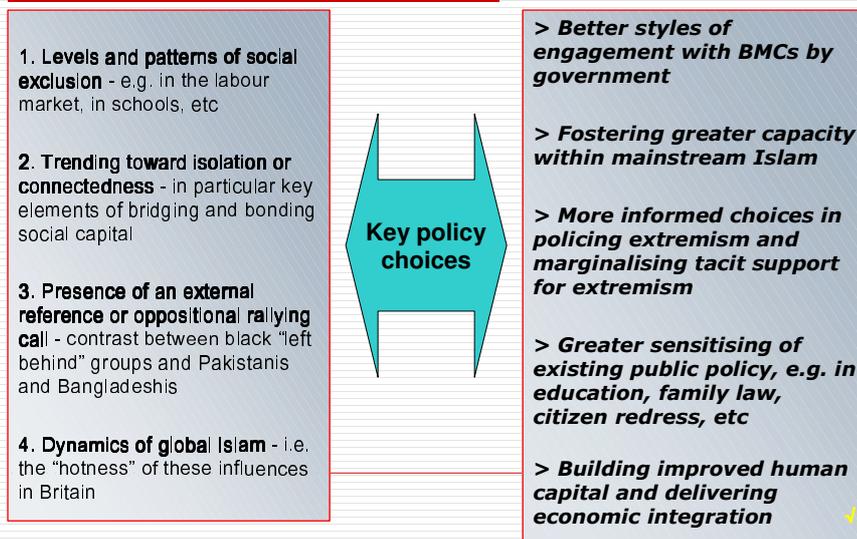
In answer to the question "Who is angriest?" it is clear that these groups and communities are near the top of list. So too, incidentally, are large pools within the white working class, whose parents all too typically lost their moorings via industrial decline in these places.

At the very least, the poor economics and inward-facing postures of these places need to be tackled with more innovative use of traditional social inclusion policy levers. The charge has been that traditional policy has achieved rather little. Well, may be. There is plenty of scope to go further. DWP's current batch of employment targets for marginalised or vulnerable groups are an excellent start. However, using the Spending Review to pin down fresh PSA targets, possibly for British-born, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, would be a sensible adaptation of what already exists.

The long tail of dismal performance among some of these groups in the compulsory schooling system is another priority area. There is, to my mind, considerable scope to build on the existing floor target machinery for schools and LEAs to target at-risk groups. Social exclusion problems therefore require better informed and finer grained policy responses in schools, employment and communities.

Beyond economics, the evidence also points to three further causes of alienation and extremism: isolated networks, oppositional cultures, and the dynamics of global Islam. Proportionate and graduated responses are required in relation to each of these.

British Muslim communities: key drivers of change

1. **Levels and patterns of social exclusion** - e.g. in the labour market, in schools, etc

2. **Trending toward isolation or connectedness** - in particular key elements of bridging and bonding social capital

3. **Presence of an external reference or oppositional rallying call** - contrast between black "left behind" groups and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis

4. **Dynamics of global Islam** - i.e. the "hotness" of these influences in Britain

Key policy choices

> *Better styles of engagement with BMCs by government*

> *Fostering greater capacity within mainstream Islam*

> *More informed choices in policing extremism and marginalising tacit support for extremism*

> *Greater sensitising of existing public policy, e.g. in education, family law, citizen redress, etc*

> *Building improved human capital and delivering economic integration*

Each of these policy areas requires a considerable degree of engagement with British Muslim communities and their leaders. This government has been keen to emphasise the need to grow capacity within these communities. With capacity comes other things, such as greater pluralism of thought and expression. It also brings a degree of appreciation about shades of grey and uncertainly in public policy. It is often said that there is only one thing that is hharder to tackle than a stakeholder who wants the opposite of current policy, and that is a stakeholder who does not know what they want. In which case, perhaps we should think of several stakeholders among British Muslims who may be pursuing mutually exclusive objectives to one another, never mind in relation to government.

The flip side of engagement and capacity is a deeper, better-informed understanding of faith in the public policy community. The most incisive and damaging complaint voiced by some Muslim leaders is that they face a wall of "secular fundamentalism." Western, post-Enlightenment societies, they charge, have become excessively dogmatic in their attachment to secular principles. These are so widespread that they are effectively suffocating to religious minorities, or indeed majorities. There is arguably something in this complaint. For one thing, it may undermine the grain of social inclusion policies which rely on active engagement of groups and communities by government. The medium through which this works

may involve faith and doctrine, and it would seem bizarre to insist that it does not.

The evidence suggests that a general secular drift in European societies has been accompanied by large pockets of loyalty to faith and spirituality. The implications must be that smart public policy should examine ways to incorporate, rather than repel, this energy and drive to deliver more effective results.

Thirty years ago, few could have imagined or predicted the degree to which British public policy and society would become sensitised to ethnicity and ethnic diversity. Much still needs to be done but much, it must be said, has been achieved. Thinking 15 years ahead, the test might be to imagine greater religious and faith sensitisation on similar lines.

In some areas, this already operates. After all, in Britain it is a comparative no-brainer to reorganise things so that a court oath can be sworn on the Koran or Torah, as well as on a Bible. Halal dietary provision in schools, hospitals and prisons is now rather common. These are the easy ones to tackle.

Addressing the RE school curriculum has been less straight forward but, for the most part, the results have been acceptable to all groups. Regulating school uniform codes, oddly enough, has proven less simple. The failure here, I suspect, has been by incentivising challenges from those who emphasise their own internal benefits. Much better, I would suggest, to get all the players to pursue their goals within a broader framework that requires consideration of external costs to others and also to a wider public interest test of social cohesion for all.

The most difficult fields are likely to be aspects of family law and criminal justice. Meeting some expectations via greater religious sensitisation may not be possible at all. But it is certainly possible to develop the basic framework to examine cases and demands one at a time. Large scale adaptation and adjustment to the strictures of Sharia are pretty unlikely, I imagine. But reconsideration of law and policy in the context of religious beliefs, and the depth with which these are held, is the core challenge.

In between there are numerous aspects of public policy that can and do meet the charge of addressing secular fundamentalism. Take one

example from the world of financial services regulation, an area where I have been involved previously. Today, British regulatory policy leads the way in Islamic personal and commercial banking and in the development of new financial markets in the Middle East and beyond. Using technical expertise, regulatory innovation and political will in equal measure, it has been possible to deliver a model outcome. There is scope to apply policy learning and borrowing to other countries and also to other policy domains at home. Above all, it gives the lie to those who say that British public policy is drenched in anti-Islamic bias.

Concluding remarks

Time to wrap up, I think.

To conclude, the solutions lie firstly, in addressing underlying settled disadvantage, and secondly, in rethinking religious sensitisation for all religious groups, of whom British Muslims are just one large component. Solutions also lie in public diplomacy initiatives to address the West's patchy reputation abroad, an approach currently championed by the FCO.

Inevitably, there is a danger of intellectual elegance at the expense of sufficient realism. So, in fairness, the solutions also lie in creating better incentives for fence-sitters to co-operate with law enforcement as a means to prevent carnage. This necessarily involves being explicit about the costs of non-cooperation. The external costs matter (i.e. bombers targeting the public). But my message has been that internal costs also exist and can be measured in the long term reputation of Muslims in western societies.

In terms of handling, there is a premium on avoiding what often appears as a National Muslim Policy. Thus, the pursuit of the religious sensitisation of public policy, if this is remotely attractive, is something that must be justified in the name of religion, faith and spirituality at large. It must not, I repeat not, be the rationale for stakeholder management of vocal lobbies.

It is worth saying to close that all of these possibilities are partly governed by what we can imagine as our future. Today it may be difficulty to sketch much beyond the next plot or the next turning of

the ratchet of mutual mis-understanding. But being able to describe a better future is a pre-requisite to attain one.

So learning from the experience of other *de facto* pariah groups may be instructive. A generation, as a society we had nothing remotely good to say about East African Asian refugees. Today we treat this smallish group as paragons of hard work, industry, resilience, religious observance, commitment to social good, and above all, loyalty to Britain. This is an excellent synopsis of the CV of any immigrant or immigrant-descended group, especially since it was not predicted. It would be an excellent target to aim for among the next generation of British Muslims.

Achieving this is unlikely to happen by accident. For sure, it will be important to remember that along with engagement and dialogue also comes the right to challenge. The atmosphere today is worrying in which respect for Islam is confused with fear. Respect for a religion or religious community cannot be demanded or imposed by a liberal state. It can be made more likely through better informed public policy driven by pragmatism and facts in equal measure.

To my mind, and in a sentence, the reality today for British Muslim communities calls for the politics of reputation management and <u>not</u> for grievance politics. This is the signal sent - I trust that it is signal received.

Thank you.

ENDS

SUSSEX LONDON LECTURE: 16 MARCH 2006

Location:
One Birdcage Walk, SW1

Title:
"The One Per Cent World: Managing the Myth of Muslim Extremism".

Synopsis:
One per cent of 1.6 million British Muslims: Sir John Stevens, the former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, recently remarked that this was the scale of genuine religious and political extremism within British Muslim communities. With a total population size of 1.6 million, the inference is that the public policy and intelligence communities should focus upon around 16,000 individuals - in short, the outer limits of the security problem. The lecture will examine the thinking behind such an assessment, and argue that tacit support for violence probably extends far beyond one in a hundred. It will suggest that security solutions are unlikely to be manageable or sustainable on such a scale. Realistic strategies to address the threat of terrorism, in addition, require a range of policy interventions aimed at both better engagement with communities as well as tackling the religious aspects of social exclusion. The rub is that neither of these elements commands widespread public support.