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The Threat of Violent Extremism

Introduction: ‘Terrorism’?

The threat of ‘violent extremism’ faced by Britain over the past few years is a complex one that defies simplistic analysis or explanation. This chapter aims to both outline the key facts and scale of that violent extremist threat, and to draw on a range of academic material and perspectives to discuss how we can understand its nature, motivation and make-up. Such detailed discussion of the threat is a vital prerequisite for a meaningful assessment of whether British policy attempts to date to ‘prevent violent extremism’ have been realistic or well-designed. The threat of Islamist violent extremism to Britain clearly can be characterised as ‘terrorism’; yet too often political, media and academic discussions of the problem and policy responses to it have focused on Muslims and the nature of Islam, rather than what we know more broadly about terrorism. This is particularly surprising, both because of the considerable academic literature based on examples of terrorism around the world and Britain’s own modern experience of terrorist activity in both Northern Ireland and Britain itself relating to the northern Irish conflict. That experience and body of academic material relating to terrorism cautions against overly simplistic understandings of the make-up and motivations of terrorists or against ill-conceived or even counterproductive policy responses.

Defining ‘terrorism’ is surprisingly complex. A common understanding focuses on violence by ‘non-state actors’, on the basis that any actions by terrorists are often mirrored by state military forces in situations of war or occupation, a parallel not lost on political opponents of the ‘war-on-terror’ state military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. A suggestion that terrorism focuses on civilians is similarly simplistic, given that some terrorist movements have avoided attacks on civilians, whilst state military operations have involved bombing civilian areas. Coming originally from the Latin word ‘terrere’, to frighten, deter or scare away, terrorism came into popular use after the ‘terror’ period of violence and anarchy in the aftermath of the French Revolution that saw as many as 40,000 people sent to the guillotine. However, long before then Britain had arguably already faced its gravest ever terrorism threat in the form of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, designed to kill the monarch and members of Parliament, with the religiously motivated plotters having also considered kidnapping and killing the royal children. Given this history, and the fact that

‘zealots’ were Jewish ‘terrorists’ of the first century AD, English (2009) suggests that the ‘new’, post-9/11 Islamist terrorism facing Britain and other Western states is actually much less new than it appears. Indeed, he questions whether terrorism is actually still a helpful term, given that ‘terrorism might best be considered as a method deployed by people who collectively see themselves as engaged in a war’.¹ This is echoed by Dipak Gupta, who suggests that ‘it is perhaps useful to think of terrorism as an epi-phenomenon, a minor sideshow of a larger social problem’.² These characterisations immediately challenge notions of terrorists as deranged or unbalanced individuals, living in their own fantasy world. Instead, these leading analysts of terrorism see individual terrorists and their actions as part of wider social movements, with the individual acts of violence a form of altruism towards ‘their’ social group. Other commentators identify a number of metaphors used in relation to modern Islamist terrorism. The terrorism as ‘war’ formulation deployed by the US Bush administration in the wake of 9/11 has rightly been criticised as fundamentally flawed and counterproductive in their inspiration for military involvements,³ whereas notions of terrorism as a ‘disease’ that can spread among populations if unchecked can be seen as the inspiration for preventative domestic policy efforts around ‘preventing violent extremism’.⁴

This immediately gives some sense of the complex debates around the motivations of terrorists generally and in particular the young British Muslims involved in the current threat of ‘violent extremism’. This is far from being a uniquely British problem, with the United States Attorney General, Eric Holder, admitting in December 2010 that the domestic Islamist terror threat in America was now more about American Muslims rather than foreign visitors.⁵ This chapter will explore some of those arguments and theories. It first briefly outlines the pivotal events of 7/7 and subsequent terrorist events, plots and convictions. It then discusses how we might understand the motivations and actions of the young British Muslims involved by focusing on six distinct but interrelated theories and explanations for such Islamist terrorism:

- Radical Islam: The ‘single narrative’
- A reaction to British foreign policy?
- A foreign hand?
- A product of ethnic/racial segregation and poverty?
- Radicalisation: Radical mosques and ‘preachers of hate’?
- Group dynamics

In discussing these theories and explanations, the chapter will suggest that understandings of the current and serious threat of Islamist violent extremism facing Britain are complex and interrelated, and that policy responses need to recognise that.

7/7: Home-grown suicide bombers

Some years on, the visceral shock of the 7/7 bombings in central London remains strong. Whilst the number of deaths involved was on a smaller scale to that of the 9/11 attacks on New York in September 2001, or the attacks on Madrid's public transport system in March 2004, the resulting impact of the British domestic population seeing the world in a slightly different way was similar. The shock came not only through the large-scale deaths and very serious injuries but also in the associated realities that these attacks were suicide attacks, carried out by four young British Muslims. The attackers were four young men from West Yorkshire in the north of England, three of them of Pakistani origin from Beeston in south Leeds and one an African-Caribbean convert to Islam from nearby Huddersfield. All had been brought up and educated in Britain, with the broad Yorkshire accents of two of them captured in a video statement prior to the attacks being all the more unsettling for the general British public – these young men looked and sounded like many thousands of other young Muslims in Britain's multiracial towns and cities. The oldest attacker, viewed subsequently as the ringleader, was Mohammad Sidique Khan, a popular learning mentor at a south Leeds multiracial primary school, and a part-time youth worker at the Hamara Youth Access Point in Beeston. Through his youth and community activities, Khan had got to know Shezad Tanweer, a 22-year-old university student and keen sportsman, and 18-year-old Hasib Hussain. Nineteen-year-old Germaine Lindsay from Huddersfield had converted to Islam as a 15-year-old, taking the name Abdullah Shaheed Jamal. Married to a white Muslim convert with a young son, and with his wife expecting their second child, Jamal was living in his wife's home town of Aylesbury prior to the attacks but still spending a lot of time in West Yorkshire. It is likely that he met Khan when attending talks by radical Islamist preachers in 2004.⁶

Having apparently carried out a 'dry run' the week before, the four attackers travelled down to London early on the morning of Thursday 7th July 2005. Parting in Kings Cross station after hugging each other, they then travelled in separate directions on public transport, where they each detonated their explosives that they had previously prepared in their 'bomb factory' flat in the Hyde Park area of Leeds. Three detonated their bombs around 8.50 a.m. on underground tube trains, with Hasib Hussain detonating his bomb on a diverted Number 30 bus in Tavistock Square about 30 minutes later after apparently failing to get on to the tube system. The motives for Hussain attempting to phone his fellow bombers after they had blown themselves up remain unclear. In the confines of a bus and tube trains, the impact of their improvised explosives, packed with bolts and other metal objects, was both deadly and horrific. In total, 52 commuters from widely varying national, ethnic, age and occupational backgrounds died, and hundreds were injured,

some very seriously with lifelong after effects. In the aftermath, many critical questions were raised, first, about the speed of the response by the emergency services and whether this attack was preventable through information already held by MI5. Calls for a full public inquiry were resisted by government, with a much more limited report issued by Parliament that outlined the key facts known. After much campaigning, survivors and bereaved relatives did succeed in gaining an Inquest in 2010/11.⁷ This both provided the opportunity for survivors and relatives to hear the full facts about what happened to individuals during each bomb attack and shed some new light on the behaviour of the individual bombers in the run-up to the attack. This added some helpful detail to the facts of the plot identified by the initial police investigation and by the previous government report. It remains unclear whether others were involved in the planning and preparation of the 7/7 attacks. In 2008 the trial of three associates of Sidique Khan collapsed after they had been accused of conducting a 'hostile reconnaissance' mission with two of the attackers seven months before the July 2005 attacks. All three had attended training camps in Pakistan with Sidique Khan, and objects belonging to them were later found in the 'bomb-making factory' in Hyde Park, Leeds, but this was not enough to secure convictions.⁸

The fact that this 7/7 attack was not an isolated one-off was graphically illustrated just two weeks later on the 21st July, when four young men of Somali origin attempted to carry out further suicide bomb attacks on London transport. These attacks only failed because their home-made explosives failed to detonate, leading to their later capture and conviction. In the heightened tension of the intervening period, armed police chased and shot dead an innocent Brazilian, Jean Charles de Menezes, at Stockwell tube station, believing him to be one of the 21/7 attackers who was about to detonate explosives. That incident and the official slowness to accept liability for the unlawful death set an unhelpful context for future government attempts to win public support towards anti-terrorism measures. Two years later, in June 2007, Bilal Abdulla, a doctor of Iraqi origin, and Kafeel Ahmed, an Indian-origin engineering student, both resident in the United Kingdom, were arrested after an attempted bombing of Glasgow airport, this coming days after their earlier failed attempt to detonate a car bomb in a crowded part of central London. Ahmed later died of the injuries he sustained during the attack.⁹

These actual incidents have proved to be just the tip of the iceberg, with a number of other plots foiled, leading to convictions and long terms of imprisonment. Those plots have included plans to bomb major shopping centres and nightclubs, and to detonate bombs simultaneously on a number of transatlantic airliners. These plots have largely involved young British Muslims or young Muslims with transnational links to Britain. This reality and the Christmas Day 2009 arrest of the London University-educated Nigerian Farouk Abdulmutallab, the so-called 'underpants bomber', after his unsuccessful

attempt to detonate a bomb on a flight landing in Detroit, Michigan, have all led to a picture of a very serious terror threat among young British Muslims, something not undermined by the failure to proceed with trials after some arrests. All these incidents and other plots have involved plans to carry out explosions in public places, often through suicide attacks. This raises the key issue of why some young British Muslims have been suddenly attracted to violent extremism over the past few years and what is motivating them.

Radical Islam: The ‘single narrative’

What is clear about this terror threat is that the consistent motivation or justification for all these attacks and plots by people of Muslim faith, some of them only very recently converted or rediscovering this faith, is a complex mixture of religion and politics. Here, a very strong identification with the ‘*ummah*’, or one global Muslim community, and a political analysis of Muslims internationally being oppressed, threatened and humiliated provide a context within which a small minority of those holding such views then travel further down a path towards acts of violent extremism. As the rest of this chapter outlines, there is no one simple profile of, or explanation for, those individuals who do travel in that direction, but their common starting point has been the acceptance of a hard-line Islamist position, a politicised understanding of Islamic faith, that provides what had been described as the ‘single narrative’.¹⁰ This ‘single narrative’ explains the world, and the individual’s life and experiences within it, in terms of the oppression of the Muslim *ummah* and the need to take action against that oppression. To describe this shared ideology underpinning the threat of Islamist violent extremism as ‘religious’ is simplistic, given that in both its outlook and the ways in which it is understood and operationalised by its adherents it is arguably closer to the revolutionary anarchist ideology of the nineteenth century or the Marxist-Leninist ideology that inspired revolutionaries across the world for much of the twentieth century.¹¹ To combat the Islamist ‘single narrative’ and how it can inspire violent extremism, it is important to understand its key elements. Whilst space does not allow a full examination, the aim here is to briefly outline the key components. These include the growth of political Islamism globally over the past 60 years and its development in Britain, the role of foreign Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia in promoting particular and literalist forms of Islamic adherence, and the role of new technology in enabling new understandings of both the Muslim *ummah* and radical Islamist interpretations of its position and needs.

One key source of this radical Islamist ideology has been a political understanding of Islam which has its roots in the struggles for independence from colonialism and the creation of a nation state in Arab and other Muslim

countries. In many of these countries, such as the Egypt of General Nasser, a broadly secular nationalism, more influenced by socialism than religion, was the dominant political ideology. However, the limited national development in the face of continued Western post-colonial economic domination and the failure of these national rulers to create meaningful democracy, liberty or equality led to increasing disillusionment with both nationalism and socialism. This, combined firstly with the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the only Muslim-dominated power bloc, and then the failure to arrest the development of Israel that was seen a humiliation for all Arabs led to increasing support for an interest in Islamist ideologies and organisations that saw Islam as the answer. A key focus for this was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, whose influence grew in opposition to the post-independence regime of Nasser through radical leaders and ideologues like Syed Qutb, who was hanged by the Egyptian authorities. Qutb, a key disciple of al-Banna, wrote a book, *Milestones*, that portrayed the West as deliberately anti-Muslim and which proposed overtly Islamic societies as a solution. This book remains highly influential on Islamist activists.¹² Whilst al-Banna's influence has largely been on 'evolutionary Islamists' working within democratic processes, Qutb's work has inspired revolutionary Islamists. This emerging Islamist ideology saw Islam not just as a faith but also as a blueprint for a socio-economic system and for society as a whole. This growth of Islamist thought in contrast to secular nationalism can be seen in the triumph of religious forces following the 1979 Iranian popular revolution and the increasing dominance of the Islamist Hamas over the largely secular and nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Palestine, in the wake of their failure to secure a viable and independent Palestinian state. This 'wave' of Islamist political ideology superseding nationalist and socialist thought in a broad political way is mirrored in a more specific way in the respective 'waves' of terrorism. Gupta (2008) identifies previous global terrorist 'waves' based first on nationalism, then on Marxist/socialist thought. Just as the perceived political failure of those socialist/nationalist ideologies led to the growth of Islamist political movements, so did the failure of violent extremism based on those former ideologies create an attraction towards violent extremism based around Islamism within the Muslim world, but with significant overlaps with this previous 'wave' of violent extremism as Al-Qaeda with the 9/11 and other attacks on US power 'targeted modern imperialism, as the ultra-leftists of the late 1960s and 1970s did with less success'.¹³

Islamist groups based on this ideology, which draws on key thinkers like Qutb and the Indian Maududi, a key ideologue within the Indian-based and ultra-conservative Deobandi movement, have gradually spread across the world, first appearing in the United Kingdom in an organised form in the shape of Hizb ut-Tahrir (HUT) after the first Gulf War in 1991. In contrast to the Sufi traditions of the majority of Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin British Muslims

who view faith as largely spiritual and unconnected from politics, such an Islamist perspective focuses on political action and on making overt demands on behalf of Muslims and their religious practice, so intensely politicising Muslim life and identity. The granting of asylum to violent Islamist extremists from Algeria, Egypt and other North African and Middle Eastern states between the late 1980s and late 1990s also did much to enable the growth of Islamist politics in Britain, as did the plight of Bosnian Muslims during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia.¹⁴ At the same time, Britain has been on the receiving end of very considerable religious propaganda and funding for conservative Islamic activities from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. The twin threats of the 1979 Iranian revolution with its more radical form of a political Islam and the growth of Leftist nationalism in other states led the oil-rich Saudis to commit huge amounts of funding to the promotion of their own conservative and literalist Wahabi interpretation of Islam. This was directed at Muslim communities globally through printed and Internet propaganda and through the strategic use of funds for mosques and organisational funding. The pivotal role of Saudi Arabia as the focus for the Hajj pilgrimage and the training of many imams enabled them to deepen this impact.

This growth both of an overtly political Islamism combined with the global promotion of literalist and noncontingent forms of Islam through Wahabism and Deobandism have led to significant developments within Muslim communities, both in Britain and internationally. It is important to state that these more politicised and/or more literal positions are still often held by only a minority of Muslims, but that minority has grown both in numbers and influence through generational change. Within this development, key concepts can be identified. ‘Salafi’ denotes Muslims who view many other individual Muslims and Muslim-dominated states as not pure or observant enough, with some Salafis expressing this through doctrinal practice and debate, and others drawn towards political, or even violent, expression. Oliver Roy (2004) terms the politicised form of this held by some young Western Muslims as ‘neo-fundamentalism’. Whilst the vast majority of Salafis oppose violence, they have little support for or involvement in wider, non-Muslim society. A more extreme development from that position is that of ‘takfiri’, radical Salafi Islamists who believe that violence against other, less devout Muslims is justified. Here, Al-Qaeda leaders have talked about ‘far’ and ‘near’ enemies, with ‘far’ denoting non-Muslims powers like the United States, and ‘near’ denoting Muslim states and their rulers viewed as corrupt or not pure enough. The fact that the video statement left by Sidiq Khan spent as much time addressing British Muslims and their leaders for their lack of ‘purity’ as it did addressing the wider British public illustrates this ideology.¹⁵

A key component in this Islamist ideology, and its extreme violent offshoots, is its emphasis and exploitation of the concept of the *ummah*, one Muslim community globally, irrespective of national or ethnic boundaries. Chapter 2 outlines the significant support for this identity and concept among young

British Muslims generally and how we might understand this, as well as the progressive and internationalist potential the concept offers.¹⁶ However, this attachment to the *ummah*, the Muslim ‘imagined community’ can be exploited and directed towards violent extremism. Here, the ‘single narrative’ that Muslims are everywhere oppressed and humiliated, and that action must be taken, can be the motivation for violent extremism on their behalf. This understanding motivates Gupta’s (2008) belief that terrorism is an altruistic act, with Islamist terrorists acting on behalf of the *ummah*, especially when a strong and simplistic narrative is built around historic and current diverse political events such as the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Chechnya and Kashmir conflicts, anti-Muslim atrocities in Bosnia, the 1991 and 2003 invasions of Iraq, and the festering Israel/Palestine conflict. This narrative conveniently overlooks the facts that many of the deaths in Iraq have resulted from attacks by Muslims on other Muslims or of situations like Sudan where Muslims are the ‘oppressors’. Nevertheless, Scott Atran observes that ‘the terrorists aren’t nihilists, starkly or ambiguously, but often deeply moral souls with a horribly misplaced sense of justice’.¹⁷ This suggests that saying suicide-bombing terrorists, such as the 7/7 attackers, died for ‘a cause’ is too simplistic; rather, they died for others, real and imagined friends and co-religionists.

This ‘single narrative’ and the way it is understood by young Western Muslims can appear to be a conservative, backward-looking rejection of modernity, but Oliver Roy suggests that ‘neo-fundamentalism and radical violence are more linked with westernisation than with a return to the Qur’an’.¹⁸ For Roy, the growth of this international Islamist ideology is just one facet of, and one reaction to, globalisation, both in the way that it is communicated via modern technologies and how it is increasingly about *individual* understandings, identities and behaviour, and how that individual understanding of Islam is performed. In this way, Islamist radicalism and its minority violent extremism forms can be better understood through comparisons with, and study of, modern ‘evangelical’ trends in other religions,¹⁹ and secular modern radical movements, such as antiglobalisation militants or neo-fascist/racist networks, than by studying Islamic history or ‘tradition’. This leads Roy to suggest that ‘the ummah here plays the role of the proletariat for Trotskyist and leftists groups of the 1960s – an imaginary and therefore silent community that gives legitimacy to a small group pretending to speak in its name’.²⁰ Western countries did not focus on the growth in Islamist ideology or in the global network built around the ‘single narrative’ until the shock of 9/11 because they had been using such groups as a tool to oppose communism, radical Shiaism or Arab leftist nationalism and were shocked to find it attacking the West. This suggests that Islamist radicalism in the West is a social movement, a response to globalisation and to the experiences of being second or third generations of a conservative ethnic minority community, as discussed further in Chapter 2.

A reaction to British foreign policy?

An obvious explanation of this domestic terror threat for some commentators is British foreign policy, specifically the highly controversial military involvements in Afghanistan since 2001 and in Iraq between 2003 and 2010. Those involvements were explicitly addressed by Mohammad Sidique Khan in the first section of his 'suicide video', where he stated, 'Your democratically-elected governments continuously perpetrate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters'.²¹ A number of politicians from different political parties echoed this link to Iraq in the weeks following 7/7. In contrast, Prime Minister Tony Blair flatly denied such a link and the government continued to avoid such a linkage. For Derek McGhee, 'By dismissing the relationship between British foreign policy and radicalisation, the government under Blair lost the opportunity to understand and respond to the grievances that extremists are all too eager to exploit'.²² However, even allowing for the political dangers of accepting such a link, it is suggested below that such 'grievances' are far less clear or transparent than those underpinning previous terror threats, such as Irish Republicanism.

Nevertheless, anti-Iraq war campaigners highlighted advice given to the government by the Parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee, drawing on the Joint Intelligence Committee of government agencies, that involvement in Iraq would heighten the risk of terrorism.²³ This link was explored further in 2004 by a joint Home Office/Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) document, *Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism*. This commented that 'there is a feeling that parts of the Muslim community, particularly younger men, are disaffected'. As part of that report, the head of the Foreign Office, Michael Jay, wrote that one recurring theme within this disaffection was 'the issue of British foreign policy', which was seen as central to the recruitment of the various Islamist groups such as HUT and Al-Muhajiroun. A perception of double standards held by Western governments, especially around Israel, was identified in the report itself, and these concerns grew as the situation in Iraq deteriorated into large-scale violence affecting civilians. Richard English, a leading academic commentator on terrorism, notes that 'members of the terrorist cell convicted in April 2007 of plotting bomb attacks in England clearly had a sense that the United Kingdom should be hit because of its support for the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq'.²⁴

It seems beyond dispute that the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have deepened feelings of marginalisation and anger among many British Muslims, and that the government's refusal to acknowledge a possible link to involvement in violent extremism has been unhelpful. However, to suggest that accepting such a link, or even adjusting foreign policy would 'solve' the problem of domestic Islamist violent extremism, is naïve because it doesn't

address why a small minority are drawn to terrorist violence, ‘underscored by the number of people who feel the same level of grievance and identification, yet do not turn to violent expression’.²⁵ Regarding that small minority of British Muslims involved in violent extremism, the simple equation of apparently anti-Muslim British foreign policy leading to an Islamist domestic terror response doesn’t convince for a number of reasons. Sidique Khan was already moving in extreme Islamist circles in 1999, and by early 2001, before 9/11, was trying to recruit young Muslims for training in Afghanistan with two Muslims from Derby who later carried out suicide bombings in Israel. Indeed, ‘The Khan family and, it seems, at least a couple of dozen others, had known that Sidique was a potentially violent radical for at least six years before 7/7.’²⁶ The claim that 7/7 could have been prevented by MI5 is based on the fact that Khan and Tanweer met the ‘Crevice’ plotters in 2004 but were not followed up. The so-called Crevice plot involved a group of young Muslims plotting to cause large explosions at venues such as the Blue Water shopping centre in Kent and the Ministry of Sound nightclub in London. They had attended a terrorist training camp and purchased 600 kilograms of Ammonium Nitrate, enough to cause several large-scale explosions, but were under surveillance, leading to arrest and long-term imprisonment. The ringleader, Omar Khyam, from Crawley in Sussex, had attended an Islamist training camp in Kashmir in 2000, again before 9/11, and then returned to raise funds for Islamist fighters in Afghanistan and Kashmir. This picture of British Islamists preparing for violent extremism not only before the 2003 invasion of Iraq but also before 9/11 is highlighted by the arrest in December 2001 of British Muslim convert Richard Reid after he attempted to explode a bomb hidden in his shoe on a transatlantic flight from Paris to Miami. Reid had trained in the same Afghanistan terror camp as fellow Briton Saajid Butt from Gloucester. Butt withdrew from the long-planned airline plot at the last minute, was arrested and imprisoned for 13 years. Similarly, Dhiren Barot, a Hindu convert to Islam, was jailed in 2007 on terror charges, after having fought with Kashmir militants and other Islamists since the late 1990s.²⁷ Clearly, the threat of Islamist violent extremism predates the invasion of Iraq or even 9/11. However, what will never be known is whether British Islamist extremists such as Omar Khyam and Sidique Khan, who initially volunteered to fight in Afghanistan, would have planned attacks on Britain without the foreign military involvements, as ‘the motivations of those who received training abroad before September 2001 did not necessarily centre upon the desire to attack civilian populations in western states’.²⁸ Certainly, violent Islamist extremists identified more recently have clearly been motivated by foreign policy issues. Roshonara Choudhry, the talented young Muslim student jailed for life after stabbing her local MP, Stephen Timms, in 2010, said in her police interviews shortly after the attack that ‘I thought that it’s not right that he voted for the declaration of war in Iraq ... I feel like I’ve ruined the rest of my life. I feel like it’s worth it because millions of Iraqis are

suffering and I should do what I can to help them'.²⁹ For Jonathan Githens-Mazer, this showed that 'we can definitively put to rest Tony Blair's claims that foreign policy isn't linked to terrorism at home'.³⁰

A foreign hand?

It seemed self-evident to some people that the carefully planned and coordinated 7/7 attacks must have been commissioned and controlled by Osama Bin-Laden and Al-Qaeda in an echo of the 9/11 attacks. That in itself was a misunderstanding of how 9/11 had been planned,³¹ but support for this came from the fact that a statement of responsibility for 7/7 was issued by a previously unknown group within hours of the attacks. Written in Arabic, the prose and content identified the statement as almost certainly the work of Bin-Laden's associate Ayman al-Zawahiri, with the sites of the four London explosions intended to mirror his phrase about the four points of the compass.³² The video statement by two of the 7/7 attackers subsequently released largely consisted of a speech by al-Zawahiri. However, analysis of the Al-Qaeda central leadership based in Afghanistan suggests that their role has often been to finance, advise and support proposals and plots brought to them, rather than necessarily initiating and actually planning themselves. Indeed, both Siddique Khan and Omar Khyam went to Afghanistan to volunteer their military services to the Taliban but were directed to 'do something back home' by the Islamist leadership there.³³ Dhiren Barot had led a group that planned to explode bombs on the sections of the London Underground under the Thames river and had merely submitted a 'business' plan to Al-Qaeda for financial support – the ideas and motivation they already had themselves. Similarly, the 2004 Madrid bombers had no direct contact with Al-Qaeda and did not seek any funding, leading Gupta to observe that 'modern jihadi terror groups are linear, open-sourced, decentralised conglomerations of small, quasi-independent groups drawn more by inspiration from Bin Laden than a direct instruction from him'.³⁴ This sort of 'leaderless struggle', inspired by ideology rather than orders, is very reminiscent of the anarchist terrorism that posed a real threat to Western states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which included assassinations of the Russian czar and the president of the United States. The new US president made defeat of the anarchist threat his number one priority, but there was no central command or control structure to attack, as increasingly appears to be the case today: 'Al Qaeda today is mostly an idea, more a violent Islamist revivalist social movement than a terrorist organisation'.³⁵ Whilst the possible influences of 'gateway' Islamist organisations or radical preachers are discussed below, the sobering reality is that most British violent Islamists convicted or having been involved in plots are 'self-starters', and it is more productive to focus on the interrelated issues

of the ideology or beliefs guiding self-starters and the small-scale interpersonal dynamics within groups of them, with these two factors seeming to be at the heart of the threat of violent extremism.

Ethnic segregation, poverty and marginalisation?

Rather than the plight of Muslims abroad, is it the lived reality of Muslims in Britain and other European states that has primarily produced this domestic Islamist terror threat? In the wake of the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings, a prominent American academic commentator on national security highlighted ‘Europe’s Angry Muslims’,³⁶ characterising the Muslims in the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands as poor, ghettoised and peripheral to their national societies, with the blame being put on policies of ‘multiculturalism’, which have allowed separate and oppositional identities to develop. This, of course, skirted the fact that France has emphatically rejected multiculturalism but still has a problem of both ghettoisation and Islamist violence.³⁷ The contrast was made to the United States, where the Muslim population was portrayed as diffused, integrated and unconflicted over their national American identity. However, in the years since that 2005 article, the United States has faced a number of Islamist terror incidents and plots very similar in nature to those faced by Britain.³⁸ These have seen settled and apparently successful American Muslims³⁹ get involved in Islamist violent extremism, with the most graphic example being the shooting dead of 13 fellow military personnel at Ford Hood, Texas by a Muslim military psychologist. These developments have now led to Congressional Hearings on domestic radicalisation and the first signs that dedicated anti-radicalisation policy measures may be developing in the United States.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 discusses in more detail, Muslims in many of Britain’s towns and cities *are* significantly ethnically segregated, often living ‘parallel lives’. The acceptance of this reality, and consequent action to address it, has been central to the post-2001 shift of emphasis within UK ‘race relations’ policy approaches, as discussed more in Chapter 2. Analysis of the 7/7 bombers and how that plot and the close relationships sustaining it grew does suggest that the close-knit and somewhat insular nature of the Pakistani-origin community in Beeston enabled radicalisation to develop without external reporting,⁴¹ based on certain ‘taken-for-granted’ attitudes and norms within the community.

In the wake of the 7/7 attacks, professional colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds praised the work with young people of Sidique Khan, and white neighbours spoke very positively about Shezad Tanweer as a polite and promising young man. This led the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to suggest that the 7/7 bombers ‘were nurtured in cohesive communities’.⁴²

However, whilst Beeston did not have rigid ethnic segregation in the manner of the towns and cities facing riots in 2001, it had, and has, significant localised segregation, and a long history of youth racial tensions encompassing a cocktail of ‘race’, territorialism and machismo. Geraldine is a white, Irish-origin local authority officer, who grew up in Beeston during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and remembers ethnic, physical and cultural segregation hardening in the area as she got older:

When I look back at my time growing up in Beeston, there seems to be a big difference between the late 1980s and the 1990s. I grew up on the Cross Flatts side of the park and I had friends from lots of different backgrounds, but at the time I don’t think much was made of it – it was just normal. I had friends who were Irish, Caribbean, Polish, Italian, Sikh as well as white British living on both sides of the park. But by the time I went to high school in 1990, it seemed like the park was a dividing line, between ‘white Beeston’ on the one side, with a small percentage of people generally accepted as comfortably integrated from lots of other backgrounds, and ‘Asian Beeston’ on the other, with very few people who weren’t of Asian origin. Again, looking back, they were collectively labelled ‘Asian’ by everyone, but actually they were predominantly Muslims from Kashmir, Pakistan or Bangladesh – and the Sikh and Caribbean families I had known had moved out too. If I’m really honest too, I remember thinking that the ‘white’ families who still lived there were quite chaotic and intimidating.

When I think of multicultural places, I picture New York or London – people of all backgrounds living in every street across all income brackets. When I look back to growing up in Beeston, it was at best bi-cultural with one version of multiculturalism on one side and another version on the other side.

Rai (2006) in his thoughtful analysis of the 7/7 attacks and their political context quotes ex-school friends of Hasib Hussain saying that he often got into fights with non-Muslims and that ‘it was always whites against Asians and there were so many fights’.⁴³ This was little changed from the previous generation represented by Sidique Khan. Luke taught Sidique Khan at Mathew Murray High School (MMHS) in south Leeds in the late 1980s, and comments,

The social climate in south Leeds generally and MMHS at that time – late 1980s – was anything but multicultural. When I arrived at MMHS in 1985, almost every single desk had swastika graffiti on it – literally almost all. The management didn’t understand racism as a problem because they were ignorant and racist themselves by and large. When Sidique got to the school, the balance of power had shifted so that the Asian kids were less of a minority, and there was an uneasy peace between them and the white kids that occasionally flared into running warfare that brought heavy policing to Holbeck. At this time, the Pakistanis had a ‘one in, all in’ policy that made them a formidable force. I never saw Sidique involved in fighting, but there would have been no ambiguity about whose side he was on. So the climate was one of fear and loathing. As an Asian kid in MMHS at that time you would have had to face ignorance, prejudice and racism on a daily basis; it was impossible to escape it. It was very difficult to talk about it to the young people as a teacher because the battle lines were drawn up and there was so

much tension constantly bubbling away under the surface. I was threatened with disciplinary action by the school management for doing too much stuff about racism at one point. They didn't know how to deal with it and they couldn't handle it appropriately. The Pakistani parents seemed very conservative and they controlled what their sons did at school, and many girls left school early or were limited in their choices. The white girls felt very oppressed by the behaviour and attitudes of many of the Pakistani youth, and this fuelled their racism. It would not be an exaggeration to describe it as an environment of hatred, and I was strangely unsurprised when I heard about Sidique, although I had no idea that it would lead to terrorism as such.

Such ethnic segregation, racism and racial tension is problematic for society in a number of ways, as Chapter 2 discusses, but recent demographic analysis shows that British Muslims have been no more likely to be involved in Islamist violent extremism activity if they come from 'dense', clustered and segregated Muslim communities than if they come from much smaller and apparently 'integrated' settings.⁴⁴ Omar Khyam, ringleader of the Crevice plot, came from Crawley in Sussex, where the Muslim population was too small for the local authority to qualify for initial *Prevent* funding. Similarly, Saajid Butt came from Gloucester, again a Muslim community of limited size in an overwhelmingly white area. Government statistics show the Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin communities, who represent the substantial majority of Britain's Muslims, as having higher rates of unemployment, poor housing and poverty than other ethnic backgrounds, and much higher rates than the white majority communities. Gupta (2008) notes that Aristotle saw poverty as the root cause of political unrest and violence, but Jason Burke, a journalist with a long-term involvement in the coverage of Islamist violence, found that 'fewer than 20% of UK militants come from genuinely deprived or low income backgrounds'.⁴⁵ Some militants, such as the ex-criminal Richard Reid, or Hasib Hussain, who achieved little at school, could be characterised as marginalised, but others had higher education qualifications or involvements and were seemingly both 'integrated' and personally 'successful'. Sidique Khan, with his wife and child, qualifications and a good job, and the two people involved in the Glasgow Airport bombing suggest that personal social circumstances and experiences cannot explain terrorist involvement.

Indeed, the varied social backgrounds of those involved in British Islamist terrorism means that 'the security services can identify neither a uniform pattern by which a process occurs nor a particular type that is susceptible'.⁴⁶ Here, it is clear that any suggested link between ethnic segregation or economic marginalisation and terrorism is misplaced, but also that 'integration' and apparent success is no guarantee of moderation. Some generalisations have been offered, such as in the government's *Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism*, which suggested that 'by and large most young extremists fall into one or two groups: well-educated undergraduates or with degrees and technical professional qualifications in engineering or IT, or under-achievers

with few or no qualifications, and often a criminal background'.⁴⁷ That does mirror what is known about Islamist extremists internationally but sheds only limited light on how preventative policies should be targeted. Given that close to 50 per cent of young Britons now go on to higher education, and that university participation rates for Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people are rising steadily, such profiling suggests a very large potential target group. This is also true for the increasing numbers of young Muslims involved in the criminal justice system, as discussed below. What is clear is that members of Britain's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are having increasingly diverse experiences in relation to education and employment, with what can be termed 'class differences' becoming more apparent.⁴⁸

Perhaps the key issue is not personal poverty or marginalisation but perception by an individual, based on his or her acceptance of the Islamist 'single narrative' outlined above, that *their people* are marginalised and oppressed. However, which Muslims are likely to be attracted to this 'single narrative' is far from clear. Gupta (2008) outlines psychological explanations for terrorism in general, including Freud's belief that unresolved sexual issues motivate a revolutionary to act against natural authority figures, based on a feeling of humiliation. Such a simplistic equation of sexual frustration equals terrorism seems to be answered by the reality that many of the Western-based Islamist terrorists have lived lives of sexual freedom, with many of the 9/11 and Madrid attackers being womanizers⁴⁹ and the 7/7 inquest identifying that Shezad Tanweer had a 'secret affair' with a girlfriend for three years, with his last meeting with her just days before the 7/7 bombings.⁵⁰ Other non-Freudian psychologists focus on frustration/aggression, social learning and the attractions of 'group-think' as possible explanations for violent extremism, but all available data suggest that those involved in Islamist violent extremism are 'normal' by the standards of psychological tests.

Radicalisation: Mosques, 'preachers of hate' and recruiters?

Much of the popular media discussion of the nature and causes of the Islamist terror threat has focused on the role of some mosques and so-called 'preachers of hate', but caution is needed here over the role of mosques. Many Islamists attracted to violent extremism had previously broken ties with local mosques, either because their radical views meant that they were no longer welcome or because the traditional and conservative approach, with sermons delivered in community languages, felt irrelevant to the interests of younger Muslims. Even in mosques where illiberal social and political attitudes are seen as the norm, the link between such 'extremism' and 'violent extremism', a distinction problematically at the heart of government approaches to *Prevent*, is less clear. For the 7/7 bombers, the mosque link does not stand up. Dissatisfaction with

the irrelevance of the local mosque and hostility from his family and local community to his 'love marriage' to an Indian-origin woman from a different Muslim tradition led Sidique Khan, along with his associates in Beeston, towards prayer and religious study meetings in local gyms and hired rooms, and to the performing of religious marriage ceremonies in the local radical 'Iqr'a' bookshop.⁵¹ This mirrors the experiences of many young British Muslims, leading some to seek their own understanding and practice of being a 'Muslim' away from mosques, in political groups, community-based meetings with invited preachers, or in informal study circles, all of which have provided great opportunity for radicalisation unchecked by community scrutiny or norms.

It is, however, clear from media investigations that some mosques have been sites of extreme political, religious and social attitudes being expressed. This was illustrated by the WikiLeaks disclosures of American secret intelligence files relating to Islamist prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, which focused on the role in radicalisation of Finsbury Park Mosque: 'the Guantanamo files disclose that by the late 1990s, the mosque in north London had become a "haven" for extremism where disaffected young men from around the world were radicalised before being sent to al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan'.⁵² The files suggested that at least 35 Muslims, evenly split between Britons and foreign radicals granted asylum in Britain, were further radicalised at the mosque through viewing propaganda and preaching by key figures such as Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada, both of whom were foreign nationals granted asylum. Here, the British network of extreme Islamists was enlarged by the presence of a significant number of exiled Islamist radicals from North Africa and the Middle East in Britain, especially in London. This presence was the direct result of political approaches to asylum policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the British government granted leave to remain to such activists, believing that it was better to have them living in the open and under surveillance in Britain. However, for many commentators this allowed an extremist free for all, with the extreme attitudes of such activists influencing young British Muslims as well as other exiles, and turning the British capital into 'Londonistan',⁵³ as well as spreading their radical influence nationally.

As suggested above though, radical mosques such as Finsbury Park, now purged of extremism and under the control of a new management committee, have been an exception, and other sources of radicalisation within Muslim communities need to be analysed. These include 'preachers of hate', radical political groups, prisons and the Internet. Many of the most 'extreme' preachers and speakers within Muslim communities are banned from mosques and instead speak at community centres and other meeting places: It is very likely that Germaine Lindsay was 'introduced to (Sidique) Khan through his associations with the radical preacher Abdullah al-Faisal',⁵⁴ who spoke twice in Beeston prior to being jailed in 2003 for incitement to racial hatred. The head of the Hamara community agency in Beeston employing Sidique Khan was also

linked to the appearance of radical preachers at venues in Leeds. Oliver Roy, one of the world's leading analysts of modern Islamist militancy, suggests that 'Islamist preachers have replaced far left militants and social workers' in being influential on marginalised Muslim youth in Western countries.⁵⁵ Intermeshed with the influence of such preacher-led meetings has been the role of Islamist political groups, something that has grown significantly in Britain over the two decades since the *Satanic Verses* controversy and the first Gulf War. The HUT, or the 'party of liberation', has been a group with origins in the ideologies of Qutb and Mawdudi and a belief in the re-establishment of the 'Caliphate' or pan-Islamic state. Operating in English and working across any traditional Muslim factional lines has made it attractive to some young Muslims, with HUT campaigning for Muslims to boycott democratic participation in wider society. The founder of the British branch of HUT, Omar Bakri Muhammed, went on to establish the even more militant Al-Muhajiroun. That group and its offshoots have staged high-profile stunts, such as the demonstration against British troops returning home from Afghanistan to Luton that sparked the establishment of the EDL.⁵⁶

It seems highly likely now that Sidique Khan initially made contact with other Islamists, such as Omar Khyam and the two Derby-based Israel suicide bombers, through Al-Muhajiroun circles, such as Omar Bakhri hosting a fundraising barbeque in London, the proceeds of which enabled Omar Khyam and Sidique Khan to travel to the Pakistani/Afghan border for military training in 2003. A significant number of the members of such Islamist political groups have previously been involved in far left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, becoming disillusioned with their lack of focus on Muslim faith and political concerns. Ex-HUT activist Ed Husain describes the attractions of a Muslim-focused group operating in English and overtly concerned with political issues like Palestine/Israel which mosques and older members of Muslim communities wanted to downplay. Former senior HUT official Shiraz Maher has used the illegal drugs analogy to characterise HUT and similar groups as 'gateway' organisations to Islamist violent extremism, not advocating violence themselves but radicalising individuals and putting them in close touch with others in ways that can facilitate further small group or cell radicalisation.⁵⁷ This role has led to the banning of Al-Muhajiroun and its successors, and calls post-7/7 for the banning of HUT, a controversial political stance in a situation where the BNP has elected councillors and Members of the European Parliament nationally, and the EDL has been allowed to stage provocative public rallies.

Political groups such as the HUT have been successful particularly in attracting educated young Muslims towards radical Islamism, with activity on the campuses of universities and further education colleges a central plank of their operation. Social movement theory suggests that this is a very traditional way for radical political movements to grow, as they are often based around

educated but politically frustrated young people.⁵⁸ To date, at least six different members of British university Islamic societies have been convicted of terrorism offences amid concern that radical Islamist political meetings and viewings of Islamist propaganda DVDs on campuses have created ‘mood music’ that provides the context for the further radicalisation of a minority of Muslim students.

A key route to radicalisation for more marginalised young British Muslims has been Islamist activity within prisons and Young Offenders Institutes (YOIs). Muktar Said Ibrahim, the ringleader of the 21/7 failed bomb plot, was radicalised whilst imprisoned in Feltham YOI in West London and then sought out combat training in Afghanistan. Similarly, Richard Reid converted to Islam whilst in prison in the 1990s in an echo of the conversion of many Black American prisoners to the Nation of Islam.⁵⁹ There have been between 100 and 200 Muslims in British prisons for terrorist-related offences at different points over the past few years at the same time as the number of people in prisons/YOIs identified as Muslims has been rising generally. This has created interrelated concerns not only around the management of these radicals but also around the further radicalisation of ‘normal’ Muslim prisoners and even the conversion to Islam in its radical form by other prisoners. The concern that Islamists committed to violent extremism are still a threat whilst incarcerated is well-founded, with research into such prisoners in the United Kingdom and Spain suggesting both that such networks can use prison as organisational and educational bases as the IRA or the Basque ETA previously did and prey on vulnerable prisoners to convert and/or radicalise them.⁶⁰ One of the key Madrid bombers appears to have been radicalised during an earlier prison spell. Caution is needed over the rate of conversions to Islam, as factors such as group protection or even food preferences may also be involved, but it is clear prisons are a site of tension around Islamic radicalisation.

Group dynamics

All the available data of young Muslims for Britain and other Western countries who have become involved in Islamist violent extremism suggests not only that there is no single economic or educational ‘profile’ of such terrorists but also that psychologically these people appear to be ‘normal’. In analysing British Islamist terrorism, Jason Burke highlights ‘the apparent banality of the men who perpetrate it’.⁶¹ The question, therefore, is why a small number of people are able and willing to make the journey towards the most extreme acts of violence. The suggestion here is that the answer is in group dynamics and peer pressure, rather than in individual characteristics. If this is true, it casts

serious doubts on attempts to 'profile' possible Islamist terrorists in advance of events: 'it is the psychology of the group, not the individual that is key.'⁶² Social psychologist Scott Atran has spent many years researching terrorism and suicide bombings, including the 2004 Madrid and 2002 Bali Islamist attacks. He concludes that 'small group dynamics can trump individual personality to produce horrific behaviour in ordinary people'.⁶³ For instance, five of the seven Madrid bombers came from the same small area of a housing estate in Tetuan, Morocco, with five of their other friends having previously gone to Iraq to fight as jihadis. Similarly in Indonesia, 'the Bali plot and plots after spewed from a tangled web of discipleship, kinship and marriage, social networks of Afghan alumni and other friends, and not really from any command and control organisation'.⁶⁴ The input of 'Al-Qaeda central' based in Pakistan on the Bali plot was minimal, and all the evidence from the Madrid plot was that they had nothing to do with it. Instead, for Scott Atran, the Madrid conspiracy developed from the group dynamics among a group of North Africans who together regularly watched emotive jihadist material and who had a charismatic central figure. This saw a coming together of Islamists and petty criminals, with the criminals actually coming to the fore as the plot took on a momentum of its own. A close analysis of this plot leads Atran to focus on how small groups can 'self-radicalise' simply through discussion and the viewing of video/online imagery and then develop terrorist plans. Group psychology and dynamics are crucial, with psychology evidence suggesting that 'to stand alone and resist conforming may be emotionally costly'.⁶⁵

That perspective draws on evidence such as Hannah Arendt's study of the Holocaust and the German roles within it that highlighted the 'banality of evil', something confirmed by the later experiments of Stanley Milgram which showed volunteers willing to torture in response to orders. A key facet of the Madrid plot was how much time the plotters spent together in the months beforehand, something mirrored in the 9/11 plot that involved three of the four key suicide pilots being close friends together from student days together in Hamburg, Germany. They had attempted to become jihadis together in Afghanistan, and when they returned, they spent much of their time praying together and watching extreme Islamist video material. Here, the small Islamist group became their world, as it appears to have done for other groups of plotters. The three 7/7 bombers from Beeston in south Leeds spent a great deal of time together in local gyms, youth projects and the radical 'Iqr'a' bookshop, praying, watching videos and discussing Islamist perspectives with friends. This was cemented with the bonding experience of a white-water canoeing trip to Wales, just as the 21/7 attackers took part in an outdoor terrorist training/preparation trip in the Lake District and the Crevice plotters undertook a similar trip to Pakistan. Such intense group experiences helped to develop the central importance of the group and its concerns to their individual lives,

making the further movement towards more extreme political positions and ideas for action seem natural and normal. In such ways, such small groups of radicalised young Muslims are undergoing a similar process of group formation and development as those people involved in religious ‘cults’ or extreme political groups, with the group becoming their life. The suggestion that the 7/7 attackers had together been ‘brainwashed’, by themselves or anyone else, has been dismissed on the basis that they all individually carried on with their normal lives, but it is clear that they ‘had hidden the most important part of their lives from their parents, their families and from many of their friends’.⁶⁶ This may well have been a long-term strategy for Sidique Khan, with one of his former teachers Luke commenting that: at school ‘he came over as clever but careful – he guarded his image carefully’.

A key part of the small group dynamics central to these Islamist plots has been the role of a charismatic leader. For the 7/7 attackers, this clearly was Sidique Khan. Older than the others, he already had a lot of status within Beeston’s Muslim community through his youth work and his role in the ‘Mullah Boys’ that had successfully worked against the influence of hard drugs in the preceding decade. Both Tanweer and Hussain attended youth activities run by Khan at the Hamara Youth Access Point as well as meetings and sessions at the ‘Iqr’a’ bookshop and local gyms. From when Hussain had been about 14 years old, Khan had been regularly visiting him at home to talk and pray with him, a relationship that in retrospect might be regarded as a form of ‘grooming’. Similarly, Germaine Lindsay is described by Patrick, someone who was very close to him and his family during Germaine’s childhood, as ‘very intelligent but very vulnerable’, someone who could be influenced by charismatic older figures. Despite not pursuing education past the age of 16, Lindsay showed himself to be very academically talented as well as an impressive sportsman. That talent, his good looks and enquiring mind all suggested that he could be whatever he wanted to be, but instability was a feature throughout his life. Never really knowing his biological father, who remained in Jamaica, Germaine experienced further instability as stepfathers moved on and his young sister went to live with her father. This culminated in his mother leaving him to live alone at the age of 17, when she emigrated to the United States after marrying a man she had never previously met. That marriage and abandonment of Germaine followed the conversion to Islam by both mother and son, with Germaine’s mother having been a long-term religious ‘seeker’ who had moved through a number of different Christian churches and sects. Patrick remembers Germaine talking of Muslim ‘friends’ at that time, ‘but those friends were converters’, almost certainly older Muslim radicals, possibly African-Caribbean converts as Germaine then became, who preyed on his vulnerability, rather than school-age, Asian-origin friends. Evidence suggests that Germaine fell under the influence of African-Caribbean convert and Islamist extremist Abdullah el-Faisal, and it was at

one of his talks in Yorkshire that Germaine first met Sidique Khan, a more local mentor figure.

Other British Islamist plots have had a clear ringleader or charismatic figure, such as Omar Khyam for the Crevice plot, and for the Madrid attacks such a figure was Sehane Fakhret, 'the Tunisian', who inspired the successful coming together of a very ramshackle group of individuals. Such charismatic individuals clearly form the key role of terrorist 'leader' or the 'political entrepreneur' who 'frames', explains and sells political explanations and proposed remedies to 'followers'.⁶⁷ This role had already been identified prior to 7/7 by the British government through its analysis of previous plots domestically and abroad: 'The Security Service has some evidence that those who go on to become involved in terrorist-related activity have been radicalised as a result of associating with loose networks that revolve around a respected key individual.'⁶⁸

Whilst this focus on small group dynamics and the role of charismatic leaders within them appears very convincing, they do not help explain the individuals who have planned and carried out Islamist terror acts entirely alone. A good example is Roshonara Choudhry, who stabbed her local MP Stephen Timms in May 2010 in response to his support for the invasion of Iraq, and whose radicalisation seemed to be solely based on viewing of Islamist images and information via the Internet. In particular, she obsessively listened to and watched sermons and speeches by American-born Islamist radical Anwar al-Awlaki (subsequently killed in an American drone attack), finding his websites without any help, and viewing the material alone, as well as viewing other jihadist material: 'I was looking at YouTube videos about the resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq ... I didn't want to tell anyone because I know that if anybody else knew, they'd get into trouble, 'cos then they would be implicated in whatever I do, so I kept it a secret'.⁶⁹ Other examples are Major Nadal Malik Hassan who killed fellow soldiers stationed at Ford Hood in Texas and Farouk Abdulmutallab, the 'underpants bomber' who tried to explode a bomb sewn into his trousers on a plane landing in Detroit, Michigan in 2009. Both of those individuals had been in Internet contact with Anwar al-Awlaki, based in Yemen, although 'it was likely that they sought out the popular Internet preacher because they were already radicalised to the point of wanting further guidance to act'.⁷⁰ Such radicalisation can come from repeated viewing of Islamist material on the Internet, with Germaine Lindsay having already raised concerns whilst still at Rawthorpe High School in Huddersfield through his attempts to find websites celebrating the 9/11 attacks.⁷¹ It is clear from these discussions of radicalisation and of the small group processes within it that viewing of Islamist material on DVD or via the Internet has played a crucial role. However, any policy responses have to acknowledge that a lot of these emotive images are actually carried by mainstream media outlets that repeat them throughout news cycles, so negating the need for Islamists to search for other sources.

Conclusion: No easy answers

This chapter has outlined how the phenomenon of young British Muslims committed to violent extremism defies easy or singular explanation – causation is multifactorial, with the strong role played by small group or ‘cell’ dynamics and by the influence of charismatic leader figures within such groups meaning that individual, ‘risk-based’ profiling is only likely to be of limited help. This suggests that any ‘hearts and minds’ policy approach, such as *Prevent*, needs to be multi-pronged, nuanced and realistic about what it can and can’t achieve, as the example of a ‘lone wolf’ attacker such as Roshonara Choudhry indicates. Above all, it suggests that *Prevent* needs to be careful to not further exacerbate some of these causal factors, such as by the overemphasis of singular ethnic or faith identities, feeding the physical and cultural segregation that can allow ‘space’ for minorities within such singular identities to move further towards ‘extreme’ interpretations of that singular identity, and by fuelling the sense that this singular identity is under attack through policies specifically aimed at one identity or community. That analysis has been at the heart of the significant rethink of British policy approaches to ‘race relations’ and the relationship between common and community-specific identities since the 2001 riots and the consequent emergence of the community cohesion policy agenda. That cohesion analysis and agenda is examined in Chapter 2 and is used to develop the argument that *Prevent* has counterproductively failed to understand and utilise that cohesion analysis, rendering *Prevent* ‘between two stools’, whereby it is neither effective as a counterterrorism strategy nor congruent with efforts to promote greater cohesion and integration.