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Preventing Violent Extremism

Introduction: States responding to terror

The previous chapters analysed both the facts and possible causes of the Islamist terror threat facing Britain and the changing political context of ethnic relations since 2001. The heightened concern post-2001 with ethnic segregation and ‘parallel lives’, which has overtly focused on British Muslims, has inevitably shaped how anti-terrorism measures have been understood and experienced. For Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2011), the 2001 riots combined in the minds of many politicians and commentators with the 9/11 attacks on New York just weeks later, and that as a result ‘*Prevent* was quite simply born out of a panic induced confusion/correlation of Islam, or sects of Islam, with bases for engaging in Islamically inspired political violence’.¹ Indeed, it is argued here that neither the home-grown Islamist terror threat nor the effectiveness of anti-terrorist policy measures to prevent it can be discussed in isolation from broader analysis of ethnic relations, ‘identity’ and the state’s relationship with British Muslims. This suggests a two-way relationship, with the broader issues shaping both the nature of the terrorist threat and the way that the state understands and responds to the threat, but that policy response also having the potential to impact negatively on British Muslims and their perception of ethnic relations, so worsening both the threat itself and the state’s ability to positively engage with Muslim communities in order to address the threat.

The UK government response to this Islamist terror threat, the threat of violent extremism, has come in the form of the original 2003 CONTEST counterterrorism strategy and the subsequent 2009 CONTEST 2 refinement. These strategies have contained four distinct components, Pursue, *Prevent*, Protect and Prepare. The focus of this book is on the second of those components, *Prevent*, a ‘hearts and minds’ preventative approach to reducing the long-term terror threat by ‘draining the pool’ of potential terrorists. This UK policy response has developed within the context of a European Union-wide Counter-Terrorism Strategy launched in 2005 and containing four key strands, one of which is *Prevent*. This was followed up by the 2007 EU *Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment Implementation Report* and the *Counter-Terrorism Action Plan*. Such EU strategies have been designed to support and underpin the strategies and approaches of individual member states, meaning that preventative counterterrorist work in Europe has been primarily locally

determined and led. As a result, subsequent EU documents, such as the 2008 document *The EU Counter-Radicalisation Strategy: Evaluating EU Policies Concerning Causes of Radicalisation*, have focused on sharing experiences from individual states, so emphasising the importance for the international community of critically evaluating the policy approaches of individual states, as this book attempts to do in the case of the United Kingdom.

The content, implications and effectiveness of the highly contested *Prevent* UK policy agenda to date are examined here across a number of chapters. This chapter details the development, content and rationale of *Prevent* since its launch in 2006, including the refinements made to it both by the previous Labour government and by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in May 2010. In discussing the design and implementation of *Prevent*, this chapter identifies a number of problematic features of the policy agenda, both in relation to the actual effectiveness of *Prevent* activity in reducing the terror threat and in its arguably negative impact on ethnic relations and on the relationship between British Muslims and the state. These problematic features are explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters through use both of empirical research data and broader academic and media discussions.

In analysing the implementation and impacts of *Prevent* to date, broader questions of how governments, particularly democratic ones, should respond to domestic terrorism need to be borne in mind. English (2009) notes how terrorists often aim to provoke a heavy-handed state response, so leading to a spiral of violence as civilian outrage produces more terrorist recruits. Here, terrorist actions are deliberately aimed at reducing or even obliterating the middle ground of public opinion, so overreaction is the worst possible tactical response by governments.² In the wake of terrorist events such as 9/11 or 7/7 and the domestic public and media responses to them, though, it is very hard for governments to avoid an overreaction, a crackdown that involves kicking down doors and arresting suspects, often identified on the basis of crude ethnic or political 'profiling'. The counter-effectiveness of such approaches was graphically shown by events in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s, when escalating Nationalist opposition to the British forces originally introduced to protect them from Loyalist violence led to large-scale internment of young Catholic men and disproportionate violence by British forces, most graphically seen in the shooting dead of 13 unarmed civilians on 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972. These state actions led to a huge growth in recruitment to paramilitary organisations such as the Provisional IRA, and destroyed any nationalist community cooperation or information sharing with the authorities: 'state violence against civilians played a dramatic part in stimulating the growth of precisely the organisation against which the state action had been directed.'³ On that basis, a modern counterterrorism strategy that has a clear 'hearts and minds' preventative approach, such as *Prevent*, should be welcomed as a

balanced approach, especially as other countries, such as the United States, have lacked such a coherent counter-radicalisation programme until very recently.⁴ The ending of terrorist threats internationally has come precisely through such a combination of states *not* overreacting, bolstering middle ground opinions rather than polarisation in society and also addressing grievances. Such approaches can lead to reassessment and reduction in support for the ‘cause’ within communities and networks from which terrorists draw.

Here, the purpose of *Prevent* can therefore be understood as a ‘hearts and minds’ approach aimed at people seen as vulnerable to persuasion towards terrorism and who might ‘reject and undermine our shared values and jeopardise community cohesion’.⁵ Such a prioritisation of community engagement within the overall CONTEST strategy acknowledges that ‘intelligence is the most vital element in successful counter-terrorism’.⁶ This approach attempts to focus both on increasing the resilience and addressing the grievances of communities, and on identifying vulnerable individuals as well as challenging and disrupting ideologies sympathetic to violent extremism. Here, ‘resilience’ can be understood as resisting the appeal of, or even standing up to, extremist political activity and terrorist recruitment attempts within Muslim communities. It is by those standards that the effectiveness of *Prevent* policy approaches in the United Kingdom since 2003 should be judged.

A lethargic response? Pre-7/7 developments

The British state recognition of and response to the scale and threat of the international Islamist terror threat outlined in Chapter 1 can be seen as sluggish both before and after the pivotal global event of the 9/11 attacks in which 67 Britons died alongside almost 3,000 American citizens.⁷ This slowness was replicated internationally with the United States failing to heed warnings during the 1990s from its own experts about Al-Qaeda.⁸ For the United Kingdom, this failure to comprehend the growing threat of violent Islamist extremism was not only about Cold War mindsets but also about the generational focus on the terror threat around the Northern Ireland conflict. The result has been that post-9/11 counterterrorism measures generally, and ‘hearts and minds’ *Prevent* policies in particular, have appeared to be reactive, designed and implemented under considerable political and media pressure. This is particularly surprising, given that foreign Islamist extremists had gathered in London as asylum seekers and refugees from the early 1990s, making it a key centre of organisation for global violent Islamism and leading worried French security officials to dub it ‘Londonistan’. Indeed, Bin-Laden established a media information office in London titled the Advisory and Reformation Committee in 1994. For right-of-centre commentator Melanie Phillips, until first 9/11 and then the grave shock of

the 7/7 attacks, Britain ‘paid virtually no attention to the extraordinary network of terrorism and extremist incitement that had developed under its nose’.⁹

The initial response of the Blair government to 9/11 was the use of the law, with five significant new pieces of legislation concerned with terrorism enacted between 2000 and 2008. This included the strengthening of the Terrorism Act in November 2001 that proscribed a number of Islamist organisations and failed attempts to deport foreign Islamist radicals that eventually led to the still controversial alternative of control orders being introduced as part of the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Alongside new legislation came a new counterterrorism strategy, CONTEST, concerned with the threat to Britain of international terrorism. That strategy identified four distinct components, Pursue, *Prevent*, Protect and Prepare. In March 2009, the government launched a revised strategy, CONTEST 2, which acknowledged that, initially, *Prevent* had been the least developed strand of CONTEST. In foregrounding *Prevent* in the revised CONTEST 2 strategy, the government was here formalising priorities that in practice had been devised and developed subsequent to the original CONTEST strategy, especially in the wake of 7/7. The main objectives for *Prevent* identified in CONTEST 2 were as follows:

- to challenge the ideology behind violent extremism and support mainstream voice;
- to disrupt those who promote violent extremism and support the places where they operate;
- to support individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment, or have already been recruited by violent extremists;
- to increase the resilience of communities to violent extremism; and
- to address the grievances which ideologues are exploiting.¹⁰

Each strand of CONTEST had its own ministerially led committee, or TIDO (Terrorism International Defence and Overseas), with all accountable to an overarching Strategy and Delivery TIDO, chaired by the government’s security and intelligence co-ordinator based in the Cabinet Office.¹¹ The first holder of this post was Sir David Omand, former director of the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). Omand acknowledged the slow initial progress on *Prevent* in March 2010, when giving evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homeland Security (APPGHS): ‘when you came to *Prevent*, it was much less clear what it was that should be done, and so a lot of time was spent with research, led by the Security Service, trying to work out where you could most effectively intervene.’¹² Alongside this, a multiagency Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) was established,

served and hosted by Thames House, the MI5 headquarters. Charles Farr, current director general of Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), commented to the CLG Select Committee Inquiry in 2010 that the government felt that ‘we need a strategy to stop people becoming terrorists in the first place’.¹³

Despite the appearance of CONTEST in 2003, and the enactment of anti-terrorism legislation, government was slow to understand either the scale of the violent Islamist threat or the necessity to engage with the ideological challenge of the single narrative and the supposed need to take violent action in its name that it posed. By 2003, British Security Services ‘had become convinced that British Muslims represented the top terrorist threat and from that year to 2005 there would be a 300% increase in MI5’s domestic investigative targets’.¹⁴ However, it was only after events in 2004 that the government rethought the scale of its response in general and the need for a more active *Prevent* component in particular: ‘sparking the government into action were the March 2004 Madrid bombings.’¹⁵ This combined with the identification and arrest of the ‘Crevice’ plotters, and the August 2004 arrest of Dhiren Barot, all British-based Islamist terrorists, led to enhanced action. One thing these events in 2004 prompted was a joint FCO and Home Office report, *Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism*. The draft of this report included a letter from Cabinet Secretary Sir Andrew Turnbull to John Grieve of the Home Office that commented, ‘there is a feeling that parts of the Muslim community, particularly young men, are disaffected. This includes some that are well-educated with good economic prospects.’¹⁶ The report offered a thoughtful summary of attitudes and positions within Britain’s Muslim communities, drawing on a variety of recent polling data and academic sources. It clearly identified the varying backgrounds of those young Muslims attracted to violent extremism and the role of charismatic individuals within small peer groups of potential terrorists. The report clearly identified a minority of young Muslims with little affinity for British identity and values, and with support for radical Islamist political positions. The shape and focus of the *Prevent* programme to be unveiled in subsequent years can be seen in this draft report, in its pinpointing of the need for dialogue that disrupts ‘career paths’ of those drawn towards terrorism and the need to target particular arenas such as further and higher education campuses. However, the tensions and dilemmas for the later *Prevent* programme can also be identified in the questions that the report poses but fails to clearly answer over how government should respond: ‘should programmes be targeted specifically at the Muslim community or be “ethnically-blind”?’¹⁷ The analysis and initial questions over Muslim attitudes posed in this report were subsequently investigated further by MI5 through their research project ‘Project Rich Picture’. By November 2006, as *Prevent* was being initiated, MI5 claimed to be monitoring 1,600 people in 200 terrorist networks around 30 active plots, with an 80 per cent increase in case loads during 2006 alone.¹⁸

The 7/7 London bombings of July 2005 came at a time when the government still lacked engagement with Muslim communities over counterterrorism or a clear *Prevent* strategy. One immediate response was a new commitment to consultation with Muslim communities that led to the ‘Preventing Extremism Together’ (PET) working groups, even though at the same time Blair was explicitly denying any links between terrorism and foreign policy and issuing his own pre-emptive 12-point plan.

‘Preventing Extremism Together’

In the wake of 7/7 bombings, the government established seven working groups under the collective title ‘Preventing Extremism Together’, whilst also establishing the Commission on Cohesion and Integration,¹⁹ whose subsequent report re-energised many of the original community cohesion recommendations. The PET process had significant Muslim involvement, and ranged across issues of economic, social and educational experiences, creating an expectation that it would lead to an explicit focus on ‘Muslim’ disadvantage. In fact, the government was already focused on educational and economic ‘social exclusion’ of Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin young people and communities,²⁰ so arguably addressing underlying root problems, but showed no inclination to integrate this as an explicitly holistic Muslim policy initiative. Such a governmental position can be seen as consistent with the wider approaches to ‘identity’ and citizenship discussed in Chapter 2 and to the multifactorial understanding of marginalisation identified in Chapter 1. The mismatch between what the PET process seemed to promise and what it actually delivered led to significant disillusionment among many of the Muslim groups and activists who engaged positively in this partnership activity with government. For instance, the conveners of one of the PET working groups later commented that ‘although our recommendations were “commended” by the Home Secretary, none were followed up or implemented, and members of the working group were not invited to be involved in contributing to the *Prevent* agenda’.²¹

As a result, *Prevent* emerged the following year as an agenda concerned with radicalisation and issues of ‘values’ and community organisation that might be contributing to it.²² The subsequent focus on ‘values’ can also be seen as stemming from some of PET’s conclusions and the political/media response to them. PET highlighted deprivation, discrimination and Islamophobia as causes of terrorism and called for changes in foreign policy. This combined with the decision of the MCB to boycott Holocaust Memorial Day because it did not reflect all types of ‘genocide’ and pro-Palestine suicide-bombing statements by senior MCB official Daud Abdullah led key elements of the Blair government

to conclude that they could not work with existing Muslim representatives, and that attitudes and ‘values’ in broader sections of Muslim communities were problematic. The very involvement of such organisations, despite their clear democratic constitution, in PET led right-wing columnist Melanie Phillips to comment that ‘the government had quite simply handed over policy on extremism to the extremists’,²³ highlighting the political pressures on the Labour government.

‘Preventing Violent Extremism’

The tensions apparent in the PET process meant that the government formally launched its *Prevent* strategy in 2006 whilst under attack, from one side by right-wing think tanks and influential sections of the media who demanded confrontation with broader section of ‘un-British’ Muslims, and from another direction by many British Muslims and liberal non-Muslim supporters who argued for changes to foreign policy and for domestic policy approaches that encouraged dialogue and partnership focused on Muslim marginalisation, rather than approaches of blame and communal suspicion. The resulting compromise *seemed* to favour the ‘values-based’ suspicion of wider Muslim attitudes and be based on the ‘conveyor-belt’ theory of radicalisation that sees wider cultures of intolerance and extremism with Muslim communities acted out within mosques and political groups, and providing the starting point for some individuals to move further towards violent implementation of these widely held beliefs. The cutting off of contact with groups such as the MCB, and some of the language accompanying the launch of *Prevent*, seemed to support this, but the actual implementation of the policy in subsequent years pragmatically left a lot of decision-making to local authorities and other bodies at local levels, so ensuring somewhat less reactionary *Prevent* activity in practice.

The forthcoming *Prevent* strategy was announced in a speech in October 2006 by Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for the newly formed DCLG, following the dismemberment of the over-large Home Office. Kelly said,

Security responses alone will not be enough. There is a battle of ideas here – it is all about us reasserting shared values and winning hearts and minds.

All of us must play a part. That means government. And it also means communities and individual citizens themselves.

I am clear that our strategy of funding and engagement must shift significantly towards those organisations that are taking a proactive leadership role in tackling extremism and defending our shared values. It is only by defending our values that we will prevent extremists radicalising future generations of terrorists.²⁴

Further details were subsequently announced,²⁵ with the initial *Prevent* activity commencing in April 2007. This was to involve DCLG funding for

work with Muslim communities in identified local authority areas under the banner of 'Preventing Violent Extremism' and work with young Muslims in specific sections of society, alongside Home Office support for police-focused work. The content and detail of this programme are discussed below. The context for this new *Prevent* initiative was a speech in January 2007 by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Peter Clarke, head of Counter-Terrorism Command at the Metropolitan Police, suggesting that Britain was losing the battle for 'hearts and minds' within Muslim communities.²⁶ The underlying target group for *Prevent* was explained by Charles Farr, director general of the OSCT, in evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee in 2009, when saying that beyond Islamist terrorists already identified, 'there is a much larger group of people who feel a degree of negativity, if not hostility, towards the state, the country, the community, and who are, as it were, the pool in which terrorists will swim ... We have to reach that group. That is to a degree what *Prevent* is all about.'²⁷

The creation of a programme to channel money towards work with Muslim communities through the DCLG, the department also concerned with local authorities, equality and community cohesion, could be seen as a progressive, partnership-based approach, working with Muslim communities rather than carrying out surveillance on them. That was certainly the view of Sir David Omand, the author of *Prevent* and the overall CONTEST strategy, who saw the split of *Prevent* work between the security-focused Home Office and the DCLG as vital: 'There was a deliberate attempt to get the Local Government Department to lead this, and to try and do it in a way that is based on the locality and not the ethnicity.'²⁸ However, McGhee (2010) suggests that this could also be understood as 'forcing responsibility for countering extremism onto Muslim communities through a process of devolving responsibility downwards',²⁹ so asking for front-line vigilance against people in their own communities. McGhee does acknowledge, though, that this communitarianist approach does avoid the 'othering' of British Muslims in trying to create partnership between the state and 'responsible' Muslims. Whether 'responsible' Muslims are the same thing as politically or religiously 'moderate' Muslims is an ongoing tension within *Prevent*. Similarly, whether *Prevent* has actually been able to avoid appearing to target and stigmatise Muslims as an ethnic group and community, as Sir David Omand hoped, has also remained a controversial issue. This approach to building partnership against extremism and intolerance can be seen as consistent with the wider strategic approaches taken by government towards 'identity' in multicultural society, as outlined in Chapter 2, and towards intolerance and 'hate crime' generally: 'government is attempting to promote the intolerance of extremism alongside the now familiar intolerance in Britain with regard to other forms of hatred, prejudice and discrimination.'³⁰

In announcing the creation of the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund in February 2007, DCLG minister Ruth Kelly said, 'Violent extremism

seeks to drive us apart. Together, we will overcome it.’³¹ The *Prevent* Pathfinder Fund made available an initial £6 million for 2007/8 from the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, via regional Government Offices to 70 local authorities of communities whose populations included 5 per cent or more Muslims. This was for action programmes aimed at Muslim communities in general, and, within those communities, at those most at risk of recruitment or ‘grooming’ by extremists, or at those ‘justifying or glorifying violent extremist ideologies and terrorism’. The aims and logic of this approach for local funding via the DCLG was explained in the April 2007 publication *Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning Hearts and Minds*.³² The population calculation used for the geographical targeting was based on six-year-old data from the 2001 Census; it was subsequently amended for the three-year, £45 million programme for 2008–11 to include first all local authorities with a minimum of 4,000 Muslims, then with 2,000 Muslims, within their population, but this lower threshold still excluded Crawley in West Sussex, home of three of the five Muslim young men convicted over the ‘Operation Crevice’ plot to bomb the Bluewater shopping centre in Kent and the Ministry of Sound nightclub in London. The very use of population data to target and distribute funding betrayed the lack of quality intelligence government and its newly created OSCT had on the ‘map’ of violent extremism.

Consistent with more general New Labour policy design, the ‘Pathfinder’ *Prevent* initiative stressed the need for locally designed approaches whilst at the same time offering explicit objectives that all local authority funding bids should address, and have agreed by the regional Government Offices. Acutely aware of the danger that government language, particularly if aping American-style ‘war-on-terror’ formulations, could further alienate and radicalise sections of Muslim communities, the *Prevent* documentation uses ‘we’ consistently. Indeed, the government also established a Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) within the Home Office, with one of its key functions being to help the various arms of national and local government avoid ‘aggressive rhetoric’ and use language that encourages the positive involvement of Muslim communities.³³ The RICU has been one of a number of aspects of the *Prevent* strategy that has drawn inspiration from policy approaches previously used by the state during the Northern Ireland armed conflict, as acknowledged by a ‘senior civil servant’ quoted in *The Times* in 2004: ‘We did the same in Northern Ireland in the 1980s when, as well as deploying police and troops on the streets, we had a massive programme of investment in the local community, raising living standards. We also set about bridge-building with the Catholic community.’³⁴

In parallel, further development to *Prevent* came in the 2008–11 expansion through significant funding to the YJB for work with young offenders in secure institutions and in the community, and to the Prison Service, both reflecting well-founded concerns that radicalisation of individual Muslims was taking

place during incarceration. The important role played for recruitment to radical Islamist political groups by further and higher education settings also led to a funding focus on universities and colleges,³⁵ confirmed as such by the testimony of ex-activist Ed Husain, who was previously involved in the Islamist group HUT. *Prevent* funding also led to 300 new dedicated police posts nationally, some of them attached to the newly established regional CTUs. This all added up to a 2008–11 *Prevent* budget of £140 million, some £85 million of which came from the DCLG and the security-focused remainder from the Home Office. Information sharing and ‘tension monitoring’ were seen as a key part of the *Prevent* strategy, particularly the developing work with offenders, colleges and universities, with the hope that extremist activity could be identified and effectively countered. Underpinning this has been a significant strengthening of relationships between police forces and educational institutions across the full age range of children and young people, with the ACPO aware that there is a ‘pressing need to develop the growing relationships between the police and education sector at every level with regard to preventing violent extremism’.³⁶ The *Prevent* approach to prisons, young offenders and further and higher education institutions is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Preventing Violent Extremism in practice

The pressure from central government on the identified local authorities, and their local partners, to be involved in *Prevent* monitoring, information sharing and ‘forums against extremism’ was significant from the start. This pressure came on local authorities through the Local Area Agreements under the Comprehensive Spending Assessment to adopt ‘National Indicator 35’ around developing ‘resilience to violent extremism’, as this extract from the April 2008 Local Government Association (LGA) briefing document *Strategic Issues: Preventing Violent Extremism* shows:

The selection or non-selection of National Indicator 35: Building resilience to violent extremism emerged as a contentious issue during LAA negotiations. The Home Office, via the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), have produced a ‘heat map’ which identifies 30 areas with a high risk of producing violent extremists and are seeking a good take-up of NI: 35 across this group. ... The HO believe that local authorities that do not select NI: 35 are not prioritising *Prevent* and concluding that little or no *Prevent* work is being undertaken. To persuade local authorities to select NI: 35, the HO is applying pressure via the Police, and senior officials during LAA negotiations which has had only limited success.³⁷

Some of the local authorities receiving *Prevent* funding refused to adopt it initially, but all were required to report on it to Government Offices.

Despite these ongoing local authority anxieties, pressure from government saw *Prevent* continue to grow to the point where all local authorities with significant Muslim communities were involved, although a number of Muslim community groups refused to participate or accept funding.³⁸ The relationship between national and local government at the heart of *Prevent* operation, and the experiences of those trying to implement *Prevent* at the local authority level, are also examined in detail in Chapter 5.

The 2008 DCLG document, *Pathfinder Fund: Mapping of Project Activities 2007/2008*, the product of a ‘light-touch’ review requested by the Prime Minister’s Office, claims that as many as 44,000 people, most of them young people, had been engaged by the initial *Prevent* ‘Pathfinder’ year programme nationally.³⁹ By government’s own admission, these were overwhelmingly Muslim young people taking part in broad and unfocused monocultural youth activities. Government acknowledged that the monitoring and evaluation data from the programme to date were weak and unreliable, so admitting that little independent evaluation had taken place. An exception was Kirklees in West Yorkshire (home of two of the 7/7 bombers), where independent evaluation identified a lack of clarity over the aims of the well-meaning work and its relationship to community cohesion.⁴⁰ The national expansion of *Prevent* from April 2008 did lead to new guidance over evaluation approaches, but this was confined to vague suggestions that local authorities ‘might’ decide to develop external evaluation of programmes.⁴¹ Throughout the 2007–11 period, evaluation and assessment of *Prevent* activity funded via local authorities and other public bodies remained largely weak and limited. For instance, the evidence submission to the 2009–10 House of Commons CLG Select Committee Inquiry into *Prevent* from the ACPO commented that ‘the apparent lack of evaluation of *Prevent* initiatives has made the “value for money” assessment of *Prevent* difficult’.⁴² One issue that was highlighted by local authority funding from early on was the unhelpfulness of the funding title ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’. Clearly, such concerns cannot be separated from deeper concerns about the overall aims and assumptions of *Prevent*, but they highlighted the reality of ‘preventing violent extremism’ being a negative title and starting point for constructive ‘hearts and minds’ work. The Kirklees research highlighted the use of ‘Pathfinder’ as a suitably opaque title deployed as an understandable avoidance strategy. Similarly, the acronym PVE or the generic-sounding ‘*Prevent*’ also played obfuscation roles in local *Prevent* implementation. Acknowledging these concerns, the government formally dropped the ‘Preventing Violent Extreme’ title, settling instead for using *Prevent* as a working operational title as well as a strategic one: ‘We have recently revised our guidance to local authorities about *Prevent* acknowledging that the term “Preventing Violent Extremism” attached to local funding can in some areas be a barrier to promoting good community based work. We have acted on this by removing the label from the funding.’⁴³

What this *Prevent* activity has involved and how we can understand it is the subject of the following chapters, but the main aspects can be briefly summarised here.

Muslim young people have clearly been the main focus of many of the *Prevent* activities to date, with funding either used directly by local authority education departments and Youth Services or channelled to community organisations working with Muslim young people, using a variety of approaches and techniques, through youth work, schools and arts and sports activities. These youth-focused activities have included the promotion of local ‘anti-extremism’ forums and ‘road shows’ on extremism and Islamophobia. Alongside this has been what in reality has been community development or capacity-building work within Muslim communities that implicitly suggested weak and underdeveloped ‘civil society’ in and around Muslim communities and limited capacity in the past to counter extremism. This led to a significant focus on educational standards in general, and citizenship education specifically, in after-school mosque schools and madrassahs, and capacity-building training, support and movement towards charitable status for many mosques and other Muslim community organisations. Such local work has been mirrored at the national level. The *Prevent* strategy included 30 national projects through the Community Leadership Fund, particularly aimed at women, young people and a broader range of faith leaders. This included the establishment of a Young Muslims Advisory Group and a national Muslim Women’s Advisory Group, both clearly intended to promote more polyphonic and ‘modern’ leadership with British Muslim communities, with *Prevent* here providing ‘the facilitation of the emergence of new, “acceptable” leadership within the Muslims communities of Britain’.⁴⁴ More controversially, *Prevent* has also been involved in the promotion of new national Muslim faith organisations, with funding going to the British Muslim Council and the Sufi Muslim Council, and has attempted to promote ‘moderate’ versions of Islam, such as through the ‘Radical Middle Way’ anti-extremism road show. The implications of this *Prevent* intervention in the organisation and leadership of Muslim communities, and the promotion of particular interpretations of Islam itself, are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

Prevent under pressure

From its initiation in April 2007, both the assumptions and operational reality of *Prevent* were highly controversial. Tensions were identified between those who wanted a more judgemental and security-focused approach to Muslim ‘extremism’ in general and those who saw dangers of further marginalisation of Muslims in the targeted nature of *Prevent* and so wanted a much more

modest and pragmatic approach. The first camp, largely right-of-centre in its politics, questioned what was being achieved with *Prevent* funding and whether it was making the country any safer. The Tax Payer's Alliance (TPA), a 'small state' campaigning group closely connected to the Conservative Party, used Freedom of Information requests to identify how *Prevent* money was actually being used at the local level, following the failure of the Conservative Opposition Communities spokesman Paul Goodman MP to obtain this data from government. Releasing their conclusions in September 2009, the TPA commented that 'there have been on-going concerns about the groups receiving funding and it has not been clear how taxpayers' money has been spent'.⁴⁵

The TPA used this data to publicise how local authorities had used the money in very different ways, both in whether they were actually spending it on activity clearly related to the *Prevent* agenda or not and how they allocated it. The clear suggestion was that significant amounts of *Prevent* funding were *not* ending up on the activities, or with the local organisations, that the central government expected. For instance, despite the government breaking off official contact with the MCB in 2006, 'Around £850,000 has been given to the Muslim Council of Britain's official affiliates through different *Prevent* funding stream'.⁴⁶

At the same time, *Prevent* came under sustained criticism from the left of British politics over the allegation that it was actually a front for state surveillance activities against British Muslim communities. Leading this critique was the think tank and Race Equality campaigning organisation, the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), and its director Arun Kundnani. The IRR used similar approaches to the TPA, and supported this with research activity among local authority and voluntary sector staff involved in the actual implementation of *Prevent* at ground level. The result was the IRR report *Spooked*, which alleged that

there is strong evidence that a significant part of the *Prevent* programme involves the embedding of counter-terrorism police officers within the delivery of local services, the purpose of which seems to be to gather intelligence on Muslim communities.⁴⁷

This report was quickly picked up by *The Guardian* newspaper, who ran a story headlined 'Government Anti-Terrorism Strategy 'Spies' on Innocent',⁴⁸ and quoted Shami Chakrabati, the head of civil liberty watchdog 'Liberty', as describing *Prevent* as 'the biggest spying programme in modern Britain' and an affront to civil liberties. Despite immediate and flat denials by the government, these serious allegations have persisted throughout the life of *Prevent*, and are discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

The fact that both these political critiques had been developing throughout 2009, combined with growing disquiet on the ground, had led the House of Commons Select Committee for Communities and Local Government, the independent group of backbench MPs charged with scrutiny of the work

of DCLG, to establish an Inquiry, with a call for written evidence released during summer 2009, and evidence sessions commencing in December 2009. Written submissions were made by a wide range of local government agencies, police bodies and voluntary/faith sector organisations. Witnesses appearing to give evidence included Arun Kundnani, Professor Ted Cantle, the DCLG minister John Denham MP and Charles Farr, director general of OSCT. The significant evidence generated through this Select Committee Inquiry into *Prevent*⁴⁹ highlighted how difficult it is to quantify 'success', especially if *Prevent* is seen as a longer term approach rather than concerned with the prevention of terrorist plots now. Indeed, oral evidence to the Inquiry from the ACPO suggested that *Prevent* represented a 'generational' struggle to influence young Muslims. That Inquiry process acknowledged that *Prevent* had enabled stronger relationships between local authorities and Muslim communities in some areas, had strengthened the organisation and transparency of some Muslim community organisations, promoted the voices of women and young people within community processes, and had highlighted the need for more open debates within Muslim communities around the causes of domestic violent extremism.

However, the Select Committee Inquiry was particularly concerned about the role of DCLG in what is, essentially, a counterterrorism strategy and how *Prevent* related to the broader work on community cohesion and integration that DCLG is primarily focused on. In its final report, which 'proved to be a robust assessment of evidence that it had elicited in reviewing the performance of *Prevent*',⁵⁰ the Select Committee concluded that *Prevent* was damaging and confusing the cross-community cohesion and integration work that local authorities were developing in the wake of the 2001 Cantle Report and government's resulting prioritisation of community cohesion. Here, it commented that 'the single focus on Muslims in *Prevent* has been unhelpful'⁵¹ and highlighted the problematic stress on 'values' and types of religious belief in saying that 'a particular worry for many witnesses in this context is having religious orthodoxy mistaken for extremism ... We believe that there has been an excessive concentration on the theological basis of radicalisation in the *Prevent* programme'.⁵² There was a clear inference that *Prevent* approaches to 'moderate' or 'extreme' versions of Islam were counterproductive attempts at social engineering. In contrast, the report praised the minority of *Prevent* initiatives that had enabled robust and open debate around political and social issues, including foreign policy, such as the 'Project Safe Space' work coordinated by the UK Youth Parliament and ACPO. Unfortunately, in the Select Committee's view, such work focused directly on the root issues underpinning violent extremism was an exception: 'We are concerned that much *Prevent* money has been wasted on unfocussed or irrelevant projects, as a result either of misunderstanding of *Prevent* or of a lack of willingness and capacity of local organisations to deliver.'⁵³

Whilst finding the charge of spying within *Prevent* unproven, the persistence of the concerns led the Select Committee to call for an independent investigation into the allegations. It concluded overall that the impact of the problems and contradictions of *Prevent* outweighed any positive impacts, and so called for significant reshaping of the programme: 'Our Inquiry has shown that the current overall approach to *Prevent* is contentious and unlikely ever to be fully accepted in its existing form by those it is most important to engage.'⁵⁴ In particular, the Select Committee recommended a much greater distinction between the *Prevent* programme and ongoing cohesion and integration work, although they saw that cohesion activity as a vital part of the long-term attempt to undermine support for violent extremism: 'funding for cohesion work in all communities should be increased. That work should be done on a thematic basis and not on a monocultural or individual community basis. It should clearly be targeted at disadvantaged and excluded groups.'⁵⁵ This apparently monocultural focus on Muslims within *Prevent* had been one of the most common criticisms and, before the Select Committee Inquiry had even got underway, the government had responded through the creation of a smaller and separate Connecting Communities Fund aimed at white, working-class communities that were supposedly 'under pressure' but in fact vulnerable to BNP agitation. These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The CLG Select Committee was largely Labour Party dominated, but reaction to its report from the other main parties was supportive. Caroline Spelman, the Conservative shadow communities secretary, said, 'It is clear that too much money has been wasted on unfocused and irrelevant projects which have created confusion and increased the risk of alienating the very communities it ought to engage.' Chris Huhne, the Liberal Democrat home affairs spokesman, said, 'The *Prevent* programme alienates and marginalises Muslim communities, and exacerbates racist bias and ignorant views ... Everyone wants to combat radical Islamism but that should not mean gathering and keeping intelligence on innocent people.'⁵⁶ During the Select Committee process, Conservative communities spokesman Paul Goodman highlighted the TPA data on the use of *Prevent* funding and called for a fundamental review of the programme,⁵⁷ something the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition was to deliver in its first year in office. This aim had already been trailed by Conservative shadow security minister Dame Pauline Neville-Jones when she said that '*Prevent* should be aimed at bringing citizens and communities together' rather than focusing on Muslims only,⁵⁸ a theme apparently developed by Sayeeda Warsi, chairman of the Conservative Party, who commented in speech to the 2009 Party Conference that 'state multiculturalism is not integration, is not unifying and is not the British way'. Somewhat contradictorily, Warsi also called for the state to accept and work with 'faith' much more.⁵⁹ The negativity of 'state multiculturalism' had been a theme of David Cameron's for some time in opposition: 'It means treating groups of people as monolithic blocks rather

than individual citizens.’⁶⁰ The logical conclusion of such a position is that viewing Muslims as one undifferentiated group is unhelpful and misguided, but in a speech in October 2009 on ‘The Future of Britain’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy’, Neville-Jones indicated that the ‘values’ of particular groups or communities were indeed their concern: ‘government should tackle extremism itself, not just extremism when it turns violent.’⁶¹ This analysis was built on a speech she had given earlier in 2009, ‘Society’s Role in Preventing Terrorism’, that solely focused on British Muslims, talking about the dangers of ‘gateway organisations’, the ‘pretensions’ of the MCB in speaking for British Muslims, and the idea of creating a register of ‘extreme’ individuals and groups.⁶² This meant that in the run-up to the 2010 general election there were clear tensions within the Conservative party over *Prevent*; on the one hand talking about positive, colour-blind cohesion work, but on the other hand suggesting a ‘values-based’ crackdown on ‘extremism’ generally within Britain’s Muslim communities.

Coalition government: A new approach?

The Conservative failure to win an outright majority in the general election of May 2010 arguably exacerbated the internal tensions indicated above, as the Conservatives were forced to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, a party with significant numbers of Muslim local activists and who had already expressed unease about *Prevent*. An early measure was the decision to divert £50 million of the *Prevent* money earmarked for local authorities between 2010 and 2012 towards the pilot phase of a new national youth volunteering scheme, the NCS, explicitly concerned with social cohesion. David Cameron and his Shadow Cabinet had been developing their ideas on NCS for some years whilst in opposition, as part of their emerging ‘Big Society’ agenda. The ‘Big Society’ is an overtly communitarianist policy approach which appears to believe that the state must contract in order for volunteerism and civic society to have the space to grow. The concern with shared identity and values was overt in the original design of NCS, with the hope that it would be ‘contributing to a sense of Britishness, with the requirement for young people to develop a sense of what being a British citizen means to them’.⁶³ The NCS promised a 6-week-long summer programme for 16-year-olds, including residential experiences and volunteering programmes within local communities, with £13 million of diverted *Prevent* money providing 11,000 places for summer 2011 and a large expansion planned for summer 2012. A 2011 report by the House of Commons Education Select Committee into Services for young people highlighted that this 6-week NCS programme cost £1,233 per head, almost exactly the same as German youth volunteering programmes cost for a whole year of involvement.⁶⁴ NCS funding initially was distributed via third sector

youth and community agencies and explicitly avoided using local authorities, making early criticism of NCS as being geared largely to more middle-class young people and having little lasting effect on the poorer young people with less social capital who do take part as hardly surprising. Above all, for all the faults of *Prevent*-funded activity via local authorities outlined above and explored further in subsequent chapters, it *was* making some progress around citizenship and identity issues and the democratic engagement of Muslim young people in some of Britain's poorest areas; 'NCS, on the other hand, is devoid of emphasis on political engagement and other contentious issues, instead focusing on issues of adulthood and responsibility.'⁶⁵

This early diversion of *Prevent* funding was followed in November 2010 by the coalition government's decision to review *Prevent* under the independent oversight of Liberal Democrat peer Lord Carlile, although they decided explicitly not to examine the allegations of 'spying' outlined above in a 'rebuff' to the CLG Select Committee.⁶⁶ What should have been a rapid review and subsequent policy announcement in January 2011 turned into something much more protracted, with the review eventually published on 7th June 2011. The substantial delay seems to have been a product of significant political infighting, not just within the two-party coalition but among leading Conservatives over the future direction of *Prevent*. This infighting mirrored tensions inherent in Labour's previous approach, and which were already evident in pre-election Conservative thinking, as highlighted above. They focused on the question of 'values', whether *Prevent* focuses pragmatically on individuals at risk of attraction to violent extremism or whether it sees the terrorist threat as symptomatic of problematic, anti-British, anti-democratic 'values' within wider sections of the Muslim community and so demands public adherence to those 'shared values'. The first public sign of these tensions came in February 2011, when David Cameron called for 'muscular liberalism' to uphold British values and explicitly criticised British Muslims during a speech at a counterterrorism conference in Munich, the same day as the far-right EDL was holding an anti-Muslim demonstration in Luton. Cameron also criticised the previous government's approach to *Prevent* of being prepared to work with law-abiding Islamists, suggesting that it was the equivalent of funding the far-right BNP to work with white youth attracted to violent neo-Nazism: 'Would you allow the far right groups a share of public funds if they promise to help you lure young white men away from fascist terrorism? Of course not.'⁶⁷ As well as being an implicit slur on many Muslim organisations,⁶⁸ this analogy was a regurgitation of arguments in an article by Dean Godson, research director of the right-of-centre think-tank Policy Exchange, who wrote in 2008 that 'it's as if the government responded to a violent insurgency from the neo-Nazi terrorists of Combat 18 by turning to Nick Griffin of the BNP'.⁶⁹ Just weeks before Cameron's Munich speech, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, chairman of the Conservative Party

and the only Muslim in the Cabinet, commented in a speech rumoured not to have been cleared by Conservative Party HQ, on how Islamophobia had become increasingly fashionable around British dinner tables.⁷⁰

The subsequent appearance of the *Prevent* review was clearly understood in its delay, tone and content as illustrative of these ongoing political tensions. *The Independent*, in its Editorial of 8th June 2011, commented that ‘few issues have divided the Coalition as dramatically as the question of how to meet the threat of home-grown terrorism’. They saw one group of ministers, including Cameron and Education Secretary Michael Gove, as advocating ‘a radical new approach based on confrontation’, whilst another group that included Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg and Baroness Warsi as rejecting ‘the idea that there is a connection between reactionary religious attitudes and support for terrorism’. *The Independent* also suggested that the concerns of the latter group were shared by senior figures in the security and police services who wanted to work pragmatically to reduce the terror threat. *The Independent* saw the Cameron/Gove group as having triumphed and the new *Prevent* strategy as leaning ‘strongly towards a confrontational approach’, as did the *Financial Times* in its Editorial of the same day, ‘UK takes values-based approach to countering extremism’. Some commentators were blunter in their assessment: ‘The document represents a triumph for the hawkish neo-con faction in the cabinet.’⁷¹ Such an apparent strengthening of the ‘values-based’ approach to *Prevent* was certainly consistent with concurrent developments in Germany, where the right-of-centre, Christian Democrat-led government was hardening the approach of its own anti-Islamist extremism programme, ‘Initiative Strengthening Democracy’. This required that ‘all federally-funded associations will have to sign a statement in which they swear allegiance to the German constitution’ and be held responsible for the political statements or behaviour of any of their members. This represented the triumph of the ‘slippery slope’ perspective that lumped non-violent German Muslims with questionable political and social attitudes together with the small minority of Islamist violent extremists. This policy approach has proved hugely politically controversial in Germany.⁷²

This triumph seemed to be confirmed by the appearance of the former security minister Dame Pauline Neville-Jones on Radio 4’s ‘Today’ programme on the day of the *Prevent* strategy release, with Neville-Jones talking of ‘people who may have the same values as terrorists’ and saying ‘there are plenty of Muslim groups in this country, I fear, that do actually hold values ... which are not in accordance with the rule of law and democratic values’.⁷³ However, *The Guardian*’s Editorial of 8th June saw the new strategy more as a ‘convenient fudge over the precise definition of extremism’. They acknowledged though that this new approach might cause problems in practice as ‘it risks outlawing people who express legitimate opposition to foreign policy’, so exacerbating the very ideological marginalisation that *Prevent* intends to address. In contrast,

The Times Editorial of the same day welcomed the new direction, saying that ‘it is now time to stop handing money to questionable religious organisations’.

These political tensions and the need to satisfy differing audiences could be seen in the significant differences between how ministers ‘trailed’ the new *Prevent* strategy in the media and what it actually said. Pre-launch interviews with, and leaks to, right-of-centre newspapers *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* suggested a new and hard line, with *The Daily Telegraph* running ‘Universities “Complacent” over Islamic Radicals, Theresa May Warns’, on 5th June 2011, and with claims that funding would be withdrawn from some organisations. The actual *Prevent* report was somewhat more circumspect, suggesting that the pre-release media work had been much more to do with wider party political positioning than the content of the actual strategy.

The revised *Prevent* strategy

The following were the new objectives identified for *Prevent* in June 2011:

- respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
- prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
- work with a wide range of sectors and institutions (including education, faith, health and criminal justice) where there are risks of radicalisation, which we need to address.⁷⁴

In launching this revised *Prevent* strategy, the government acknowledged that ‘the *Prevent* programme we inherited from the last government was flawed’.⁷⁵ In claiming that the previous approach had confused integration/cohesion and counterterrorism, the revised strategy appeared to accept the findings of the CLG Select Inquiry, saying that, ‘as a general rule, the two strategies and programmes must not be merged together’.⁷⁶ Here, the government identified the significant degree of local decision-making and the lack of ring-fencing for the funding as leading to what they identified as the ‘convergence’ of *Prevent* and cohesion. This claim is partly based on evaluation returns from local authorities but, as identified above, this data is significantly unreliable. It also raises issues of what exactly ‘hearts and minds’ *Prevent* work *should* look like, if it is not to have any connection to cohesion and will not, primarily, be locally determined. The overlap between cohesion and *Prevent* was identified by the Select Committee Inquiry as problematic and as fuelling concerns over spying, so the new strategy proposed a formal policy split, with the Home Office leading on *Prevent* and DCLG

concerned only with cohesion and integration. *Prevent* was now to focus on work in 25 areas identified as ‘hotspots’ of potential radicalisation, with local coordinators to be funded directly by the Home Office in order for them to direct local *Prevent*-funded activity. However, the local partnership boards they will work with are likely to be very much the current local structures largely coordinated by local authorities, with this immediately suggesting that the formal Home Office/DCLG, *Prevent*/cohesion split is somewhat artificial.

The June 2011 list of 25 identified areas for *Prevent* activity was a significant departure from the previous approach of identifying a larger number of local authorities on the basis of their communities’ Muslim populations. The new strategy stated that ‘in future, simple demographics will not be used as a basis for prioritising *Prevent* work’.⁷⁷ This revised and reduced list of target areas did *not* include key local authorities in the north of England such as Oldham, Rochdale or Calderdale, all of which had experienced terror arrests and convictions, and racial tensions involving Muslim communities. In particular, it did not include Kirklees in West Yorkshire, home of two of the 7/7 attackers: ‘Funding will be made available by the Home Office to the 25 priority areas for project work on a grant basis and for activities which address specific local risks and are designed to establish specific *Prevent* benefits’.⁷⁸ The OSCT will have oversight of this funding, which ‘in the future will be prioritised on our assessment of the risk of radicalisation in specific areas’.⁷⁹ The analysis behind this is suggested in the comments that ‘radicalisation tends to occur in places where the terrorist ideologies, and those that promote them, go uncontested’,⁸⁰ and that ‘Islamist extremists can purport to identify problems to which terrorist organisations then claim to have a solution’.⁸¹ This seems to represent the ‘values’ approach coming to the fore, although despite the pre-publication hype, the review found evidence of only a ‘small number’ of extremist organisations⁸² receiving *Prevent* funding in the past, leading *The Guardian* to conclude that ‘official review finds scant evidence of state funds going to extremists’.⁸³

The revised *Prevent* strategy also signalled a potential reduction in the dedicated funding to the police, despite positive comments on how *Prevent* has helped to build police contact with and understanding of Muslim communities. This change was based on concerns from the police themselves that they had been too dominant in *Prevent*, with ‘the number of people employed by the Police to deal with *Prevent* exceeds the numbers who have been employed by local authorities’.⁸⁴ However, the Police and the Security Services through the regional CTU ‘hubs’ are likely to remain central to *Prevent* as it moves forward. Any reduction in the police role, alongside an intelligence-based approach to targeting activity, could be seen as a partial governmental admission of Police/Security Service ‘overstepping’ within *Prevent*, despite their denials of any ‘spying’. However, that sits uncomfortably with the new *Prevent* strategy’s statement that ‘there are some 12,000 students training for health

qualifications within universities each year. Work has started to ensure that *Prevent* is included in the undergraduate curriculum⁸⁵ and their trumpeting of the fact that over 15,000 front-line public sector staff have already received ‘Workshop to Raise Awareness of *Prevent*’ (WRAP) training, all of which suggests that doctors or social workers diagnosing ‘radicalisation’ is the same thing as noting child abuse or hard-drug use.

Other key operational elements of *Prevent* were retained but challenged to sharpen their focus. This included the information and communication work of RICU, which was required to comply with the renewed emphasis on ‘values’: ‘going forward, we will want to emphasise the connection between extremist and terrorist ideologies.’⁸⁶ As trailed in pre-release media work, the new strategy also criticised both universities themselves and student bodies such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) for not doing enough: ‘we are concerned that some universities and colleges have failed to engage in *Prevent*.’⁸⁷ Good progress was reported in the prisons sector, but the government quoted recent research by the University of Huddersfield for the YJB to suggest that the youth justice field now needed a risk-based, smaller and better targeted programme in the same way as local authorities. The increased emphasis on intelligence-led approaches to individuals at risk of radicalisation within the revised *Prevent* strategy could be seen in the prominence of the Channel programme within the plans for the future. It highlighted that Channel had worked with 1,120 people between April 2007 and December 2010, with the majority being aged 11 to 25 years old, 290 being under 16, and an astonishing 55 under 12 years old. The very significant ethical questions raised by this demographic profile were not directly addressed in the document, with discussion instead focusing on the need to ensure that Channel did not stray into broader cohesion or social work issues: ‘we recognise the risk that the criteria for entry to these programmes can be too broad.’⁸⁸ The implication was that Channel would be focused on the 25 priority areas identified by the strategy. Channel is discussed further in Chapter 6.

This document reiterated the judgement of CONTEST 2 (Home Office 2009): ‘The most significant terrorist threat we face comes from Al Qaida, its affiliates and like-minded terrorist organisations inspired by violent Islamism.’⁸⁹ This apparent need to focus on Islamist terror was supported by the belief that extreme right-wing terrorism in the United Kingdom has been ‘much less widespread, systematic or organised’⁹⁰ in comparison, with those arrested being isolated individuals without training or support. The revised *Prevent* strategy went on to admit that 17 people currently serving sentences in UK prisons for terrorism-related offences had links with far-right groups, ‘though none of these groups are themselves terrorist organisations’, and that ‘extreme right-wing plots have predominantly been undertaken by people acting on their own or with one or two associates’.⁹¹ This dismissive characterisation of the far-right terrorist threat could arguably be equally applied to many of the Islamist

terror threats in the United Kingdom in recent years, with individuals or small groups emerging from legal organisations like HUT.

The sense that the revised *Prevent* strategy was offering a misguided analysis of the far-right terror threat was heightened just weeks after its launch, when a Norwegian far-right activist, Anders Behring Breivik, killed 77 people in a bomb attack in Oslo and a mass shooting at a socialist youth camp held on the island of Uttoya. Shortly before he commenced his attacks, Breivik emailed a detailed manifesto that railed against multiculturalism and the ‘Islamification’ of Europe to hundreds of far-right activists across Europe, including many members of the EDL.⁹² These events in Norway inevitably shone light on the claim of the revised *Prevent* strategy that ‘people involved in extreme right-wing terrorism have not received the same training, guidance or support as many of those who engaged with Al Qaida or Al-Qaida-influenced organisations. Nor have they ever aspired or planned to conduct operations on the scale of those planned by their Al-Qaida counterparts’.⁹³ The European-wide nature of this Islamist-obsessed mindset is demonstrated by the fact the Norwegian media assumed, and reported as fact, for several hours initially that this mass shooting and bombing was an Islamist attack.⁹⁴ In the wake of the Norwegian attacks, Labour’s shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper wrote to Home Secretary Theresa May, asking her to reconsider the scope and focus of *Prevent*. Similarly, the National Association of Muslim Police Officers claimed that the UK authorities had been in denial for years about the scale of the right-wing terror threat, and their president, Zaheer Khan, ‘said his group’s warnings in private meetings with officials to take the threat of extremist right-wing violence more seriously had been re-buffed’.⁹⁵ The counter-argument deployed here was that Breivik was the usual far-right ‘lone wolf’⁹⁶ who demonstrated the lack of a far-right network of ideology and inspiration comparable to Islamist extremism. This complacent fallacy, which badly underestimates the growing far-right terror threat and its clear links to ‘legal’ UK groups like the BNP and EDL, is discussed further in Chapter 4 as part of the book’s arguments that *Prevent* needs to take a much more holistic approach towards the dangers of violent extremism. In its attempts to downplay the far-right threat, *Prevent* also overplays the coherence of the Islamist threat, as Chapter 1 suggested.

Conclusion: *Prevent* – flawed and friendless?

This chapter has outlined the origins, assumptions and content of *Prevent* policy approaches in the United Kingdom since its inception in 2006 as part of the CONTEST strategy. In doing so, it has detailed the significant modifications made to *Prevent* by both Labour and Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition governments, and the substantial criticisms and concerns

expressed over this sensitive policy area. Whilst the United Kingdom should rightly be praised for a ‘hearts and minds’ counterterrorism approach that tries to reduce support for, or involvement in, violent extremism, it is clear that *Prevent* remains remarkably friendless, even after successive modifications, because of its significant flaws. Those flaws arguably reflect the sharply differing political views *within* each major party over how the causes of violent extremism can be understood and how government should react, with the result being clumsy and contradictory compromises. Those disagreements also centre on what *Prevent* ‘success’ looks like, and how it should be measured, with one former official who has studied *Prevent* and counterterrorism developments commenting that ‘I feel that the metrics by which success/progress could be monitored or benchmarked are not particularly tight’.⁹⁷ These flaws, their implications for *Prevent* activity in practice, and the questions they raise are addressed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 addresses the monocultural focus on British Muslims, which remains problematically at the heart of *Prevent*. It also examines the implications of this for the wider government priority of community cohesion and integration, and the impacts that the contradictory approach of *Prevent* is having, and is likely to continue having, on its present basis. Underpinning this focus on Muslims is the tension over ‘values’ and ‘means’, and a flagrant lack of concern with the growing far-right terror threat. Chapter 5 takes this debate further by discussing how *Prevent* has actually been implemented at local level and what impacts it has had. That chapter focuses on local authorities and the difficulties they have experienced over clarity, control and direction in relation to both national government and the Police and Security Services. It also examines specific sectors targeted by *Prevent*, such as higher and further education, prisons and youth offending sector. Chapter 6 directly addresses the allegation that *Prevent* has been a front for surveillance activity, examining the very significant role for the Police and Security Services in both the design and delivery of *Prevent* activity and how we might understand this. This enables clear conclusions to be reached around the current effectiveness of *Prevent* against its stated aims, and what a *Prevent* approach that was more in tune with cohesion approaches, and so a more effective ‘hearts and minds’ counterterrorism programme that addresses all forms of extremism, might look like.