

“OUR SHARED VALUES – A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY”

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RADICALISATION AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE, 17 JANUARY 2007

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP, Home Secretary

I am delighted to be here to speak to you today, and to mark the launch of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence.

There are few areas of domestic or international public policy where the case for exploration and enquiry is more pressing, where the need for understanding and debate is more urgent.

I applaud you on this important initiative, and wish you every success.

Today I want to give you my perspective on these pressing and urgent issues:

- the causes and the effects of violent extremism;
- how it comes to take hold in people’s lives;
- the damage it can do to individuals, communities, and wider society; and
- how that damage can be prevented and communities supported in rooting out its influence.

The counter terrorist strategy for which I am responsible – known as CONTEST – has four main components:

- **pursuing** terrorists and disrupting the immediate threats we face;
- **protecting** our infrastructure and our borders;
- **preparing** for any incident which may occur; and
- **preventing** radicalisation in the cause of violent extremism.

I have no doubt that it is the last of these – stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists – that is the major long-term challenge we face.

The relentless process of persuasion and propaganda, of assertion and insinuation, that can lead ultimately to engagement or support for violent extremism – this poses particular questions and requires a rounded, comprehensive response.

Last year, we established the Office of Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) in the Home Office to co-ordinate the development and delivery of CONTEST. An early priority has been to focus on the need to review and enhance our PREVENT work.

Central government departments, enforcement agencies, local authorities, institutions and community groups have all been involved in this process. And the wealth of expertise they bring to it is injecting new energy into our efforts, and helping us to build new thinking on old.

These efforts will be the main focus of my remarks today. But before turning to them, I think it is important to first give you a sense of the threat we face.

Last June, in my first few days as Home Secretary, the attempted attacks in London and Glasgow showed clearly

the intent of those who want to mount indiscriminate attacks on public places.

As we have seen all too clearly, attacks can happen without warning, and with the aim of causing multiple fatalities.

Our current threat level is ‘severe’, which means that we believe an attack is highly likely.

Jonathan Evans, the Director General of the Security Service, recently estimated that there are some 2000 people in the UK who pose a threat to our security. In 2006, the number was roughly 1600.

The increase is partly because our coverage of the extremist networks is now more thorough. But we also have to accept that more people are showing sympathy with the cause of violent extremism.

Secretary Chertoff’s comments this week on the rise of what he calls “homegrown terrorism” in Europe are a timely reminder that this radicalisation, wherever it occurs, is an issue of international concern.

Last year, 42 people were convicted for terrorist offences, relating to 16 different operations. Half of these people pleaded guilty.

These figures show that the threat is real and serious. Among those convicted last year were the 5 young men sentenced to between 35 and 40 years each as a result of Operation Crevice.

Their plan was to detonate a device in London in 2004. But we should remember that they were not only prepared

to make a conventional explosive device but also talked about obtaining a radiological device – a dirty bomb.

And material recovered after Operation Rhyme, the al Qaeda conspiracy to attack London, again in 2004, also included instructions on how to make a dirty bomb and projections of its destructive effects.

At the moment there are 5 major terrorism trials in court here. These include the trials of 6 individuals charged in relation to the alleged plot to kidnap and kill a British soldier, and the trial of five individuals charged following an operation against an alleged terrorist facilitation network in this country.

Since becoming Home Secretary, I have made it my business to understand the basis for our threat assessments. In countering terrorism – just as much as in tackling crime and in strengthening our borders – I do not take my responsibilities lightly.

The gravity and the extent of this criminal terrorist activity are now all too clear to me.

And it is equally clear to me that to tackle it we all need to keep clear heads.

The threat is real. The threat is live. But we must keep it firmly in perspective.

It comes from a very small minority of people – and the great majority of us, who share common values and principles, find the murder of innocent people abhorrent.

This is vital when we come to consider how best to respond to the threat we face.

Terrorism is a crime that does not discriminate. The ‘small minority’ threatens the safety and security of all communities in Britain, irrespective of politics, faith, or ethnic background.

And we are not unique in this – the same is true elsewhere. Indeed, despite its rhetoric to the contrary, al Qaeda itself pursues a global strategy of killing Muslims.

Terrorism can affect us all, wherever and whoever we are.

And let me be clear – such terrorist outrages are crimes, first and foremost. First and foremost, terrorists are criminals.

As so many Muslims in the UK and across the world have pointed out, there is nothing Islamic about the wish to terrorise, nothing Islamic about plotting murder, pain and grief. Indeed, if anything, these actions are ‘anti-Islamic’.

My duty as Home Secretary is to protect the security of our citizens and the freedoms they enjoy.

The purpose of terrorism is to use indiscriminate killing to dictate the way we think and act, both as individuals and as governments.

But it is a weakness of terrorism as a tactic that the way we respond determines the impact that it will have.

Whether terrorists ultimately succeed or not is up to us, not up to them.

We should not forget that we operate from a position of strength – for these values are shared by the overwhelming majority of people living in Britain.

In Britain our response to preventing terrorism should therefore preserve both our security and the values on which our society depends.

And in this country we will uphold our common values by pursuing terrorists as criminals through our criminal justice system. They will get the justice that they deny to others.

To support the work of criminal investigations and the due process of our judicial system, we need to ensure that the police and security agencies have the powers they need to deal with the threat we face.

Countering terrorism and violent extremism is one of the most important and urgent priorities for the police service.

That's why we are providing record levels of funding for counter terrorism policing.

And to ensure we have the powers, as well as the resources, that we need to mount an effective response to the threat we face, we will introduce the Counter Terrorism Bill shortly.

From the first, my approach to this Bill has emphasised the importance of consulting and listening to the voices of all who have an interest in our proposals.

There is consensus on a number of the measures we want to bring forward:

- the gathering and sharing of information about terrorist suspects;

- the greater use of post-charge questioning of suspects;
- tougher sentencing for offences with a terrorist connection; and
- the seizure and forfeiture of terrorist cash, property and other assets.

We have also amended our proposals for pre-charge detention to reflect the views we have received. And in bringing forward these proposals, we have made clear that we are doing so on a precautionary basis, with strict limits imposed that mean they could only be used for a temporary period in exceptional circumstances.

But an effective response to terrorism can never solely depend on the state and law enforcement.

It also depends on us – on the active commitment of individuals and communities to certain rights and responsibilities, to shared values which apply irrespective of religion or culture.

These rights include the right to life, and to liberty. The right to freedom of speech and expression, and to freedom of religion. The right to live the lives we wish, subject only to our law.

The rights we claim for ourselves need to be matched by the responsibilities we owe others – to our fellow citizens, to a common good. Together, these rights and responsibilities are the foundation for citizenship.

As the Prime Minister said in his speech on liberty in October, in developing our work against terrorism we must “bring people together, mark out the common good, and energise the will and resources of all.”

The way we respond to terrorism must reinforce our shared values – because it is on these values that our security ultimately rests.

Because our work to reduce the threat here depends on individuals and communities, we will seek the widest possible consent for, and understanding of, our strategy.

Success requires consensus as much as executive or law enforcement powers – and that in turn requires openness and consultation.

We want to hear views and engage in debate. We published last year our strategy for countering terrorism and are continuing to evolve it in the light of experience. The Prime Minister intends to present the National Security Strategy to Parliament shortly.

I have talked about the threat we face and about principles which must inform and guide our response. I now want to focus in particular on counter radicalisation.

Study of experiences in this country and elsewhere has told us a lot about why people are drawn into the world of violent extremism, either as actors or supporters.

Our best estimate is that in this country, as in others, violent extremism is caused by a combination of interlocking reasons:

- by an ideology, by which I mean both a misinterpretation of religion and a view of contemporary politics and history;
- by ideologues and propagandists for this cause, very often taking advantage of the open institutions in this country;

- by vulnerability in young people, of a kind that I recognise from other contexts;
- by communities which are sometimes poorly equipped to challenge violent extremism; and
- by grievances, some genuine and some perceived, and some of course directed very specifically against government.

Our strategy to deal with radicalisation to violent extremism must therefore focus on each of these factors.

We need to challenge the ideology of violent extremism, that misreading of Islam and view of history and contemporary politics which justifies terrorism. The ‘we’ in that sentence means not only civic society in Britain, but states and communities overseas.

Government can facilitate, but it should be cautious about the degree of expertise it can bring to bear on matters of religion and about the extent to which it should seek to lead or to guide. And we need to be very clear about parameters.

I do not wish to discourage dissent or seek political conformity. I will not dictate how people should practise their religion or express their lawful opinions.

But I will never accept any argument which seeks to legitimise and sanction mass murder.

We have made progress:

- We have backed leading Muslim scholars and opinion formers here to talk about extremist ideology at roadshows across the country. Some sixty thousand [60,000] people have attended to date, and an associated website gets fifty thousand [50,000] hits each month.
- We want to see more Islamic studies here, perhaps a further centre of excellence.
- We are supporting a programme of overseas visits by British Muslim opinion formers to Muslim majority countries, and establishing links with prominent institutes overseas to better understand the teaching they can provide.
- We are encouraging much more interaction between opinion formers here and in Muslim majority countries to correct misunderstandings about Islam in the UK.

But we must take action not only against the ideology, but also against those who promote it.

We have legislated to enable us to do so – and we are now systematically disrupting the small group of key propagandists for terrorism in this country.

The use of intelligence to identify and go after the individuals concerned will become an ever more important priority for policing and the security services.

We also need to sensitise those working in the institutions – including in prisons and educational establishments – where propagandists are and have been active.

With the Ministry of Justice and the Prisons Service we have set up an important programme to understand and address radicalisation in our prisons system.

I know that this is a problem in many countries, and we have learned much from experiences elsewhere. I want to highlight the very valuable contribution made to this programme here by the Prisons Chaplaincy, imams and others, who have vital role to play in challenging anti-Islamic views and behaviours. In tandem, there have also been initiatives to raise awareness and understanding among Prisons Service staff.

Education has a key positive role to play in countering violent extremism – not only through the teaching of particular subjects like citizenship and religion, but also through the shared values embodied by the method of teaching.

My colleagues John Denham and Bill Rammell have started a debate on how we maintain academic freedom whilst ensuring that extremists can never stifle debate or impose their views. They will shortly be providing guidance to Higher and Further Education establishments to help promote shared values, increase community cohesion and prevent violent extremism.

As a Government, we have no wish to constrain the space for enquiry. But we want active debate and challenge, not a monologue imposed by ill-disguised force, and we must be ready to take action against propagandists who incite violence.

Schools can also make a crucial contribution to building resilience and supporting young people who may be exposed to extremist influences.

Countering violent extremism features in The Children's Plan recently issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. We are engaging directly with head teachers to talk about what further support they need, and to ensure that schools are involved in local partnership work, including with the police.

As you have been discussing at the conference, the internet is a key tool for the propagandists for violent extremism.

Let me be clear. The internet is not a no-go area for Government.

We are already working closely with the communications industry to take action against paedophiles, and together we have improved the way that instances of possible abuse can be reported by internet users.

If we are ready and willing to take action to stop the grooming of vulnerable young on social networking sites, then I believe we should also take action against those who groom vulnerable people for the purposes of violent extremism.

In the next few weeks, I will be talking to industry, and critically those in the community, about how best to do this – and how best to identify material that is drawing vulnerable young people into violent extremism. Where there is illegal material on the net, I want it removed.

Our strategy also needs to find ways of directly supporting vulnerable people – by intervening with individuals when families, communities and networks are concerned about their behaviour.

We want to know what advice to provide to a parent concerned about the behaviour of a son or daughter, drifting into a network which sanctions violent extremism – and we want to know how best to provide it.

In this context, we need to think about the most effective response – more about rehabilitation, where that will work, and less about the criminal justice system.

Support to vulnerable individuals is best provided by communities. I commend the lead that a number of mosques have provided, not only in developing material which refutes a misreading of Islam but also in providing a space in which that material can be put to best use.

There are things government can do to help:

- we are supporting work with young offenders vulnerable to radicalisation;
- we can help create linkages between those working on rehabilitation programmes overseas and those wishing to do so here; and
- we can support the police and others as they work with ‘at risk’ individuals.

Building resilient communities is the next key part of any strategy to counter radicalisation.

The people who really understand the challenge of confronting violent extremism in our towns and cities are the people who live and work there.

Muslim communities have been more at risk from the propagandists of violent extremism than anyone else. So there is a particular and compelling role for Muslim

organisations, institutions and civic society to challenge what I have described today as anti-Islamic activity.

Of course, these organisations have every right to expect respect and recognition from others for what they have already achieved, and I pay tribute to the work being done in our communities, by our communities, for our communities – often without a fanfare of publicity but with quiet determination, and great conviction.

There is a very large range of activity underway already. Hazel Blears and her department have funded the development of more than 200 wide-ranging and ambitious projects.

Over the next three years, we will be working with local authorities and local communities to bring about a step change in this work.

Many projects are focused on women and on young people, with others designed to support citizenship education and volunteering in the Muslim community. There are also a number of community-led programmes for faith leaders and for faith organisations, for imams and for mosque schools.

Policing has a key role to play in supporting resilient communities. But I want to emphasise that policing is vital to all aspects of the counter radicalisation strategy I have described today – challenging the language of violent extremism; disrupting propagandists for terrorism; better protecting vulnerable institutions; and supporting individuals vulnerable to recruitment.

Counter terrorist policing is not just about the sharp end – the disruption of those who seek to attack us – crucial though that is.

It must also be about stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists. We cannot, after all, simply arrest our way out of this problem.

Developing a Prevent policing plan is one of the most important and urgent initiatives now underway, led by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

The plan will build on other initiatives successfully developed by the police in recent years – neighbourhood policing, support programmes for drugs offenders, outreach to improve community cohesion, local multi agency partnerships to deal with a range of criminal activity.

The Prevent policing plan will make use of these experiences and reflect this expertise. But it will deliver something that is recognisably new.

I want to end my remarks on our strategy by talking about how we address grievances which some people hold in this country and which may encourage them to sympathise with the propagandists of violence.

These grievances may be about our foreign policy, or what is perceived to be our foreign policy.

They may derive from the experience or the perception of socio-economic disadvantage.

Or they may be based on perceptions or misperceptions of police and law enforcement activity.

No grievance can justify terrorism. But where grievances are legitimately expressed, we are of course prepared to debate them.

Terrorism must not drown dialogue. And where grievances are not only legitimately expressed but well founded, we must be prepared to respond.

That a cause has been misappropriated by violent extremism does not make it a wrong one.

Rather, putting a grievance beyond the reach of a democratic solution, beyond the understanding of state and society, is a goal of those who wish to harm us. We should do them no favours.

As I have explored today, the framework for action we are developing is designed to offer comprehensive engagement with the threat Britain faces from violent extremism.

We have built a wide range of partners to deliver the framework, some of whom are new to the issue. The challenge is considerable, and cannot be met by a narrowly defined or narrowly delivered response.

We are working at home and overseas, at national and local levels. We are talking to local authorities and to regional government.

We are considering carefully how the policing of counter terrorism needs to develop to take account of counter radicalisation, and the extra resources that may be required for this purpose.

And we are listening to you, academics and experts from around the world.

I finish where I began. It is certainly a key role of government to protect people's security. And it is also certain that government cannot do so on its own.

That is the basis of our strategy – a strategy that is perhaps unequalled in the world today for its breadth of partnership and scale of ambition.

To succeed against terrorism and violent extremism in this country, we will depend not on force, but on force of argument. Not on authoritarianism, but on the authority that derives from shared values, shared rights, and shared responsibilities.

Thank you.

