POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

UK and European Perspectives on Radicalization: a debate

'Has the official response to the terrorist threat created more problems than it has solved?'

JAMES MATTHEWS Session Chair

James Matthews is Sky News' Scotland Bureau Chief, based in the Edinburgh bureau. James joined Sky News in 1994 and since then has reported from around the United Kingdom and abroad.

His assignments have included reporting from HMS Invincible (during heightened tensions in the Gulf), from NATO in Brussels during the Kosovo conflict, and from France, where he covered the Scottish football team's 1998 World Cup campaign.

During the war in Afghanistan he reported from the US Aircraft Carrier, USS Theodore Roosevelt as it launched attacks on enemy positions. He has twice conducted exclusive interviews with the Libyan leader Colonel Gaddaffi, once on the eve of the Lockerbie Trial.

OSMAN MEHMOOD

Osman Mehmood is a 19 year old Glasgow University student, living in the Southside of Glasgow. He is Vice-Chair of the Active Life Club, an organisation set up to empower young people through sports and other personal development measures. In this capacity, Osman is involved in organising activities for young people and organising events in the local area to foster stronger community links. This includes Eid in the Park and the phenomenally successful Twenty:20 annual cricket match against Strathclyde Police. These events have strengthened community relations between different minority groups and, most noticeably, the relationship between young people and The Police. He looks forward to developing these events further and planning new programmes and events to help young people.Osman is also active in Politics. He is currently working with Bashir Ahmad, the first Minority Ethnic MSP.

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I will look at this topic from a youth perspective and through my own experiences as a young Muslim.

I will argue that laws like the 42 day detention and stop and search powers cause young Muslims to feel alienated from mainstream society and this allows extremists to target these youngsters and use this feeling of isolation to brainwash them.

I will also draw on the work done by local community groups like the Active Life Club in showing youngsters that they have a meaningful part to play in society and to try and reintegrate them back into mainstream society.

I will argue against the top-down approach used by government and instead advocate the use of a grassroots model to deal with issues at a local level. Each community has its own issues and a one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't work.

I will also put forward some steps that I feel are a good starting point to tackling the homegrown terrorist threat, including engaging young people at an earlier age through schools and community groups to counter the feelings of alienation they feel.

PAUL CASTLEDINE

Paul Castledine is the Chair of SEMPERscotland, which exists to promote race equality and to support and empower minority ethnic employees within the Scottish police service. The organisation's objectives include improving links with the minority ethnic communities throughout Scotland.

Paul, an officer with Fife Constabulary for over 19 years, has been involved with SEMPERscotland from its inception in 2003.

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Points for discussion:

- Since the London bombings there has been a diminution in the value attached to multiculturalism and its core principles of acceptance and cultural understanding.

- The official national and international response has inhibited the trust and tolerance on which constructive inter-faith relationships are built; consequently, community relations in Scotland are in danger of fragmentation.

- It has become clear that many in the Muslim community feel isolated, anxious, and misunderstood within wider society as a result of the current situation. Both anecdotal and statistical evidence suggest that in recent years stop and search powers have been employed disproportionately against Muslims throughout the UK. These and other confrontational methods are likely to prove counter-productive, as they risk increasing radicalisation of young Muslims.

- Media reporting frequently seems to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes. Phrases like 'Islamic terrorism' encourage the misrepresentations. While comment is often shaped by unsympathetic portrayals of all Muslims as unreasonable, violent or 'fundamentalist'. I believe the government need to speak with care and sensitivity on these matters.

- Other visible minorities have felt exposed and vulnerable because of their appearance. They have been abused as accomplices of, or sympathisers of Al-Queda. Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and others from minority ethnic backgrounds have all experienced increased levels of hostility and suspicion.

- The impression is given that Muslims are being arrested and convicted of terrorism in large numbers, whereas the truth is quite opposite. Unfortunately, this only serves to increase public fear and prejudice.

- National legislation on counter-terrorism measures is systematically undermining international human rights law.

GEORGE DENHOLM and NICK CROFT

Superintendent George Denholm *has 25 years police service with Lothian and Borders police and has worked in a variety of uniform operational roles. He was the head of the force's diversity unit for three years and held the ACPOS LGBT portfolio. In 2007 he was seconded to HMICS and was tasked by the Scottish Government's Equalities Unit with reviewing the Scottish public sector's response to CONTEST 'Prevent', the UK national counter terrorism strategy. This review was carried out in partnership with Nick Croft. He followed that work with HMICS own thematic inspection of the same issue but in a specific policing context. He is currently a staff officer within HMICS.*

Nick Croft has worked in a variety of statutory and on statutory settings over the last 20 years covering youth and community work, social work, mental health research, drugs prevention and residential day care. Over the last 7 years he has been working in Scotland on equalities, diversity and human rights issues in a local authority context and is current equalities manager at City of Edinburgh Council.

Since December 2007 he has been on part time secondment with the Scottish Government to lead on CONTEST Prevent in partnership with ACPOS and the CTIU Scotland. This has involved developing a communications strategy and communications guidance on Prevent, improving awareness of, analysis and understanding of Prevent matters across the statutory and on statutory public sector and identifying resources and lead agencies for Prevent project interventions in Scotland.

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Definitional clarity:

The "Official Response" is defined as primarily the UK Government based response with input from Police (ACPO) and the Security Services (MI5 and MI6).

Yes:

- Initial (and to a lesser extent recent) messaging and communications from the UK Government around Islamist, Islamic Terrorist, Jihadi, Muslim Radicals was unhelpful and alienated key community partners.
- The original Prevent Strategy blurred the distinction between broader race and faith equality policy objectives and the need to focus on tackling specific push and pull factors which cause people to support, or become, violent extremists or terrorists.
- The initial reticence to share details of the local threat assessment amongst local delivery partners created an "air of conspiracy" amongst those partners.
- Recent CT Bill proposals on DNA fingerprint retention, pre charge detention and glorification offences are causing significant concern in key community partners.
- Current CT legislative Section 44 powers have led to a palpable sense of grievance in communities, especially with those passing through ports and airports.

No:

- Recent iterations of the refreshed Prevent Strategy are evidence based, targeted and express clearly the role and importance of community involvement. They provide a clear focus on tackling the specific sociological and psychological factors that contribute to violent extremism and terrorism. There is a clear distinction between Prevent and broader race and faith equality policy objectives.
- OSCT - RICU research on communications and messaging has led to a step change in the approach to official communications which has improved engagement by community partners.
- The Prevent Strategy has forced pursue and prevent related functions to work more closely together to explore a "vulnerability" approach in respect of areas, institutions and individuals.
- CONTEST has led to a broader concept of resilience that acknowledges the importance of community involvement and re assurance.
- The Prevent Strategy has led to a greater understanding of the nature of British Muslim communities and Islam within government. This has "spin off" benefits in other policy areas.
- The recent coverage of far right violent extremism (e.g. NCTT) has given the Prevent agenda an improved sense of balance.
- The CONTEST Strategy has led to a step change in the organisational culture, public pronouncements and partnership approach between the Security Services / local Police Force Special Branch functions and the wider public sector / community stakeholders.

Summary response to the question:

- Initially yes, but as the Prevent Strategy has evolved post the refresh, a definitive no.

JEFFREY MURER

Dr Jeffrey Murer is based in the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews. His research explores processes of collective identity formation and their relationship to enactments of violence. He is particularly interested in the interplay among communities and between communities and the state as a social representation of the classic security dilemma, whereby efforts to make one community more secure are interpreted by other communities as threatening. Murer's research is an effort to understand patterns of reactions and the motivations for "radical" political action, and to encourage modes of engagement that minimise misunderstandings between communities and promote greater societal security.

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Yes. Examining the many repercussions of the official responses to the threat of terrorism I conclude that more problems have been created than solved. In particular I would argue that overall societal security in the UK has decreased in part because of policy decisions and the courses of policy implementation following the attacks on the United States in 2001 and on the London Transport System in 2005. This pattern has continued through the 2008 debates regarding the length of detention for terrorist suspects. However, there are signs that elements within the security and investigative services, particular among the policing services, are listening to public constituencies and social and community activists calling for different approaches.

One of the most important and deleterious effects of the collective actions of the government has been an overall erosion of public trust, particularly within marginalized communities. Regardless of the rhetoric of inclusion and the appreciation of diversity, many within the Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, North African communities express a sense of alienation and exclusion. Even as the CONTEST Strategy PREVENT strand places a large emphasis on "community" it feels to many outside of the white, Anglo-Saxon community that there is no recognition of the complexity and diversity within Britain. While policy papers present the concept of community, many security policies include actions that those within targeted communities experience as demonstrations of official suspicion. This tension between what is said and what is done further erodes public trust. Both individuals and collectivities faced with a sense of ontological insecurity, that is an identity crisis or a sense that their identity is under threat, will seek out more stable identity constellations. Identity constellations and attachments shift in a dualist and dialogical process of self ascription and group ascription. Ironically, it often the case in the UK that actions performed in the name of enhancing security actually create or increase a sense of ontological insecurity. Addressing identity security, which in turn strengthens societal community, requires far different approaches than those implemented in the past 8 years, or those that focus primarily on physical security.

I believe understanding the fluid and dialogical nature of identity, as opposed to a fixed or essentialised conception, offers new avenues of social interaction between various communities, including that of representatives of the state. These routes will only open through a thoughtful and engaged process of listening. I believe the more the policing services understand the processes of identity formation, and the roles of language and action within them, the more likely it is to slow the erosion of trust and to build stronger more stable communities. Addressing anxiety and social insecurity will yield far better and longer lasting result than searching for the "threat among us." The former approach focuses on intersubjective engagement while the later often divides a society into those who constitute a potential "threat" and those who constitute an "us." The greatest threat to societal security is a divided society.