



When Progressives Treat with Reactionaries

The British State's
flirtation with radical Islamism

Martin Bright

Preface by Jason Burke

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Policy Exchange is an independent research institute whose purpose is to contribute to public understanding of and stimulate wider debate on a broad range of social, economic and political questions. Using an evidence-based approach to policy development, Policy Exchange aims to generate fresh ideas in support of strong communities in a free society.

*This pamphlet is dedicated to a Foreign Office
whistleblower whose courageous actions have allowed
me to expose Whitehall's love affair with Islamism.*

Front cover photo: Prime Minister Tony Blair (centre) with
Iqbal Sacranie, then Secretary General of the Muslim Council
of Britain at a fringe meeting at the Labour Party Annual
Conference in Brighton. 29 September 2004.
Photo by Stefan Rousseau/Empics.

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Contents

Preface by Jason Burke	7
PART I: COMMENTARY	9
Introduction	11
Chapter 1	14
Chapter 2	20
Chapter 3	24
Conclusions	28
Notes	31
PART II: DOCUMENTS	33
List of documents	35
Acknowledgements	76

Preface

Jason Burke

Kabul, June 2006

The analysis of contemporary Islamic militancy has gone through various phases since the attacks of September 11th 2001. The first, which lasted about a year, was largely characterised by inaccuracy and imprecision. This was brought home to me very rapidly when I compared the lurid descriptions of the terrorist eagle nest at Tora Bora in the British press - replete with subterranean computer rooms, secret passageways, laboratories and such-like - with the reality of paltry, rubble and excrement-filled caves that I myself inspected during the battle. It was reinforced when I read the statements by a series of often unsavoury governments around the world claiming that their local militant groups, many of which had been operating for decades and had roots in colonial and pre-colonial conflicts stretching back over centuries, were all part of a global terrorist super-organization called al Qaeda.

“ How do we engage with radical Islam? Can we separate the violent radicals who want to destroy and replace the modern state from the political Islamists who want to appropriate it? ”

The second, recent, phase of analysis lasted through to the end of 2003. Thankfully, there was a growing recognition that the earliest ideas about the nature of the threat were not accurate. However, there was still strong resist-

ance to those who put forward alternative theses. Finally, from around the end of 2003, at least in Europe, there has been a widespread acknowledgement that al Qaeda is an idea, not an organisation, and a growing realisation that the phenomenon that had produced 9-11 and all the subsequent bombings and violence since was rooted not in the actions of a few bad men. Rather, it was rooted in political, cultural, social and religious factors of great depth and complexity - and in the often vexed interaction of the Islamic world with the West over a millennium or more. Alongside this analytic process there has also been a steady evolution in terms of the discussion of the non-military policy that should be pursued to counter the new threat and to avoid any putative "clash of civilizations".

Thankfully, the primitive phase has ceded to the re-appraisal phase which is itself in the process of giving way to the reality phase (at least in the UK and Europe). It is to this debate that Martin Bright's excellent, well-researched and thought-provoking pamphlet makes a most important contribution. The author, alongside whom I spent several fruitful years working at the *Observer*, tackles key issues head-on. How do we engage with radical Islam? Can we separate the violent radicals who want to destroy and replace the modern state from the political Islamists who want to appropriate it? If so, how do we define those with whom we can work and those with whom any dialogue is not just fruitless but counter-productive, possibly dangerous and, arguably, profoundly immoral? Bright is exploring at a relatively theoretical level a problem that confronts me daily as a journalist working in the field. Who are our interlocutors?

Whose voices best represent the complex, diverse and dynamic societies that are bundled together in that terrible generalisation, the "Muslim world"?

I am writing these words in a small guesthouse in the old city of Kabul. In the last two weeks I have spoken to moderate and hardline clerics, to the Taliban, to the Afghan authorities, to warlords (armed and disarmed), to taxi drivers, kebab salesmen, farmers (of poppy and other crops) and even to journalists. Yet the Western media often privileges those who shout loudest, have the most guns, hold the most animated demonstrations or are responsible for the most violence at the expense of the vast silent majority who merely want a quiet life that assures them a modest degree of prosperity, security and dignity. Martin Bright shows that the British government makes the very same mistake -- in

listening hardest to those who force themselves to the front of the crowd. In so doing, the British government risks missing the critical truth -- that neither bin Laden and his jihadis, nor political Islamists like those of the Muslim Brotherhood, have a monopoly on the representation of the views and aspirations of the world's Muslims. In fact, it is the words of those stuck in the middle, caught between the campaigns of such men and the often deleterious effects of Western policies, that need to be supported and heard. After all, any solution to the current problems will ultimately rest with them.

Jason Burke is Europe Editor at the Observer. He is author of al-Qaeda: The true story of radical Islam. His latest book, On The Road To Kandahar, was published in May.

Part I: Commentary

Introduction

The bundle of Foreign Office documents which arrived at the *Observer* last August was a journalistic goldmine. The single brown envelope provided me with two parting scoops at my old newspaper before I took my present job at the *New Statesman*. The first was a leaked letter from the Foreign Office's most senior mandarin, Sir Michael Jay.¹ Dated a year before the London bombings, it warned that the Iraq war was fuelling Muslim extremism in Britain, something the Prime Minister had consistently denied. A second leak revealed plans for a campaign against Islamic extremists by infiltrating jihadi groups via the internet.² [DOCUMENT 10]

“ Far from representing the more progressive or spiritual traditions within Islam, the leadership of the MCB takes its inspiration from political Islamism associated with reactionary opposition movements in the Middle East and South Asia ”

The leaks were prompted by a piece I had written in mid-August about the radical links of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the umbrella organisation which claims to represent British Islam.³ The piece coincided, by pure chance, with a controversial *Panorama*

programme on the same subject that caused a serious row between the BBC and the MCB. My contention was that the MCB had its origins in the sectarian politics of Pakistan. I raised concerns that the organisation's influence through Whitehall meant that more liberal voices were being crowded out.

I stand by everything I said in the original article. Far from representing the more progressive or purely spiritual traditions within Islam, the leadership of the MCB takes its inspiration from political Islamism associated with reactionary opposition movements in the Middle East and South Asia. Sir Iqbal Sacranie, the recently retired head of the MCB and its press spokesman Inayat Bunglawala have both expressed their admiration for Maulana Maududi, the founder of Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami party which is committed to the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by Sharia law.

The origins of the MCB can be traced to the *Satanic Verses* affair, when Iqbal Sacranie came to prominence as a leader of the opposition to Salman Rushdie's novel. The idea for an umbrella organisation for British Islam was first floated when Michael Howard was Home Secretary in the last Conservative Government. But the idea was taken up with particular alacrity by Jack Straw, always with an eye to his Muslim constituents in Blackburn, and the organisation was officially founded in November 1997. Straw championed its cause, first as Home Secretary and then, after the 2001 election, as Foreign Secretary. Whilst at the Foreign Office, Straw established an outreach department, now called the "Engaging with the Islamic World Group", where the MCB's influence is still strongly felt.

I am now sure the leaks which I received were prompted by deep concern among certain individuals within the Foreign Office about the accommodation the department was making with radical Islamism. The documents continued to serve me well when I moved to the *New Statesman*: email exchanges about a Cabinet split on proscribing extremist parties⁴; a report about Britain's knowledge of CIA rendition flights⁵; details of Foreign Office negotiations with Egypt's radical Islamic opposition movement, the Muslim Brotherhood⁶; and even a leak of the investigation into the *Observer* leaks⁷. As the anniversary of 7/7 approached, further disclosures allowed me to demonstrate that the Government's "Preventing Extremism Together" Task Force, set up after the London bombings, was a cosmetic exercise⁸.

“ It depresses me deeply that a Labour Government has been prepared to rush so easily into the arms of the representatives of a reactionary, authoritarian brand of Islam ”

As a result of the leaks I was approached first by the think tank Policy Exchange, and then by Channel 4, to examine the wider implications of the story contained in the leaked documents. Research for this pamphlet and the Channel 4 programme has convinced me that the Government is failing the people of Britain. Instead of tackling the ideology that helps to breed terrorism, Whitehall has embraced a narrow, austere version of the religion. I believe that when taken together, the documents provide a unique insight into the workings of the Foreign Office and show it is pursuing a policy of appeasement towards radical Islam that could have grave consequences for Britain. In making the television programme I had the

privilege of travelling around Britain to talk to some of the Muslim communities that feel shut out by the Government's bizarre dalliance with the Islamists. In London, Rochdale and Dudley people told me of their frustration with a Government that chooses to promote a highly politicised version of Islam. By contrast most ordinary Muslims believe their faith comes as a result of a personal relationship with Allah, not through lobbying for blasphemy laws. I make no apologies for the journalistic tone of this pamphlet: it makes no claims to be a definitive academic thesis, but it is an attempt to record the state of play. Chapter One provides an analysis of a series of documents showing the Foreign Office moving towards closer dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood, the key opposition Islamist group in the Middle East. In Chapter Two, I use the example of visa applications for two foreign Muslim leaders to show how the Government is engaged in a process of redefining radical Islam as "mainstream"; and in Chapter Three I attempt to show how the Government's main partners in the Muslim community are drawn from the Islamic religious right.

As the Political Editor of a left-wing magazine, it depresses me deeply that a Labour Government has been prepared to rush so easily into the arms of the representatives of a reactionary, authoritarian brand of Islam rather than look to real grassroots moderates as allies. With the honourable exception of former Foreign Office minister Denis MacShane, few senior Labour figures have taken the trouble to grapple with the complexity of the issues involved. Those in Government have merely frustrated the efforts of journalists and Opposition MPs to find out what is really going on within the Foreign Office. The Government failed to produce a single minister to answer the claims being made in the Channel 4 programme covering the same ground as this pamphlet. The one minister with a genuine knowledge of the area, Liam Byrne, was moved within the Home Office from dealing with security (where he could really have made a difference) to immigration, that graveyard of ministerial careers (where he will not).

It has therefore been left to the Tory progressives at Policy Exchange to take the issue forward – and I salute them for that. There are signs that the reformist Cameron wing of the Conservative Party is beginning to grasp the urgency of the issue. On the Opposition benches, Michael Gove, the Conservative MP for Surrey Heath, has made it his business to harry the Government over its relationship with radical

Islamism. He has been tireless in his pursuit of ministerial answers on the issue, in the face of a quite extraordinary level of Government evasion and secrecy. I only hope the information and documents contained in this pamphlet can act as a basic primer for those who wish to find out more – and that once they have done so, they act to hold the Government to account for this bizarre policy of appeasement.

1.

In December 1972, an obscure Foreign Office mandarin returned from a tour of the Middle East a very puzzled man. Like most officials and experts at the time, James Craig believed the main threat to British interests in the region came from Arab nationalists and Marxist revolutionaries. But like the good diplomat he was, Craig kept his ear to the ground and the word on the street was intriguing: in Jordan and Lebanon the 48-year-old Arabist heard rumours of an Islamic revival.

Craig wrote to Sir Richard Beaumont, British ambassador to Egypt, who had picked up rumours of a similar revival in Egypt and circulated it to embassy staff across the Middle East to alert them and ask for feedback. “One theory put to me in Beirut,” he wrote, “was that, since Arab nationalism had failed, people are turning to the alternative of Islamic nationalism. I argued that this, too, had failed – indeed, it failed long ago. The reply was that the very length of time which had passed since this failure made it possible to consider giving it a second trial run.”

At the time of Craig’s letter, the responses, revealed in documents from the National Archive released in 2003, were almost entirely dismissive. In Lebanon the ambassador wrote: “We will keep you informed of developments, though we do not expect these to become dramatic in the near future.” Our man in Jordan told Craig: “We see no signs of a fundamentalist Islamic revival here.” Jerusalem baldly stated: “We have seen no sign on the West Bank of an Islamic revival.” Only R.A. Burroughs, Britain’s ambassador to Algeria, had begun to pick up the same messages as Craig and Beaumont. He

reported back that “symptoms” of an Islamic revival were not hard to find.⁹

In fact, Craig and Beaumont had stumbled on the revival of the Muslim Brotherhood, known in Arabic as the *Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*. Founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1928, it called for a return to Islamic first principles and the establishment of an Islamic state run on the principles of Sharia law. Though they are often represented as “moderates” in comparison to the psychopathic jihadis of Al-Qaeda, the motto of the Brotherhood remains to this day “Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qu’ran is our constitution. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.”¹⁰

The Brotherhood had been brutally suppressed in Egypt after a failed assassination attempt on President Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1954 and most believed it was a spent force. In fact, its members had regrouped in exile across the Middle East and in 1981 President Anwar Sadat was assassinated by four members of a splinter from the Brotherhood. Sadat was murdered by Islamist assassins despite having initially courted the Brotherhood. He did this as a way of distancing himself from the leftist pan-Arabism of his predecessor and establishing his devout Muslim credentials; he released thousands of Islamists from prison, legalised the Brotherhood and made the Sharia law “the main source of all state legislation”. Sadat’s fate is an object lesson is how difficult it is to co-opt the Islamist tiger.¹¹

Craig went on to become Britain’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Syria (he re-emerged in the *Guardian* on 27 April 2004 as one of the 52 former diplomats who warned

the Prime Minister that the policy he was pursuing with the United States on the Arab-Israeli problem and Iraq was misguided). After a time, as a senior ambassador Craig fell into line with the general Foreign Office consensus and concluded that talk of an Islamist revival was exaggerated. He now admits he was as surprised as anyone by the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. This possibility was so far from Foreign Office minds in 1972 that Iran was one of the few Middle Eastern countries not even asked for a response by Craig. Yet Burroughs in Algeria was prescient: an Islamist party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), eventually vanquished the nationalist Government of the National Liberation Front (FLN) in the first round of elections in late 1991 only to find the second round cancelled by the military in early 1992. The bitter civil war between the Government and the Islamists that followed has cost over 100,000 lives.

“ I... detect a tendency for us to be drawn towards engagement for its own sake; to confuse ‘engaging with the Islamic world’ with ‘engaging with Islamism’; and to play down the very real downsides for us in terms of the Islamists’ likely foreign and social policies, should they actually achieve power in countries such as Egypt. ”

Sir Derek Plumbly

Fast forward three decades from Craig’s letter and another senior Foreign Office man is desperately attempting to work against the grain. This time no one is in any doubt that people are “turning to Islamic nationalism”: the inevitable onward march of political Islam is now as unthinkingly accepted in Foreign Office circles as

it was dismissed as a laughable historical curiosity in 1972. But for some, plans for open engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood (the main opposition force in Egypt after last year’s elections with 88 seats in the 454-strong People’s Assembly) were a step too far. Writing to the Foreign Office’s Political Director, John Sawers, on 23 June 2005, Sir Derek Plumbly, the British ambassador to Egypt, raised a number of concerns: “I... detect a tendency for us to be drawn towards engagement for its own sake; to confuse ‘engaging with the Islamic world’ with ‘engaging with Islamism’; and to play down the very real downsides for us in terms of the Islamists’ likely foreign and social policies, should they actually achieve power in countries such as Egypt.” [DOCUMENT 2]

In his letter, Plumbly urged extreme caution, suggesting that the Foreign Office was mistaken if it believed engagement would have any effect on the future direction of the Muslim Brotherhood: “I suspect that there will be relatively few contexts in which we are able significantly to influence the Islamists’ agenda.” Plumbly had been alerted to the shift in policy towards the Muslim Brotherhood by accounts of a round table on engaging with Islamists in the Arab World, which had taken place in Paris on 1 and 2 June last year. The round table involved officials from across Europe, who listened to academics and analysts with expertise in the field. I first published details of the Plumbly letter in the *New Statesman* in February, but I also have a copy of an internal Foreign Office letter summarising details of the round-table that caused Plumbly such concern. [DOCUMENT 1] The letter is from Angus McKee, a senior official in the Middle East and North Africa desk in the Foreign Office to Frances Guy, head of the “Engaging with the Islamic World Group”, which also plays a significant role in working with British Muslims. Although the letter is intended as an objective account of the debate on whether western Governments should be talking to Islamists, it reveals that senior officials were not so much asking *whether* Britain should be engaging with Islamic radicals - but, rather, *how*.

The list of countries now seen as having a significant Islamist presence were precisely the countries contacted by Craig in 1972: Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. But now, the consensus appeared to be that Islamists engaged in the political process in the Middle East should be sought out as partners in reforming democratic structures in the region. Olivier Roy from the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) in Paris and author of *The Failure of Political Islam* is quoted approvingly in Angus McKee's summary as saying that the traditional Western policy towards Islamists of containment and repression had been a failure. "The argument that authoritarianism would create a secular society which would in turn lead to democracy had been proved wrong", Roy stated to the gathering. "Now we had regimes incapable of reform, which actually *increased* the appeal of Islamism. If the West was now interested in reform, it had to consider how to integrate Islamists into the political system."

The appeal of the various Islamist movements is discussed in detail and can be summarised in the following way: they resist oppressive regimes or a foreign occupier; they have a seductive anti-corruption message; and they have an ability to set up alternative welfare structures to those provided by the state. Under the heading *Motives for Engagement*, McKee's paper from the Paris round-table even suggested that it might be worth giving aid to Islamist groups rather than Governments: "Given that Islamist groups are often less corrupt than the generality of the societies in which they operate, consideration might be given to channelling aid resources through them, so long as sufficient transparency is achievable. [DOCUMENT 1]"

If McKee's summary is to be believed, at no point was Islamist ideology discussed at all in Paris, nor were the consequences of Sir Derek Plumbly's main concern, namely that of an Islamist party coming to power. At times, the analysis is worryingly short-sighted: just months before Hamas won the Palestinian elections, Angus McKee is able to make the following sweeping statement about the

Palestinian Islamists: "Many want to participate in the political system but are wary of assuming power and responsibility. For Hamas, becoming part of a Government would presuppose a willingness on its part to enter into dialogue with Israel, a notion to which it is implacably opposed."

In the end, it was the Danes who came up with the pragmatic policy of not dealing with Hamas as such, but agreeing to deal with all elected officials, even if they turn out to be from Islamist parties. This was a strategy that the Foreign Office delegation found attractive and it is safe to assume that it informed later discussions on how to deal with the Muslim Brotherhood - without appearing to be talking to extremist groups. Despite the Foreign Office's highly sympathetic approach to the Islamists, Angus McKee was nevertheless surprised by the "forthright" German approach of allowing its missions to talk to anyone "who might be in power in five years time".

In Plumbly's 23 June 2005 letter to John Sawers, the Political Director of the Foreign Office, he accepts the principle of talking to Islamists. Plumbly's concerns are about doing it without a keen understanding of why it is happening and what the British Government hopes to get out of it. But he is suspicious that the British Government has adopted a general policy of engagement without considering the consequences for individual countries. "If we get ourselves into a position where we are stating as a matter of principle, the importance of 'engaging political Islam' we will run into specific difficulties in particular countries, including this one. Seen from here we will do better to position ourselves country by country as required to advance our overall reform objectives. The general principles should be ones of universal application (democracy, freedom of expression, respect for human rights etc)." But Plumbly's suggestion that it was better to continue with behind the scenes, country-by-country information-gathering on the Brotherhood was apparently rejected in favour of adopting a general principle of engagement with Islamists.

The discussions in Paris led in July 2005 to the circulation of a report into the politics of the Muslim

Brotherhood entitled: *Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood – Terrorists?* [DOCUMENT 3]. This most revealing document, outlining the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a compelling argument for engagement with the reformed, modernised incarnation of the movement. A month on from the Paris round table, the Foreign Office was moving apace towards a policy of full engagement – despite Plumbly’s concerns.

The Foreign Office analysis is deeply sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Egypt, and critical of President Hosni Mubarak’s attempts to demonise the organisation as “terrorist”. Again the author is Angus McKee, who emerges from the documents as one of the main driving forces behind the pro-engagement faction in the Foreign Office, or at very least, an effective champion of a pre-existing policy. “This is a consistent regime policy which, along with periodic arrests and other harassment, attempts to keep the MB in its ‘box’. However, in spite of this, the MB remain the largest and most effective opposition grouping in Egypt. Its ability to mobilise support and its critique of the current system are far more effective than those of the licensed opposition parties”.

“ The Foreign Office analysis is deeply sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is banned in Egypt, and critical of President Hosni Mubarak’s attempts to demonise the organisation as “terrorist” ”

As discussions over the new engagement policy developed over last summer, Foreign Office mandarins circulated a specially commissioned paper entitled “We Must Talk to Political Islamists in the Middle East — and not just Iraq” [DOCUMENT 5]. The paper was written by Richard Murphy, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near

Eastern Affairs in the Reagan Administration and Basil Eastwood, the former British Ambassador in Damascus, an impressive double-act in the internal Foreign Office propaganda war. The two seasoned Arabists wrote that they had been in dialogue with “a small number of people familiar with some of the different national branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, with Hamas and with Hezbollah.” Their conclusion was enthusiastically in favour of dialogue. In essence, they categorise the Islamic ideology of the Muslim world as falling into three camps: the “Official Islam” of the regimes of the Middle East and Asia, which they dismiss as illiberal and undemocratic; the “jihadi Islam” of Al-Qaeda and other groups, committed to violence as a revolutionary strategy and “Political Islam”, which seeks reform on Islamic lines via the democratic process.

The Murphy-Eastwood pro-engagement thesis is neat and is summarised in the following passage: “Perhaps the best evidence in their favour [i.e. the political Islamists] is the fact that they are criticized bitterly by those Muslim extremists who *do* advocate violence to bring in authoritarian clerical rule. For, when it comes to politics, Muslims are no more united than Christians. Political Islam itself varies from country to country, but there are much greater differences both between political Islamists and ‘official Islam’ on the one hand and between them and the jihadists on the other. Even within Sunni (orthodox) Islam there are bitter divisions between the exponents of ‘official Islam’, the ‘political’ Islamists who seek change but do not advocate violence to overthrow regimes, and the jihadists, the Islamic extremists who do.” What the authors do not deal with here is the criticism that the three strands they have identified are not quite as tidy and well-defined as they might like. Individuals in the Muslim world are quite capable of passing between each of the categories, or occupying two or more at the same time.

Indeed, Murphy and Eastwood advocate immediate dialogue with political Islam to avoid a conflagration and their conclusion is apocalyptic: “We believe that G8 Governments must now, perhaps indirectly, get into

dialogue with such movements and involve them in the civil society track of the [Bush Administration's] Broader Middle East Initiative. For if we are to avoid a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West (or, even more seriously, with Islam *in* the West) and if we are serious about reform in the Middle East, we must do business with those who are struggling to relate their faith to the world as it is – and not as it was at the time of the Prophet.” It is easy to see why this classic “third way” argument might appear attractive to civil servants eager to please New Labour ministers steeped in the politics of compromise and triangulation. It is no surprise that it won out over the more cautious approach of officials such as Plumbly.

In January 2006, after the Muslim Brotherhood won a fifth of seats in the Egyptian elections, the Foreign Office used the opportunity to officially change its policy on the Brotherhood – something they had been preparing for some time. A memo to ministers dated 17 January 2006 outlined the preferred options [DOCUMENT 4]:

- “Increase the frequency of working-level contacts with Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians (who do not advocate violence), particularly those who are members of parliamentary committees
- Change the content of our dialogue to focus on communicating our policy, as well as being in listening mode
- Encourage other countries to adopt a similar policy of engagement, including the EU and the US.”

Although the document states that the change in policy had the approval of “Egypt” (i.e. Plumbly), the reasoning behind the shift appeared to be in direct contradiction to what the ambassador in Cairo had said in his letter of June 2005 – about not fooling ourselves that we can use contacts to exert influence over political Islamists. The memo, which was passed to then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and Middle East Minister Kim Howells stated: “Incremental enhancement of contacts may help in discouraging radicalisation. Interacting with ‘political

Islam’ is an important element of our ‘Engaging with the Islamic World’ strategy and we should be trying to influence these groups, who often have significant reach with the ‘grass roots’. It also gives us the opportunity to challenge their perception of the West, including of the UK, and on their prescriptions for solving the challenges facing Egypt and the region.”

The British Government’s position was clarified in parliamentary answers earlier this year in response to Conservative shadow minister Michael Gove¹². Asked to outline contacts between the British Government and the Muslim Brotherhood since September 2001, Kim Howells responded on 11 May 2006: “British officials have had contact with members of the Egyptian parliament, including occasional contact with members of the Muslim Brotherhood since September 2001. Officials have also met representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon. In addition, officials have had limited contact with members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, whose leadership is in exile in London.”

“ By promoting dialogue, the British Government has, therefore, significantly strengthened the international credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood ”

Challenged on the floor of the Commons on 23 May by Keith Simpson, a Conservative Shadow Foreign Affairs spokesman, as to whether any individuals the Government was talking to were involved in terrorism, Howells’ answers were even more revealing: “I certainly have no information on that, and I am not aware that anyone to whom we have spoken has been involved in such acts. The Hon.Gentleman will recall, of course, that

this Parliament has some history of engaging in secret talks with terrorist organisations such as the IRA. Wherever possible, I shall endeavour to ensure that we do not engage with anyone who advocates terror, whether it be Islamist terror or some other sort, that threatens to kill innocent people.” Howells’s response points to the Government’s profound confusion on how to deal with this challenge. And it begs the question: does he view the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation, or not?

Who gains from reaching out to such organisations? The Muslim Brotherhood certainly knows how to exploit

such apparent uncertainty. Thus, on the 2nd June 2006, the London-published weekly newsletter of the Muslim Brotherhood, *Resalat al-Ikhwān*, reported the Commons proceedings of 23 May with evident glee¹³. Under the headline “The Muslim Brotherhood dominates British Parliament’s sessions,” the report applauds Britain’s new position on dialogue and congratulates itself on its success in positioning itself as a significant player in Egypt. By promoting dialogue, the British Government has, therefore, significantly strengthened the international credibility of the Muslim Brotherhood. Engagement is clearly not a one-way street.

2.

Just a week after suicide bombers brought terror to the streets of London on 7 July last year – killing 52 innocent people and injuring hundreds of others – a young official in the Foreign Office was asked to draw up a report on a controversial Muslim cleric who had justified suicide bombing in other parts of the world [DOCUMENT 6]. Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, had already caused controversy during a visit to Britain the previous July, when London mayor Ken Livingstone was vilified for welcoming him to the capital as a great Muslim scholar. The Home Office had asked for Foreign Office views on whether he should be excluded from the country. The document was passed to me at the *Observer*. al-Qaradawi has supported suicide bombing in the Palestinian occupied territories and decreed that it is the duty of every Muslim to resist Coalition forces in Iraq.

Yet Mockbul Ali, the Islamic Issues adviser in the Foreign Office, whose job it was to finalise the reports concluded: “We certainly do not agree with al-Qaradawi’s views on Israel and Iraq, but we have to recognise that they are not unusual or even exceptional amongst Muslims. In fact it is correct to say that these are views shared by a majority of Muslims in the Middle East and the UK.”

It is often wrongly assumed that Muslims are as radical as their most prominent spokesmen such as al-Qaradawi, but it is surprising to see such a sweeping statement coming from Whitehall and. In fact, Mockbul Ali’s advice is plain

wrong. A comprehensive survey by leading polling company Populus for *The Times* last year paints a very different picture. Just 16% of Muslims in Britain felt that suicide bombing could be justified in Israel. Similar attacks in Iraq were only supported by 15% of the community. So it is difficult to see how these views could be described as representative.¹⁴

There is no doubt that al-Qaradawi has a large following in the wider world. His weekly show on the Arabic al-Jazeera channel, “Sharia and Life”, is watched by millions and his website, IslamOnline, which provides commentary on Muslim issues from a reactionary Islamist perspective, is visited by millions more. al-Qaradawi has been outspoken in his condemnation of al-Qaeda terrorism and has, therefore, been courted by some in the West as a “moderate” voice. The 14 July Foreign Office report quotes the Department’s Political Director, John Sawers as saying: “Having individuals like al-Qaradawi on our side should be our aim. Excluding them won’t help.”

In the final recommendation, Mockbul Ali suggests that: “On balance the Foreign Secretary agrees for the FCO to advise that al-Qaradawi should not be excluded from the UK given his influence in relation to our foreign policy objectives”. But despite his stance on international terrorism, al-Qaradawi’s views elsewhere are far from mainstream. He has described the Taliban’s war against US and British troops as a “jihad”. He has supported the execution of men found to participate in homosexual

acts; he has backed female genital mutilation and said that Muslims who reject their faith deserve to be killed. It may be the case, as Mockbul Ali suggests, that letting al-Qaradawi into the country suits some foreign policy objective, but to say that he is a “mainstream figure” is just misleading.

“ Tony Blair has long warned that Britain should not play host to hard-line Islamic clerics and warned of the ideology they spread ”

Michael Gove, who has written a book, *Celsius 7/7*, examining the West’s approach to Islamic extremism remains deeply suspicious of Foreign Office policy towards mullahs such as Qaradawi. “Sheikh Qaradawi is theologically an immensely conservative figure, and also politically, a dangerously radical figure,” he told me. “He’s a supporter of suicide bombing. And he is someone whose views I think most of us would consider to be medieval. The fact that the Foreign Office can think that someone who’s medieval is mainstream. I think says something about their failure properly to engage with the real mainstream and moderate voices in Islam.”¹⁵

But it is not just opposition politicians who have objected to the presence of people like al-Qaradawi. After 7 July, the Prime Minister himself said that “the rules of the game had changed”. Tony Blair has long warned that Britain should not play host to hard-line Islamic clerics and warned of the ideology they spread. Speaking in the Commons exactly a year before the London bombings in response to al-Qaradawi’s visit, he said: “Let me make it clear... we want nothing to do with people who support suicide bombers in Palestine or elsewhere or support

terrorists.”¹⁶ What is more, the Prime Minister seems to believe that the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be so easily divorced from the jihadi philosophy of Al-Qaeda. Blair made his position clear, as never before, on 21 March in a landmark speech to the Foreign Policy Centre:

“The extremism may have started through religious doctrine and thought. But soon, in offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, supported by Wahabi extremists and taught in some of the Madrassas of the Middle East and Asia, an ideology was born and exported around the world. Today, in well over 30 or 40 countries terrorists are plotting action loosely linked with this ideology. My point is this: the roots of this are not superficial, therefore, they are deep, embedded now in the culture of many nations and capable of an eruption at any time.”

So the Prime Minister clearly believes that the Muslim Brotherhood is the key organisation that is spreading this Islamist ideology. The Muslim Brotherhood was the first organisation to really develop the idea that you could have an Islamic state within a modern world. Its spiritual leader is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the very man Mockbul Ali, Islamic Issues Adviser to the Foreign Office, argued is a mainstream figure.

So how is this discrepancy to be explained? How can the Foreign Office advise that al-Qaradawi, a man who has justified suicide bombing, should be “on our side”, whilst the Prime Minister identifies his ideology as being at the root of Islamic terrorism? Is the Government in such a state of confusion that while the Foreign Office is actively pursuing a policy of engagement with radical Islamists, the Prime Minister is cautioning against it?

Two months after the London bombings, there was further evidence that the “rules of the game” had not changed as far as the Foreign Office was concerned. Another leaked Foreign Office document [DOCUMENT

7], shows an even more controversial figure being considered for entry to Britain in September 2005. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi is an MP in Bangladesh who preaches violent hatred against the West. A series of email exchanges from the Foreign Office show deep concern within certain sections of the department. Eric Taylor, the India Pakistan Relations Desk Officer at the South Asia Group quotes a report from a Bangladeshi human rights organisation, Drishtipat, submitted to the Home Office cataloguing Sayeedi's alleged pronouncements. According to the report he is said to have claimed that the UK and the US "deserve all that is coming to them" for overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan; he has compared Bangladeshi Hindus to excrement; and he appeared to defend attacks on the country's persecuted Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Sayeedi's speaking tours in Britain have also been marred by reports of violence. During one incident in Oldham, five Bengali elders were reportedly attacked and beaten up by Sayeedi's followers and participants in a demonstration against him in East London were attacked. It is difficult to overstate just how controversial Sayeedi is in Bangladesh. His party, Jamaat-e-Islami was violently opposed to Bangladeshi independence from Pakistan, which was won in 1971. An extract from one of Sayeedi's rallies in Bangladesh, which attract thousands of followers, make his current position on American troops in Iraq quite plain: "...And if it is not Allah's will that they become good Muslims, then let all the American soldiers be buried in the soil of Iraq and never let them return to their homes."¹⁷

Despite the overwhelming evidence of Sayeedi's extremism, an email response to Taylor from Islamic Issues Adviser Mockbul Ali, asserts that Sayeedi should be considered a "mainstream" figure. In arguments very similar to those used with al-Qaradawi he says: "What is true, is that Sayeedi is a very conservative Muslim, even [an] ultra-orthodox figure with a number of views we would not endorse in any way. But he is also someone who has a very big following in the mainstream British Bangladeshi Muslim community - and is viewed as a mainstream Muslim figure. Any steps taken on his exclusion from the UK must take that

into account, especially at a time when we require increasing support on the Prevent/CT [Counter-Terrorism) agenda from British Muslims".

“ The suggestion that these extremist views are mainstream is an affront to the vast majority of peaceful, largely apolitical, tolerant Muslims in Britain ”

Forget for a moment, Mockbul Ali's advice that Sayeedi's exclusion would hamper the battle against terrorism. Forget also his statement that Sayeedi is mainstream: this is not even true in Bangladesh, where his party, Jamaat-e-Islami, won less than 6% of the seats in the 2001 general election. Taylor's response to Ali, who had merely been asked to comment on whether Sayeedi's TV broadcasts could be received in Britain, is an impressive critique of his position. As such it is also a critique of Foreign Office orthodoxy and, therefore, worth quoting in full:

"My understanding of HMG's current work on Islamic extremism is that it is based on the premise that, in the PM's words, 'the rules of the game have changed'. What may have been tolerated pre-7/7 is no longer the case. You say that Sayeedi has a very big following in the mainstream Bangladeshi community here, and that any steps taken on his exclusion from the UK must take that into account, especially when we require increasing support on the Prevent/CT agenda from Muslims in the UK. But the inference here is that excluding a cleric associated with extremism might endanger that support. I am not sure if that is true. The Prime Minister and his Ministers have made repeated assurances that the Muslim community rejects

extremism. If that is indeed the case then banning Sayeedi from the UK... will, instead, be warmly welcomed" [DOCUMENT 7].

The position of the Bangladeshi human rights organisation is backed by genuinely mainstream members of the Muslim community. Murad Qureshi, a prominent Bangladeshi-British politician currently serving as a Labour member of the London Assembly, has repeatedly petitioned the Foreign Office to exclude Sayeedi. But his calls have gone unheeded as Sayeedi has returned to Britain regularly for the annual lecture season. "Sayeedi is a hugely controversial figure in the Bangladeshi community," Qureshi told me. "He brings along a lot of baggage. Characters like him are certainly not mainstream. They come from a particular Islamist tradition and I don't think it helps to have bigots like him coming along and espousing his views."¹⁸

The Government has declined to confirm whether Sayeedi or al-Qaradawi have been granted visas of late, although both men have been regular visitors in the past. But it is worrying that the man responsible for advising Foreign Office ministers about "Islamic Issues" is prepared to advocate the entry into the UK of the likes of Sayeedi. Some of those who are responsible for drawing up policy towards Muslims at home and abroad stubbornly refuse to see that they are labelling the wrong end of the spectrum as mainstream. Al-Qaradawi and Sayeedi are radical populists, who have a significant following in the Middle East and South Asia. But they are not mainstream figures in Britain. Unfortunately those urging caution, such as Eric Taylor, do not always do so loudly enough. The suggestion that these extremist views are mainstream is an affront to the vast majority of peaceful, largely apolitical Muslims in Britain.

3.

When it comes to Muslim matters within the Foreign Office, there is one name it is difficult to avoid. Mockbul Ali, the Islamic Issues adviser at the Foreign Office, is a young Bangladeshi in his late twenties whose immense energy and commitment have made him apparently indispensable to ministers. Whether it is deciding which radical mullahs to let into Britain, establishing ministerial contacts with Muslim institutions, organising Islamic delegations abroad or helping out with delicate hostage negotiations in Iraq, Mockbul Ali is always at hand. Meanwhile, his unit within the Foreign Office, the “Engaging with the Islamic World Group”, has a growing influence across Whitehall, on domestic as well as foreign policy issues. Despite his success, the Foreign Office is tight-lipped about Mockbul Ali and has consistently refused to answer Parliamentary questions about him.

Mockbul Ali was recruited directly from the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, while Jack Straw was Foreign Secretary. He quickly forged a close working relationship with Mike O’Brien, the minister with responsibility for Muslim engagement at the time. The Labour Party was so impressed that it seconded Mockbul Ali to help on the 2005 election campaign, before he returned to his job at the Foreign Office.

Whilst at university, Mockbul Ali was Political Editor of the Muslim magazine *Student Re-Present*, which regularly published the work of radical mullahs such as al-Qaradawi and the Tunisian opposition leader Rachid

al-Ghannouchi. After the events of September 11 2001, Ali wrote: “It is paradox of the American system, indeed of the history of the Western nation states, that the non-white world has been terrorised in the name of freedom. If you are not white, you are most likely to be ‘liberated’ through bombings, massacres and chaos. Welcome to terrorism as a liberating force. Welcome to civilisation – Western style.”¹⁹

Mockbul Ali’s view of what is mainstream is evident from his email response on the question of the extremist Bangladeshi politician Delwar Hossein Sayeedi. He is also thought to be the co-author of a PowerPoint presentation from 2004 on British Islam for use across Whitehall, which describes the Muslim Brotherhood and its Asian sister organisation Jamaat-e-Islami as “reformist” groups with which the Government could happily do business. “The root of the reformist movement can be traced to the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami, which was orthodox and pragmatic,” it states. “However, the reformist trends have evolved into a progressive and liberal movement, adapting to their own socio-political context, especially those in Britain.” [DOCUMENT 8].

The influence of political Islam in the higher echelons of the British establishment is strong and growing stronger. The MCB, which claims to speak on behalf of the Muslim community has known links to the ideology of radical Islamism. One of its affiliates, the Muslim Association of Britain, claims inspiration from the Muslim Brotherhood although it has always denied being its British branch. A

number of individuals within the leadership of the MCB are sympathetic to the views of Jamaat-e-Islami, the radical Islamist organisation considered the Asian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The retired Secretary General, Sir Iqbal Sacranie and press spokesman Inayat Bunglawala have both expressed their admiration for Jamaat-e-Islami founder Maulana Maududi. Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi politician, Delwar Hossein Sayeedi (see above), was hosted by the East London Mosque – whose chairman, Dr Mohammed Abdul Bari is the new Secretary General of the MCB.

“ Foreign Office sources have told me that when Iqbal Sacranie of the MCB and Jack Straw recently shared an international platform, both men’s speeches were written by the same man: Mockbul Ali ”

The MCB is the Government’s main partner on Muslim issues. Indeed, I would say the two are joined at the hip. Foreign Office sources have told me that when Iqbal Sacranie of the MCB and Jack Straw recently shared an international platform, both men’s speeches were written by the same man: Mockbul Ali. Dr Chetan Bhatt, a reader in sociology at Goldsmiths University and an expert on Hindu and Muslim extremism told me that the Government’s channels of dialogue with the Muslim community were effectively monopolised by Islamist groups. “The overwhelming number of organisations that the Government talks to are influenced by, dominated by or front organisations of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood,” he said. “Their agenda is strictly based on the politics of the Islamic radical right, it doesn’t represent the politics or aspirations of the majority of Muslims in this country.”²⁰

I first became aware of the extraordinary influence of the Foreign Office-MCB nexus when I discovered last summer that the Government was attempting to exercise control over who should appear at a series of Muslim arts events. The Festival of Muslim Cultures was designed by its organisers to highlight arts from around the Islamic world as an antidote to the somewhat puritanical version of the religion that has often dominated its representation in Britain.

A leaked Foreign Office letter from 4 July 2005 shows that the Foreign Office and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport prescribed exactly which organisations the festival organisers would need to deal with in order to get Whitehall funding. [DOCUMENT 9] Needless to say, one of these was the MCB, and all but one of the rest were also its close affiliates. Young Muslims UK, the Islamic Society of Britain, the Islamic Foundation and the Muslim Welfare House may sound like a wide range of organisations, but they come from the same limited part of the Islamic political spectrum: each inspired, in its way, by the Islamist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood or Jamaat-e-Islami.

Isabel Carlisle, the festival’s director, told me she had to negotiate directly with the Foreign Office and, needless to say, its Islamic Issues Advisor Mockbul Ali:

“We wanted to show the diversity of the Muslim world through its cultures and to engage with the Muslim world, not through religion but through culture. We were being non-ideological, non-political and non-sectarian. But it was clear that funding decisions had to be taken with Mockbul Ali, and if you see funding as the key... to controlling and negotiating with Muslims in the UK, this was obviously a very powerful tool.”

She said she was surprised that Foreign Office officials had insisted on her working with approved Government groups. “The Government had some organisations who they worked with and wanted us to work with too. I

think that we came to see quite a narrow approach to UK Muslims.”²¹

This unedifying episode shows that when it comes to anything to do with Muslims the Government defers to organisations with a certain political ideology. Yet these organisations represent just one section of an extraordinarily diverse Muslim community. Although the MCB describes itself as an umbrella organisation for British Muslims, the clear Islamist sympathies of its leaders make this a difficult proposition to sustain. Many Muslims in the UK come from Pakistan and Bangladesh and belong to the mystical Sufi tradition. Many of those Sufis practice a moderate, apolitical version of the religion - which some, who consider themselves to be more orthodox Muslims, find unacceptable. The Government does not collate figures for the religious and ideological make up of the Muslim communities, but it is accepted that the Sufis are in the majority. If anyone is the mainstream, they are.²²

“ This unedifying episode shows that when it comes to anything to do with Muslims the Government defers to organisations with a certain political ideology. Yet these organisations represent just one section of an extraordinarily diverse Muslim community ”

Khurshid Ahmed, who set up the British Muslim Forum last year to represent Sufi mosques, believes the time had come to challenge the way the MCB has come to dominate the political debate around Islam. “My estimate is that we’re approximately eighty percent but the people who dominate the representational side of our faith are probably representing five or ten

percent...” he observed. “The dangers I believe are obvious: that a vast majority of the Muslim population is simply ignored. You have to come up with solutions from within the community and unless we adopt a holistic approach to the problems that we are facing at the moment we are not going to tackle this menace of extremism or radicalisation.”²³

After 7/7 the Government seemed to acknowledge that it needed to talk to the wider Muslim community. So the Home Office set up a group of over 100 people to talk about how to stop future attacks. The group was united in its call for a public enquiry into the bombs. But the Government chose to ignore this. Of over 60 recommendations just one has been fully implemented: the establishment of a road show of prominent Muslim scholars to tour the country preaching a message of non-violence.

The Liberal Democrat peer Lady Falkner, a member of the working group on tackling extremism and radicalisation, believed the exercise was largely cosmetic:

“We hadn’t looked at the issues of extremism: we weren’t particularly experts in that regard. It appeared obvious that we wouldn’t have time to take evidence or travel around or talk to communities in any substantive manner. And so it seemed to me rather that it was going to be a very hurried, ‘let’s-do-something’ sort of response rather than anything substantive.”²⁴

Lady Falkner’s misgivings have been borne out by subsequent events with the Government refusing the Preventing Extremism Task Force recommendation for a public inquiry on the effects of British foreign policy on radicalisation. The task force was not a bad idea in itself. The Government had a golden opportunity to gain a real insight into the views of Muslim communities in Britain. But, unfortunately, it did not grasp it.

“We were absolutely unanimous on the need for a public inquiry,” said Lady Falkner. “We were almost

unanimous on the impact of foreign policy on these matters. We've had a flat rejection of a public inquiry, no 'commission on integration' or anything like that. So I felt that we were really a rather superficial exercise rather than a very serious effort to try and understand what was going on in those communities."

There are some signs of hope. The Sufi majority, which has traditionally avoided politics, is finally beginning to find its voice. Haras Rafiq, a young businessman from Rochdale is one of the most prominent among them. This year, he set up the Sufi Muslim Council out of fears for the future of his young family: "I decided to stand up and be counted because about three and a half years ago, my daughter, who was about five and a half years of age, came home and said 'Daddy, I don't want to be a Muslim', and that struck a nerve if you like, and I decided that I had to do something. The danger is, if we continue to deal just with the people that hold this very narrow version of

Islam, we face a real possibility... that we will miss out the real moderate mainstream majority of Muslims that exists in the UK and abroad."²⁵

The situation as it stands within Government is less hopeful. Whitehall risks promoting just one very narrowly defined version of Islam, claiming it as the authentic, mainstream voice of British Muslims. According to the academic Dr Chetan Bhatt, the result could be a dangerous distortion of Islam in the UK. "One of the impacts you can see happening, especially amongst younger Muslims is that they're rejecting the traditions and cultures, arts, values, literatures of their parents – the rich traditions that come from South Asia of tolerant, humane Islam – in favour of these narrow, dogmatic and simple political ideologies."²⁶ By presenting this as the only ideology available, there are real dangers for the next generation. Young Muslims will find that unless they adopt a prescribed political brand of Islam, their voices will not be heard.

Conclusion

It will surprise most people to learn that the Government's strategy towards the British Muslim community has been driven in recent years by the Foreign Office rather than any domestic department of state. In recent months, this state of affairs has been made all the more confusing by a Government reshuffle, which shunted responsibility for "community cohesion" from the Home Office to the new Department for Communities and Local Government.

The relationship between the West and Islam is one of the defining issues of our times and there is no doubt that the British state takes its responsibilities in this area very seriously. The documents leaked to me over the past year confirm this. But they also show that the Government's policy on British Muslims has been heavily influenced by the Foreign Office's determination to engage with Islamist radicals.

“ There is deep confusion at the heart of Government about how best to deal with radical Islamic politics ”

This has been described as "engagement for engagement's sake" by Sir Derek Plumbly, Britain's ambassador to Egypt. This doctrine is also well expressed in a leaked Foreign Office letter from April 2004 in which the then Director General for Defence and Intelligence, William

Ehrman, outlines the strategy to Sir David Omand, the Security and Intelligence Co-Ordinator at the Cabinet Office: "Given that we will never eradicate extremist tendencies, the key question is: what action is most likely to marginalise them, and deprive them of the (often only) passive support they need to do real damage? So far many Middle Eastern regimes are sticking by the wrong answer: suppression and gerrymandering of superficial bits of the democratic furniture, instead of bringing moderate Islamist tendencies into the power structure while they are still moderate, and confronting them with the realities of power and responsibilities." [DOCUMENT 10]

Whatever the arguments for engagement abroad, where local circumstances may call for lines of communication with Islamist groups, there is no reason to believe this strategy is necessary for British Muslims. After all, they enjoy full access to the democratic process and they are not aligned in great numbers to Islamist groups. There is deep confusion at the heart of Government about how best to deal with radical Islamist politics, as shown by the Government's contradictory attitude to the British based group Hizb-ut-Tahrir. A series of leaked emails from August 2005 showed the Cabinet split on the matter. The then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke was, unconvinced that the group should be banned, whilst the then Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, was an enthusiast for proscription (his friends at the MCB have always been bitterly opposed to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, for their reasons). The Northern Ireland Office, too, was worried that a ban might "read across" to paramilitary organisations involved in the peace process – particularly Sinn Fein. Most significantly,

the head of MI5, Dame Eliza Manningham-Buller, and her counterpart at MI6, John Scarlett, were also resistant to the idea that intelligence information might be used to justify a ban. [DOCUMENT 11]

These exchanges underline that the Government has a serious problem with credibility. Because of the way intelligence was used in the run-up to the Iraq war, MI5 and MI6 are reluctant to let their institutional prestige be used to justify a political decision. A different, but no less acute credibility problem applies in its attempts to win the hearts and minds of Britain's Muslim communities. The Government tried to establish its bona fides by setting up the Preventing Extremism Task Force, but has failed to show that it is genuine in its desire to listen to what the silent Muslim majority has to say.

“ It is impossible to overstate the ethnic and theological diversity of Britain's Muslims ”

It has now emerged that just one of more than 60 recommendations of the Preventing Extremism Task Force has been implemented in full. It turns out that even this proposal (to set up a road show of moderate scholars to tour Britain to talk to Muslim youth) had been planned in advance by Foreign Office mandarins. It was later presented as coming out of the grassroots task force process. Such bare-faced cynicism does not help build trust in the Muslim communities, which are understandably wary of such civil service manoeuvres.

The key word here is *communities*. It is impossible to overstate the ethnic and theological diversity of Britain's Muslims: Sunni, Shia, Deobandi, Barelwi, Ismaili and Ahmadiyya. The potential for sectarianism is endless. Any government wishing to grapple with this issue must take this as its starting-point. When this Government set up its Preventing Extremism Task Force, participants remarked on the absence of representatives from the Somali and

Turkish Muslim communities, to name but two. Such an oversight is symptomatic of the failure at the heart of Whitehall, where ministers and officials remain far too dependent on the MCB and its affiliate organisations for advice – another source of the mistrust referred to above. It is now essential that it reassess this relationship.

A starting-point would be a refusal to deal with any organisation that is not truly representative of all British Muslims. Any over-arching structure is susceptible to infiltration and subversion – and the MCB is no exception. Further dialogue should be accompanied with serious conditions. For instance, it should no longer be acceptable for the British Government to deal with the leadership of the MCB whilst it refuses to accept certain branches of Islam as true Muslims. The Ahmadiyya sect has been active in Britain since the early 20th century and has been persecuted in Pakistan and Bangladesh. One might have thought that a beleaguered Muslim minority might attract the support of the MCB – but instead, it has backed the stance of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi governments, which both refuse to recognise the Ahmadiyya as part of the wider Muslim family. When the Ahmadiyya opened Western Europe's largest mosque in Morden, Surrey, the MCB said it did not regard the building as a mosque or consider the Ahmadiyya to be Muslims. Sir Iqbal Sacranie, then head of the MCB was reported to have said: “They can call their place of worship by any name except for a mosque because that is for Muslims. They are outside the fold of Islam.”²⁸

Of wider concern are the links of MCB affiliates such as the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) and Young Muslim Organisation UK (YMO) to the politics of radical Islamism. Where the leadership of the MCB turns to Pakistan and Bangladesh for inspiration, many affiliates such as FOSIS and YMO are more directly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. As the analyst Lorenzo Vidino has pointed out in his essay, “The Muslim Brotherhood's Conquest of Europe”, such organisations are involved in a sophisticated strategy of implanting Islamist ideology

among young Muslims in Western Europe. According to Vidino, in 1996, Muslim youth organisations from across Europe joined forces in Leicester to form the Forum of Muslim Youth and Student Organisation (FEMYSO), a pan-European focus for Brotherhood ideology. Vidino's assessment would provide sober reading for any British minister considering engagement with Islamist youth organisations in Britain.²⁹

“What most European politicians fail to understand is that by meeting with radical organisations, they empower them and grant the Muslim Brotherhood legitimacy,” Vidino writes. “There is an implied endorsement to any meeting, especially when the same politicians ignore moderate voices... This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of radicalisation because the greater the political legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood, the more opportunity it and its proxy groups will have to influence and radicalise various European Muslim communities.”

A year on from 7/7, it is difficult to understand how we find ourselves in this fix. There is no more serious issue and yet the Government is still struggling to engage with the genuinely moderate and liberal voices of British Islam and to sell the message of the benefits of integration to young Muslims most vulnerable to radicalisation. The Government needs also to ask itself who represents Britain's largely silent Muslim women, let alone gay and lesbian Muslims, and all people of Muslim origin who do not define themselves primarily by their faith.

There are no easy solutions but there are certain measures that could provide a way forward:

1 A full public inquiry into the events leading up to 7/7

This should concentrate on the intelligence gaps that led the bombers to slip the security net and the conditions that led to the radicalisation of the bombers. Without this, a unanimous recommendation of the Preventing Extremism Task Force, it is difficult to see how we can make any progress on the issues of integration.

2 A Royal Commission into British Muslim integration
Building on the work of the Cantle report into the northern riots of 2001, this would build up a full picture of the problems faced by some of the poorest communities in Britain.

3 Revival of the Extremism Task Force In principle, the 7/7 Task Force was the right idea, but it has been shown to be little more than an elaborate PR exercise. It should be reinstated, allowed to call witnesses and given time to do its job.

4 The Home Office to take the lead on Muslim engagement and community cohesion This is too important an issue to be dealt with by a minor department of state such as the Department for Communities and Local Government. It is time to treat this issue with the urgency it merits and move it back to the Home Office. Any work being carried out by the Foreign Office in this area should be thoroughly reassessed and, if necessary moved to the Home Office

5 An end to the Government's policy of “engagement for engagement's sake” with the MCB Any body that represents itself as speaking for the Muslim community must demonstrate that is entirely non-sectarian and non-factional. The MCB has consistently failed in this area and the Government should consider cutting all ties until it has thoroughly reformed itself. For too long, the Government has chosen as its favoured partner an organisation which is undemocratic, divisive and unrepresentative of the full diversity of Muslim Britain.

Until now, ministers have opted for the quick fix of engaging primarily with the representatives of political Islamism. This is no longer enough. Until the Government begins to reach out to those many Muslims who are not currently being heard, there is a real danger that the radicals will retain the initiative.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 Leak shows Blair told of Iraq war terror link: *Observer* 28 August 2005
- 2 Revealed: MI6 plan to infiltrate extremists: *Observer* 4 September 2005
- 3 Radical links of UK's 'moderate' Muslim group: *Observer* 14 August 2005
- 4 Losing the Plot: *New Statesman* 30 January 2006
- 5 Rendition: the cover-up: *New Statesman* 23 January 2006
- 6 Talking to Terrorists: *New Statesman* 20 February 2006
- 7 Panic in Whitehall *New Statesman* 5 December 2005

Chapter 1

- 8 *New Statesman*, 3 July 2006
- 9 FO mandarin forecast rise of the Islamists: *Observer* 5 January 2003
- 10 Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (Yale 2006) p.171
- 11 On Sadat and Muslim Brotherhood, see Felipe Fernandez Armesto, "Sadat and his Statecraft" London 1982
- 12 See *Hansard*: 11 May 2006 and 23 May 2006
- 13 Private information

Chapter 2

- 14 *The Times* 7 February 2006
- 15 Interview with author: 12 May 2006
- 16 *Hansard*: 7 July 2004
- 17 The Main Inspiration of Jihad: DVD of rally obtained by Channel 4
- 18 Interview with the author: 8 May 2006

Chapter 3

- 19 Quoted in Panic in Whitehall: *New Statesman* 5 December 2005
- 20 Interview with the author: 14 May 2006
- 21 Interview with the author: 14 May 2006
- 22 "Ethnicity, Politics and Transnational Islam: A Study of an International Sufi Order", part of the Transnational Communities, Research Briefing no.9, ESRC Research Programme, p.1.
- 23 Interview with the author: 10 May 2006
- 24 Interview with the author: 12 May 2006
- 25 Interview with the author: 10 May 2006
- 26 Interview with the author: 14 May 2006

Conclusion

- 27 *Guardian* 3 October 2003
- 28 *Telegraph* 3 October 2003
- 29 *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2005 pp. 25-34

Part II: Documents

List of documents

DOCUMENT 1: Page 37

Angus McKee (Foreign Office, Middle East and North Africa department) giving a summary of the Paris round table meeting regarding "Engaging with Islamists in the Arab World". 7 June 2005

DOCUMENT 2: Page 41

Letter from Sir Derek Plumbly (British Ambassador to Egypt) to John Sawers (Director General, Political, Foreign Office) entitled "Engaging with Islamists". 23 June 2005

DOCUMENT 3: Page 44

Angus McKee (Foreign Office, Middle East and North Africa department) to Michael Nevin (Foreign Office, Engaging with Islamic World Group), memo about the history and development of the Muslim Brotherhood, entitled " Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood-Terrorists?" 19 July 2005

DOCUMENT 4: Page 47

Email from Julie McGregor (Foreign Office, Arab-Israel North Africa Group) to Middle East Minister Kim Howells, regarding the issue of whether contact should be made with the Muslim Brotherhood. 17 January 2006

DOCUMENT 5: Page 51

Specially commissioned paper circulated last summer in support of the Foreign Office's new engagement policy by Richard Murphy (former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs in the Reagan Administration 1983-1989) and Basil Eastwood (British Ambassador to Damascus 1996-2000).

DOCUMENT 6: Page 53

Mockbul Ali (Islamic Issues Adviser to the Islamic World Group of the Foreign Office) to John Sawers (Director General, Political, Foreign Office) regarding the issue of Sheik Yusuf al Qaradawi (controversial Qatari based Islamist cleric). 14 July 2005

DOCUMENT 7: Page 58

Series of emails within the Foreign Office regarding the issue of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, labelled a "Bangladeshi Extremist". 13-14 September 2005. These emails are in reverse order.

DOCUMENT 8: Page 64

Power Point presentation entitled "Working with the Muslim community: Key messages", produced by Strategic Policy team, Home Office and Foreign Office. July 2004

DOCUMENT 9: Page 65

Discussion between Graeme Thomas (Programme co-ordinator, Foreign Office Islamic World and UK Outreach Programmes) and Isabel Carlisle (festival director for Festival of Muslim Cultures) about the proposed creation of "Festival of Muslim Cultures UK 2006". Includes a report of "cross- Whitehall meeting on 16 May at the Foreign Office on the proposed Festival". 4 July 2005

DOCUMENT 10: Page 68

Letter from William Ehrman (Director General of Defence-Intelligence, Foreign Office) to Sir David Omand (Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary at Cabinet Office) regarding "Hearts and Minds of Muslims". 23 April 2004

DOCUMENT 11: Page 70

Email exchanges between Whitehall officials on the Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's conversation with Home Secretary Charles Clarke on how to handle Hamas, Hizbollah and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. 30-31 August 2005. These emails are in reverse order.

DOCUMENT 12: Page 74

Email from Riaz Patel (Foreign Office, Engaging with Islamic World Group) to Andrew Jackson (Foreign Office, Deputy Director of Engaging with Islamic World Group) regarding the subject of creating a "UK Muslim Scholars Roadshow". Organisations such as Q-News, FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies) and the YMO (Young Muslim Organisation) are recommended. 16 August 2005. *Note regarding DOCUMENT 12: The Foreign Office have pointed out that Riaz Patel did not join the Department until 21 November 2005, so he could not have written such a minute.*

DOCUMENT 1:

Angus McKee (Foreign Office, Middle East and North Africa department) giving a summary of the Paris round table meeting regarding "Engaging with Islamists in the Arab World". 7 June 2005

From: Angus McKee
Date: 7 June 2005
cc: Peter Gooderham, Director MENA
EIWG – All Staff
Martin Longden, Policy Team
Peter Bainbridge, EU-X
RA Islam Team
MENARG – All Staff
Nick Abbott, BE Cairo
Jacky Perkins, BE Bahrain

Frances Guy, Head EIWG

ENGAGING WITH ISLAMISTS IN THE ARAB WORLD: PARIS ROUND-TABLE – 1 JUNE

Summary

1. Islamist movements in Arab world diverse. Most are wary of western motives but ready to engage. Regimes feel threatened by this. Europeans also face domestic constraints. Engagement with Islamists should follow from European promotion of reform, and not vice versa. Human rights, election monitoring, donor assistance, dialogue fora, municipal elections all possible entry points. All this will take time.

Detail

2. This note summarises discussions you held between EU officials and academic experts at IFRI, Paris, on 1 June, which focussed on trends within Islamist movements in the MENA region, and opportunities for European engagement.
3. At the beginning of the discussion, you outlined the principle objectives of the day: (i) should western governments be speaking to Islamists?; (ii) if so, to whom?; and (iii) how?
4. Olivier Roy (CNRS, Paris) began by assessing that previous western policy towards Islamists – containment and repression – had been a failure. The argument that authoritarianism would create a secular society which would in turn lead to democracy had been proven wrong. Now we had regimes incapable of reform, which actually *increased* the appeal of Islamism. If the west was now interested in reform, it had to consider how to integrate Islamists into the political system.

The popularity of Islamist movements

5. Academics took the opportunity to describe various Arab Islamist movements in outline, concentrating on Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon (case studies from the Gulf were notably absent). It soon became clear that the popularity of these movements was a slippery concept. For example, while Jordanian Islamists (the Islamic Action Front) do reasonably well in elections, their influence is exaggerated by low turnout amongst those less inclined to vote Islamist. In contrast, Lebanese Hizbullah's influence is far greater than its parliamentary representation suggests. Hizbullah has succeeded in integrating its military, political and social activity. It is also highly capable of

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mobilising Shia, and does so by promoting its ideology through multiple activities, and drawing on its extensive social networks. In addition, affiliation with Hizbullah serves as a pole for Shia cultural identity.

6. The extent of influence is also hard to measure in Egypt – religious piety doesn't automatically translate into political loyalty; the regime plays the religious card as often as the opposition does; many service providers claim Islamic credentials, even when they're private sector enterprises; and there are many in the Muslim Brotherhood who are disillusioned with the current leadership. We ultimately do not know how popular the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is, but while some estimates of their popularity may be exaggerated, we must remember that the mushrooming appeal of the Algerian FIS in the early 1990s took everyone by surprise.

Goals and values of these movements

7. In many MENA countries Islamist movements form the principal structured opposition and are well organised. They also benefit from the support of the population whom they 'represent', notably the young, and from being seen as the 'resistance' to an unpopular regime or foreign occupier. Their charitable welfare work invariably strengthens their appeal. Their structured organisation enables them to honour undertakings.
8. Islamist movements who take part in electoral politics usually have an anti-corruption platform, and some movements are themselves perceived as incorruptible. But we shouldn't assume all Islamists in political movements wish to take power. Many want to participate in the political system but are wary of assuming power and responsibility. For Hamas, becoming part of government would presuppose a willingness on its part to enter into dialogue with Israel, a notion to which it is implacably opposed.
9. Some Islamist movements are able to forge alliances with non-Islamist groups, such as Christians or secular parties – even communists (although westerners should be wary of describing the non-Islamists as *secular* opposition; 'there are no secular Moroccans', one participant retorted). Taboos are being broken. This collaboration may be preceded by intellectual debate and revision of Islamist attitudes to democracy. For example, democracy may be detached from its Greek roots and developed as an extension of the Islamic concept of *shura* (consensus).
10. Islamist movements are not monolithic for a number of reasons. One of the most interesting dynamics is the generational cleavage – the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is divided between the old guard who favour remaining aloof from the political process, and the [relatively] young generation who are more pragmatist.
11. Many Islamist movements (e.g. Hizbullah) are able to mobilise significant numbers of women. In Egypt, Islamist *salons* are becoming more popular among women. Islamist women's movements usually put an emphasis on conformity with social values. Although women are under-represented in the political leaderships of Islamist movements – just as they are in non-Islamist political parties in MENA – they are beginning to make inroads into the leadership, and as elected officials.
12. Some regimes (e.g. Egypt, Syria, Tunisia) are particularly wary of the challenge that Islamists present, and forbid the legalisation of parties with a religious ideology. Hugh Roberts (International Crisis Group) argued that even if it were undesirable to permit religious parties, there was a good argument for legalising Islamist movements – but convincing these regimes was another matter!

Islamists and violence

13. The Islamist elements of the armed Iraqi opposition present a dilemma. They lack proper political programmes and there is little potential for normalisation with the Coalition. Perhaps, argued Peter Harling (International Crisis Group), the only solution was for western policymakers to persist with legitimising the Iraqi state.

14. Mona Harb (American University of Beirut) was wary of talking about disarmament of Hizbullah without consideration of regional issues, particularly the Israeli threat to Lebanon, the status of Palestinian refugees, and the continued occupation of the Shebaa Farms by Israel. While westerners may criticise Hizbullah's use of violence (guerrilla and terrorist activity; its role as a proxy for the Lebanese police), Shia communities viewed this as legitimate.
15. Likewise, Hamas has broad Palestinian support. While Hamas does not expect support from the international community, and has low expectations that the west will help Palestinians to achieve justice, it does wish for international recognition. International interaction with its elected municipal officials will further enhance its reputation for efficiency and probity.

Motives for engagement

16. Roberts questioned the objectives of western policy-makers when engaging with Islamists. Dialogue could serve to de-demonise Islamists in the eyes of public opinion, or banalise western-Muslim relations – reducing ignorance and encouraging mutual comprehension. But if the objective is sponsoring opposition forces, with an eye on regime change, we should say so. If the latter is the case, then the west should be extremely wary of favouring Islamists over other political forces. If it's not, then surely we should be prioritising democratisation/reform over engagement solely with Islamists. Doing that will require us to acknowledge that democratic Islamists have a role to play.
17. Denmark and Finland pointed to an anomaly in European human rights policy – we are ready to advocate on behalf of a single non-Islamist politician, but not criticise the detention of dozens of Islamists. One possible step which could be taken is to demarche consistently in all cases of suppression of Islamists.
18. Election observation is another pragmatic place to begin. The EU will monitor the Lebanese elections (although particularly in Hizbullah strongholds, exactly how this will be done is not clear). The Commission needs to be left in no doubt that consistency and coherence of application are of vital importance.
19. Given that Islamist groups are often less corrupt than the generality of the societies in which they operate, consideration might be given to channelling aid resources through them, so long as sufficient transparency is achievable.

Do Islamists want to engage with the west?

20. Fares Breizat (Centre for Strategic Studies, Amman) explained that many Islamist movements would be divided over the question of dialogue with western governments, and that any initiatives from the latter would prompt heated internal debate or possibly even a split in the movement. Nevertheless, there was real appetite for engagement with Europe.
21. Harb described how Hizbullah had sought dialogue with European governments after 9/11, through the use of an affiliated think-tank. However, she was unable to point to changes in Hizbullah behaviour or military/terrorist activity as a result of that engagement.

Constraints on European engagement

22. European officials gave numerous examples of how attempts at engagement with Islamist movements were constrained by parliamentary or media pressure. For example, a Dutch minister had labelled Hizbullah a terrorist organisation, which precluded subsequent contact; Some of these constraints would only be reduced as public opinion changed, and this could take a long time. Hungary also felt exposed to US pressure on this issue.

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23. Another challenge comes where Islamist movements are outlawed – both Egypt and Tunisia object to western contact with their Islamist opponents. Roberts assessed that some of the regime objection is bluff, and there would be times when Europeans gave a robust response, provided they were certain of their own position. But to flout the law of the land by engaging with outlawed movements was also problematic.

24. Basil Eastwood (ex-HMA Damascus) doubted that there could be a concerted European response. He also stressed that the approach would have to vary from country to country.

Taking engagement forward

25. Breizat believed it was time for the west to advocate the inclusion of Islamists in Arab political processes. But the west would do well to seek guarantees of the rotation of power, such as a strong independent judiciary or a role of guarantor for the military.

26. Roberts didn't think the west should get overly hung up on whether or not their Islamist interlocutors were inherently democratic. He said policymakers shouldn't fixate on how virtuous an Islamist movement was. Even if it were playing the democratic game for pragmatic reasons, there was an opportunity for the west to engage with it on questions relating to reform.

27. Eastwood suggested that dialogue or engagement with Islamists was 'de-dramatised', and efforts made in areas away from high politics – e.g. municipal politics, human rights issues, women's rights, medical ethics, trade unionism. Europe should also exploit those Islamists resident in Europe. Harb agreed that municipal politics was a good starting point – it was here that real democratisation took place. Roy pointed out the potential for engagement beyond the political class – Islamists are drawn from clerical circles, business communities, etc. These aren't the traditional contacts of embassies, however.

28. Denmark has developed a pragmatic solution for contact with those Islamist movements with questionable credentials, such as Hamas. While it does not have a policy of engaging with Hamas, it is ready to work with democratically-elected officials, even if they are Hamas members. Germany had been more forthright – its missions had been instructed to engage with all those 'who might be in power in five years time'.

29. Roberts pointed out that it remained for the west to persuade Islamists that it was sincere about wanting reform and democracy. This would be easier if the west explained that reform in the Arab world was in the west's interests as well as the region's.

30. Harb argued against a short-termist approach. An incremental process which had medium- and long-term objectives would have improved results.

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DOCUMENT 2:

Letter from Sir Derek Plumbly (British Ambassador to Egypt) to John Sawers (Director General, Political, Foreign Office) entitled "Engaging with Islamists". 23 June 2005

23 June 2005

John Sawers Esq
Director General (Political)
FCO

Dear John

ENGAGING WITH ISLAMISTS


1. I have seen by chance accounts of two discussions in Paris on 1/2 June about engaging with Islamists in the Arab world. The first was from Frances Guy, and the second from Angus McKee. Both go to essentially the same point: where and how we should engage with "political Islam". Angus gives some reasons as to why, and Frances suggests points of possible agreement as to action. I attach copies for ease of reference.

2. When I was in London three weeks ago I discussed the same subject with you. I also had a meeting with experts from across and outside the Office on the internal political situation in Egypt, which went over some of the same ground. The intention then had been for AINAG to produce a paper on political developments in Egypt to include the Islamist issue. I am not sure where that currently stands, but I still think it would be a good idea. In the meantime I am slightly concerned that we are getting ahead of ourselves, and that discussions may be pursued with partners which could land us in unnecessary difficulty, especially during our EU Presidency.

3. Obviously it is desirable to talk to Islamists if we can. As already established, doing so when they fail to renounce violence is likely to prove a bridge too far for our ministers. In other contexts we might gain useful information. I suspect that there will be relatively few contexts in which we are able significantly to influence the Islamists' agenda.

4. But I also detect a tendency for us to be drawn towards engagement for its own sake; to confuse "engaging with the Islamic world" with "engaging with Islamism"; and to play down the very real downsides for us in terms of the Islamists' likely foreign and social policies, should they actually achieve power in countries such as Egypt.

5. This is a big subject, and Frances' and Angus' records raise a lot of questions, beyond those which are directly relevant to the extent of our own engagement. The idea for example that the debate between "laicistes" and religion is largely redundant in this part of the world sits oddly with my nightly viewing of the Orbit discussion programmes which are de rigueur in Egypt.



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6. But my main purpose in writing concerns the operational conclusions drawn from these meetings. If we get ourselves into a position where we are stating as a matter of principle the importance of "engaging political Islam" we will run into specific difficulties in particular countries, including this one. Seen from here we will do better to position ourselves country by country as required to advance our overall reform objectives. The general principles should be ones of universal application (democracy, freedom of expression, respect for human rights etc).

7. My second point is that it would not be sensible to instruct EU Heads of Mission across the Arab world during our Presidency to initiate discussion of contacts with Islamists. The fact of the discussion would in itself be a signal. Whether such a discussion was likely to be useful might vary from post to post. But we need to recognise the porosity of the 25. Once a paper or subject is launched among Heads of Mission, certainly in this post, it will be in the hands of our hosts within the hour (cf recent experience in relation to the ENP Action Plan). We will then be running to put out brush fires out with Aboul Gheit to the exclusion of real business. The collective response of my colleagues might well be that we should have no truck with the Brothers. But I would be labelled – as I am to a certain extent already – as agitating in the other direction. Discussion is more likely to be useful in informal fora. G8 Ambassadors here have recently compared notes on contacts with Islamists at our instigation. I attach the relevant paragraph from the record.

8. Underlying all of this – here at least - is a question about what the real possibilities for forward movement on political reform are at the moment, and how signalling greater readiness to talk to the Muslim Brothers would impact that. The Brothers are the regime's red line. Mubarak has it is true been dragged over other red lines. But this one is existential, not just for the leadership but for the class from which they are drawn and for the vision of society to which they subscribe. They can be encouraged to accommodation on it (see for example my record of my meeting with Governor Mahgoub in Alexandria over the weekend). But we need to judge the message very carefully. Pressing for legalisation of the Brothers as a political party, or dealing with them ourselves directly (as opposed to seeing their MPAs or sympathisers like Fahmy Howeldi, to whom I introduced Kim Howells), will panic the horses. In my judgement it would seriously impede our ability to influence them on other aspects of political reform – more transparent elections, access to the media, freedom of assembly for opposition candidates etc.

9. I am not starry eyed about the commitment of the regime here to political reform. The old guard – Safwat Sherif, Kamal al Shazli and their like – continue to try to cook things in a thoroughly unscrupulous way. Abuses are manifold, and will be repeated any number of times in the coming months. But the stated vision of the regime – democratic choice, freedom of expression, a stronger secular opposition – is respectable. They wrap themselves in the banner of "no religion in politics". Many oppositionists including in Kifaya take the same line. As the US Chargé here says that is not so very far from the basis of his constitution, and the Americans for the moment seem disinclined to challenge this particular red line. You will have seen from our reporting that Condoleezza Rice went out of her way during her visit here to deny the existence of US contacts with the Muslim Brothers – "we respect Egyptian law" – though she was very firm about transparent elections, freedom of assembly, human rights abuses etc.



10. I think real advances in political liberalisation are possible in Egypt this autumn. We are much further forward than I expected at the beginning of the year. The key – even more important than the Presidential elections – will be those for the Peoples Assembly, in which independents including MBs and opposition figures may well do much better than in the past. I would not be surprised if that in turn led to a realignment of parties and the emergence of new ones, though not - I am pretty sure - an overtly Islamist one. The road that takes us there may well be bumpy, and will certainly include a good deal more pressure from the Muslim Brothers on the streets. If their activity is repressed aggressively we will need to respond: I very much agree with Frances that we should not confine our demarches on human rights to liberal or secular victims of abuse: we have been too silent here on this score in the recent past. But I am not keen actually to encourage the Brothers - as chance remarks from Condoleezza Rice earlier in the year encouraged the first round of demonstrations by them.

11. In short I think we need to avoid restricting our freedom of manoeuvre by enunciating general principles about engagement with Islamists, and give ourselves room to handle the issue flexibly on a country by country basis. We will continue to look for opportunities to talk to Islamists here. But we will pick the context carefully and not put other interests at risk. If the issue is one of knowing more about bodies like the Muslim Brothers, there are other ways of doing so besides group engagement.

Yours ever

Derek

Sir Derek Plumbly
Ambassador


cc:



DOCUMENT 3:

Angus McKee (Foreign Office, Middle East and North Africa department) to Michael Nevin (Foreign Office, Engaging with Islamic World Group). Memo about the history and development of the Muslim Brotherhood, entitled "Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood-Terrorists?" 19 July 2005

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From: Angus McKee
Date: 19 July 2005
cc: 

Michael Nevin, EWG

EGYPT: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD – TERRORISTS?

Summary

1. Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood a religio-political movement. Historic links to terrorism – assassinations in 1940/50s and ideologue Sayyid Qutb modernised the concept of *jihad*. Since then, Islamic terrorist groups in Egypt have had only circumstantial links to the Brotherhood (e.g. attracting disaffected members). But Brotherhood is a political threat to the regime – it is the largest and most effective opposition grouping – and thus demonised as 'terrorist'.
2. There is no formal Muslim Brotherhood international organisation. But there is debate and collaboration between national branches. Some are licensed political parties (e.g. Jordan). Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood in all but name.

Detail

3. You asked me about the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's involvement in terrorism. President Mubarak told Solana in a conversation about the London bombings that one had to be careful with the Muslim Brotherhood (egram 8679/05). In May, President Bush told visiting Egyptian PM Nazif that the US considered the Muslim Brotherhood a 'terrorist organisation' (egram 5323/05).
4. I am grateful to BE Cairo, BCG Jerusalem, JTAC and Head/RA Terrorism Team for their comments on an earlier draft.

The History of the Muslim Brotherhood

5. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB; Arabic: *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) is the largest Islamist movement in Egypt. In short, it is a political movement which sees Islam as the model for social and political organisation, with *Shari'a* (Islamic law) being the basis for legislation. The MB was founded in 1928 by an Egyptian, Hassan al-Banna. He saw Islam as having answers not only to religious questions and social behaviour, but also providing a critique of domestic politics and colonialism (after 1922 Egypt was no longer formally a British protectorate, but the military occupation lasted until June 1956).
6. In tandem with its political and religious activity, the MB for a long time had a militant arm. Some of its members fought in the 1948 Palestine war. Both the monarchy and the post-1952 revolutionary government cracked down on MB supporters, and there were tit-for-tat political killings. In 1949, al-Banna himself was assassinated. Although the MB supported the 1952 coup leaders, relations soon soured and Nasser saw them as a threat to his authority. An attempt on his life gave him the opportunity to crack down hard on the organisation.

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7. One of the MB leaders imprisoned during the Nasserist crackdowns was the ideologue Sayyid al-Qutb. Although he was executed in 1966, his published writings have subsequently inspired Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere, including many in al-Qa'ida. Jihad was to be waged on *jihali* society (that is, society ignorant of Islam).
8. During the 1970s, President Sadat part-liberalised the domestic political scene, and the MB were one of the beneficiaries. Other Islamic groups also flourished on the university campuses and elsewhere, including radical extremists who used terrorist tactics against the regime. In 1981, Sadat was assassinated by one of these latter groups and Mubarak became president.

The Muslim Brotherhood under Mubarak

9. Mubarak's rule (1981-present) has seen two extremist uprisings: the first was at the time of Sadat's killing, the second was during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when westerners – particularly tourists, were amongst those targeted. In both cases, the regime used repressive tactics to put down the violence. Although the historic terrorist groups of this period (*al-Jihad*, *al-Gamaa al-Islamiya*) are now severely weakened, we are beginning to see the emergence of a new phenomenon – small groups inspired by regional events to use violence against western targets. All these groups are distinct from the MB.
10. During Mubarak's rule, the MB has remained outlawed, but has abstained from violence and repeatedly tried to make gains through the parliamentary process. It has fielded candidates in parliamentary elections, standing as independents, sometimes in alliance with other political parties. In the 2000 elections (which were neither free nor fair), the MB won 17 seats in the People's Assembly. They performed better than any of the licensed opposition parties.
11. The MB continues to believe that implementing Sharia at national level will address Egypt's social and political problems. However, in the absence of full *Shari'a* much can be achieved through grassroots activism and preaching. Over the last few decades MB strategy has seen reduced emphasis on a quick route to majority rule and more on 'change from below': achieving social change in the absence of political power, proving its competency in the leadership of syndicates and trade unions, and contributing to the 'Islamic revival'. It does this in the People's Assembly, the syndicates, Islamic NGOs and residential districts, and on university campuses. It also preaches patience to its followers, genuinely believing that advancing its agenda by stealth will make it among the primary beneficiaries of meaningful political liberalisation in the future.
12. The MB enforces strict discipline on its members, but critics see this leaving the group inflexible. Some members would rather take a more pragmatic line, working with non-Islamists and even the regime to increase its stake in local and national decision-making processes. In the mid-1990s, some left in an attempt to form their own, more pragmatic party; both the regime and the MB leadership turned against them. Others criticise the leadership's cautious approach, particularly its failure to challenge the regime's foreign policy line. Yet the ageing leadership is unmoved. The political pragmatists must either bide their time or leave for the no-mans-land that is Egyptian opposition politics; the hotbloods must either bide their time or seek more assertive organisations.

The Muslim Brotherhood international

13. During the mid-twentieth century, Al-Banna's ideology quickly won over adherents, with branches of the Muslim Brotherhood being set up in many other Arab countries. Where political activity was allowed, they participated in elections. But any democratic openings (e.g. Syria in the 1950s) were soon eclipsed by authoritarianism and MB branches were perceived as a threat to those in power. The confrontation between the Baathist regime in Syria and the Syrian MB was particularly fierce, and when radicals turned to terrorist tactics, the regime launched a wholesale offensive against all elements of the Syrian MB, violent and non-violent.
14. MB branches have adapted to local needs and now pursue national agendas over pan-Islamic ideals. The MB in Jordan has created a political party, the Islamic Action Front, which participates in elections; Jordanian brothers have long been viewed with suspicion because of their accommodation with the

- 2 -

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Hashemite monarchy. The Syrian MB leadership are in exile, and engage regularly with other oppositionists including communists, Kurds and Christians. Hamas evolved from the MB in Palestine.

15. Although the Egyptian MB maintains a paternalistic attitude towards other MB branches, there is no formal MB International. Members of the numerous branches will be in regular contact and dialogue over political issues, theological debate, human rights issues, etc; they will sympathise with each others aims, and their media outlets will publicise the others' activity. But there are no formal links or over-arching structures.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the regime today

16. The Egyptian regime has long feared the MB because it is a political threat. The MB's current strategy is to maintain its support base and use it to influence the current debate on political reform in Egypt. It is hoping that the autumn parliamentary elections will allow it to increase its parliamentary representation (freer and fairer elections would help). As part of this strategy it mobilises its supporters to protest in the streets.
17. The regime also fears that the MB will bring social disorder. Their more assertive brand of Islam could undermine Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt. Their social vision at times calls into question Egypt's crucial tourism sector – e.g. on alcohol sales. MB ideology is certainly in stark contrast to the regime elite's way of life. But it is a religio-political message which appeals to very many Egyptians.
18. Current western pressure on Egypt to liberalise politically has raised the stakes in the long-running confrontation between the MB and the regime. While any move to greater political pluralism is difficult enough for Mubarak to contemplate, [untrue] rumours this spring that the US Government had begun to engage with the MB as it does with other oppositionists and dissidents seriously unnerved the regime. To counter this, Mubarak demonised the MB as terrorist. This is a consistent regime policy which, along with periodic arrests and other harassment, attempts to keep the MB in its 'box'. However, in spite of this, the MB remain the largest and most effective opposition grouping in Egypt. Its ability to mobilise support and its critique of the current system are far more effective than those of the licensed opposition parties.

Role in terrorism

19. All MB branches are religio-political organisations – Islamist groups. In the past, elements of some branches have used terrorism (e.g. Syria in the 1970/80s, Egypt in the 1940/50s) against authoritarian regimes during times of reciprocal violence. Some elements of contemporary MB branches – particularly Hamas – are currently engaged in terrorism. Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades are the only part of any MB organisation proscribed under the UK's Terrorism Act, 2000.
20. There is no evidence that the Egyptian MB itself is now engaged in any terrorist activity. But it is possible that the MB forwards charitable donations to Palestine, perhaps even Hamas itself, as do many Egyptians and others, Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the intellectual, political and geographical milieu which the MB inhabits means that there will always be members who move to more violent activity, even terrorism, in other organisations.

Anous McKee

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- 3 -

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DOCUMENT 4:

Email from Julie McGregor (Foreign Office, Arab-Israel North Africa Group) to Middle East Minister Kim Howells, regarding the issue of whether contact should be made with the Muslim Brotherhood. 17 January 2006

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From: Julie McGregor
AINAG
Date: 17 January 2006
cc: [REDACTED]

To:	Nick Banner (seen 17/01/06)	
	Dr Howells	
	Foreign Secretary	

EGYPT: CONTACTS WITH THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

ISSUE

1. Whether to increase engagement with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

TIMING

2. Priority. Egyptian parliamentary elections took place in November and December. We are likely to be asked by interlocutors, parliamentarians and the press how we plan to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood now that they have an increased presence in the People's Assembly.

PREFERRED OPTIONS

3. I recommend that we:

- increase the frequency of working-level contacts with Muslim Brotherhood parliamentarians (who do not advocate violence), particularly those who are members of parliamentary committees;
- change the content of our dialogue to focus on communicating our policy, as well as being in listening mode;
- encourage other countries to adopt a similar policy of engagement, including the EU and US

AGREED BY

4. AINAG, EIWG and Cairo. Press Office and PRDT also agree.

Page 1

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RISKS

5. The presentation of any change in the way we deal with the Muslim Brotherhood will have to be carefully handled, in order to safeguard our bilateral relations with Egypt. The Egyptian Government perceive the Muslim Brotherhood to be the political face of a terrorist organisation. In 2005, Research Analysts examined the alleged links between the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism (Flag A). They concluded that there is no evidence of the current organisation being involved in terrorist activities, although it is possible that they forward charitable donations to Hamas.

6. We have already started preparing the ground with the Egyptians highlighting that we do not plan to support the MB but the results of the recent elections make it difficult for us not to engage with them. So far the Egyptians seem to understand the need for us to look at this issue but have made clear that they do not want any surprises in our policy. There will be no change to their own approach to the MB and no readiness to allow them to form a political party.

ARGUMENT

7. In the 2005 Egyptian parliamentary elections, the independent candidates affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 (20%) seats, an increase of 71 seats from the 2000 elections, making it the strongest opposition group in Egypt. As the MB now has a strong representation in the People's Assembly and is clearly a political force in Egypt it is no longer possible for us to maintain a policy of minimal contact. It will also be difficult for us to maintain credibility for our calls on Egypt to reform towards further democracy and better governance, if we fail to engage with the largest and most effective opposition group.

8. Engaging with movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood will help increase our understanding of 'political Islam' generally, as well as in the specific Egyptian context. Incremental enhancement of contacts may help in discouraging radicalisation. Interacting with 'political Islam' is an important element of our Engaging with the Islamic World strategy and we should be trying to influence these groups, who often have significant reach with the 'grass roots'. It also gives us the opportunity to challenge their perception of the West, including of the UK, and on their prescriptions for solving the challenges facing Egypt and the region.

9. The US are reviewing their position on contacts with the MB, having previously refused any contact. Their line is likely to continue to be that they will operate within Egyptian law. We should discuss increased political contacts with the US and EU partners sharing our ideas for ways to increase contacts, sensitively and gradually. In particular we should consider including appropriate MB parliamentarians in Muslim outreach and interfaith initiatives and including MB parliamentarians amongst other parliamentarians and civil society representatives when events for medium-level British visitors take place in Egypt.

Page 2
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BACKGROUND

10. Until 2002, FCO officials have had infrequent working-level (Second Secretary) contact with Muslim Brotherhood members of parliament. However this was noticed by the Egyptian authorities who made clear their displeasure. Since 2002 we have had only occasional contacts with MB members including one or two contacts with parliamentarians and random unplanned encounters.

11. Religious groups are banned from forming political parties in Egypt. As the MB is not recognised as a political party it puts forward independent candidates to compete in elections. However the Egyptian authorities adopted a more relaxed policy in the recent elections, giving the MB more freedom to operate and campaign. For the first time MB candidates were allowed to campaign with a common platform and their use of the banned slogan "Islam is the Solution" was tolerated. Nevertheless, several hundred MB supporters were arrested during the latter stages of the parliamentary elections. In spite of the subsequent efforts of the ruling elite to limit MB successes, it is clear that the new parliamentary situation derives from the government's readiness to allow the MB more rope. They are most unlikely, however, to change their position that the MB remains banned as a political organisation on the basis of 'no religion in politics'.

PARLIAMENT AND MEDIA

12. There has been recent press and parliamentary interest in the FCO's views on political Islamists, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Any policy of engagement is likely to come under further scrutiny. I attach draft press lines (Flag B).

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

13. None.

Julie McGregor
AINAG

Tel: [REDACTED]

cc: Sir Michael Jay
Frances Guy, ETWG
Martin Hetherington, MENARG
PRDT Submissions

Peter Gooderham
Michael Nevin, ETWG
Dan Chagg, Press Office
HMA Cairo

Page 3
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DRAFT PRESS LINES

- recent parliamentary elections in Egypt raised the number of Muslim Brotherhood representatives in the People's Assembly to 88. Premature to form a view of likely impact on work of the Egyptian parliament
- while the Muslim Brotherhood is not recognised as a legal organisation in Egypt, the increase in the number of independent members of the People's Assembly linked to the Muslim Brotherhood means that international contacts with them, including on the part of the UK, will inevitably increase
- contact with elected parliamentarians, who use peaceful means to achieve their objectives, is normal diplomatic practice
- [if pressed] we have seen no credible evidence linking the Muslim Brotherhood to terrorist activities

DOCUMENT 5:

Specially commissioned paper circulated last summer in support of the Foreign Office's new engagement policy by Richard Murphy (former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs in the Reagan Administration 1983-1989) and Basil Eastwood (British Ambassador to Damascus 1996-2000).

We Must Talk to Political Islamists in the Middle East – and not just in Iraq

*by Richard Murphy and Basil Eastwood**

President Bush is intent on bringing democracy to the Middle East, and reform is at the heart of the G8's Broader Middle East Initiative which Britain as chairman is now pledged to carry forward. The peoples of that troubled region deserve no less, but democracy cannot just be imported (still less imposed), and the governments in the region prefer the status quo and will be extremely reluctant partners in this process. If it is not counter-productive, outside pressure for democratization and reform needs to be exercised with great care and to complement the efforts of movements working for these goals within the states of the region. It was therefore right for the President to say in his inaugural address that the US will "seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture".

In the Arab Middle East the awkward truth is that the most significant such movements which enjoy popular support are those associated with political Islam – movements which seek by peaceful means to apply their faith to their state's politics. Ibrahim Jaafari, the leading candidate for Prime Minister in Iraq, is a good example. For us to "seek and support" such movements will not be a comfortable process: elsewhere in the region most such movements are (naturally) seen as opponents by their governments - governments whose cooperation we need to combat terror; and they do share the general views of the Arab public that violence against occupation is legitimate and that British and US policies in the region are fundamentally misguided.

We believe, however, that our disagreement with them, however vehement, is good reason for talking to them, not for ostracising them. For a year now we have been engaged in a dialogue with a small group of people familiar with some of the different national branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, with Hamas and with Hizbullah. They do not formally represent these movements, but we believe that they do speak with authority. Some of them have been imprisoned for their beliefs and they describe movements which are arguably more democratic than the Arab governments concerned (who habitually rig elections to ensure that such movements do not win). They deny vehemently that, once voted in, the movements will hang on to power if subsequently voted out. Consciously or not, the movements seem to be adopting the theological belief that the voice of the people is in some sense the voice of God ('vox populi vox Dei') which made possible the emergence of Christian democracy in western Europe less than two centuries ago.

Perhaps the best evidence in their favour is the fact that they are criticized bitterly by those Muslim extremists who do advocate violence to bring in authoritarian clerical rule. For, when it comes to politics, Muslims are no more united than Christians. Political Islam itself varies from country to country, but there are much greater differences both between political Islamists and 'official Islam' on the one hand and between them and the Jihadists on the other. Even within Sunni (orthodox) Islam there are bitter divisions between the exponents of 'official Islam', the 'political' Islamists who seek change but who do not advocate violence to overthrow regimes, and the Jihadists, the Islamic extremists who do.

A spokesman for one of the Jihadist groups recently argued on a Jihadist website not only that all Arab regimes and the imams who support them (ie official Islam), together with secularists, communists and nationalists are heretics, but also that democracy is heresy. True believers, he insisted, should have nothing to do with the Muslim Brothers (the mainstream of Sunni political Islam) and their 'defeatist secularist democratic programme'. (He was even very critical of Hamas which he described as merely fighting for land). It is such Jihadists not the political Islamists who see all westerners as 'Crusaders' and seek to throw them out of the Middle East. The popular Arab reaction to western policies in Iraq and Palestine is strengthening the extremists at the expense of

the political Islamists, but the extremists do not and probably cannot command a mass following.

The political Islamists we have been talking with are unanimous that reform in the Arab World is needed whether there is progress towards a settlement with Israel or not. They point out that for too long corrupt regimes have used the Palestine issue as an excuse to maintain their power. Some of them are explicit in arguing that only democratically elected (and thus in their view probably Islamist) governments will have the legitimacy to make real peace with Israel. That may well be an honest view: while excluded from power and themselves under threat from extremists, the political Islamists have no reason to tackle the difficult issues which making peace with Israel will require, but it is striking that in Turkey it is an Islamist government which is able to take the difficult decisions needed to take Turkey into the EU.

We believe that G8 governments must now, perhaps indirectly, get into dialogue with such movements and involve them in the civil society track of the Broader Middle East Initiative. For if we are to avoid a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West (or, even more seriously, with Islam *in* the West) and if we are serious about reform in the Middle East, we must do business with those who are struggling to relate their faith the world as it is – and not as it was at the time of the Prophet.

**Richard Murphy served as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs in the Reagan Administration, 1983-89*

Basil Eastwood was Director of Research and Analysis for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office 1991-2 and British Ambassador in Damascus 1996-2000

DOCUMENT 6:

Mockbul Ali (Islamic Issues Adviser to the Islamic World Group of the Foreign Office) to John Sawers (Director General-Political, Foreign Office) regarding the issue of Sheik Yusuf al Qaradawi (controversial Qatari based Islamist cleric). 14 July 2005

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From: Mockbul Ali
Date: 14 July 2005
Cc: As Attached

John Sawers (agreed)
PS

SHAYKH YUSUF AL QARADAWI

ISSUE

1. The Home Office has asked for FCO views on whether Qatari based cleric Shaykh Yusuf Al Qaradawi should be excluded from the UK, and any possible consequences.

TIMING

2. Immediate. The issue would become urgent if Al Qaradawi decided to travel to the UK.

RECOMMENDATION

3. I recommend that, on balance, the Foreign Secretary agree for the FCO to advise that Al Qaradawi should not be excluded from the United Kingdom given his influence in relation to our foreign policy objectives. CTPD agree. DG Political has commented that "Having individuals like Qaradawi on our side should be our aim. Excluding them won't help."

ARGUMENT

4. The Home Secretary has endorsed a recommendation from the Foreign Secretary not to exclude another prominent Muslim scholar- Tariq Ramadan who was the subject of negative tabloid attention. Qaradawi is a more difficult case, but similar arguments apply.

5. The Foreign Secretary may recall the negative media storm during Al Qaradawi's visit to the UK last year at the invitation of Ken Livingstone. The media highlighted Qaradawi's controversial views on suicide bombers in Palestine and his view that Coalition presence in Iraq was an illegal occupation. Qaradawi has argued that the Palestinians see suicide bombing in Israel as the only weapon left available to them in the face of oppression. On Iraq, ahead of Operation Telic, he issued a Fatwa banning the use of Islamic lands and facilities to assist Coalition forces, and said it

2

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should be an individual obligation for all Muslims to confront and resist the invaders (see annex 1).

6. We certainly do not agree with Qaradawi's views on Israel and Iraq, but we have to recognise that they are not unusual or even exceptional amongst Muslims. In fact it is correct to say that these are views shared by a majority of Muslims in the Middle East and the UK. Refusing entry on these grounds would also open a Pandora's box in relation to entry clearance for others in the Muslim world.
7. On the issue of the terrorist attacks on London, Qaradawi was one of the first international Muslim scholars to issue a clear statement of condemnation. He has said *"We were dumbfounded by the grave news of the London bombings which killed tens and wounded hundreds of innocent people who committed no crime"*. Qaradawi stressed that these *"black actions"* run counter to the teachings of Islam and has called for other scholars to also condemn the attacks.
6. While there would undoubtedly be tabloid media pressure in current circumstances to ban Qaradawi, we need to consider his status and influence within the Islamic world. To act against Qaradawi would alienate significant and influential members of the global Muslim community. In recognition of this fact, the US have started dialogue with him in Qatar. He is the leading mainstream and influential Islamic authority in the Middle East and increasingly in Europe, with an extremely large popular following and regular shows on Al Jazeera. He is involved in a number of high profile mainstream Muslim bodies and initiatives. Only last week, Qaradawi issued a strong fatwa of support for the 'Amman Message' championed personally by King Abdullah in the defence of mainstream Islam against extremism. Other leading Muslim scholars often wait for Qaradawi's lead before issuing any of their own fatwas. His role as Chair of the Council of Scholars will be key in promoting mainstream Islam and countering the AQ narrative.
7. Excluding Qaradawi would give grist to AQ propaganda of a western vendetta against Muslims and would undermine Qaradawi's counter terrorism messages. Qaradawi would be the first port of call when encouraging statements against terrorism and the killing of Muslim civilians in Iraq, as requested recently by Iraq Policy Unit. He has repeatedly and

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authoritatively condemned terrorist attacks - after 9/11, Bali, Madrid, Beslan, the Bigley kidnapping and recently after the bombings in Qatar, as well as on other occasions. When Qaradawi was accused last year of justifying kidnappings and kidnappings of civilians in Iraq, particularly US civilians, he has firmly stated "*I did not issue such a fatwa*". In fact Qaradawi was widely reported as '*vehemently opposed to kidnapping and killing innocent civilians*' and '*urged the release of four Italian and French individuals recently abducted in Iraq*.' (see Annex 1) We could not engage with Qaradawi on counter terrorism or Iraq should there be a decision to exclude him from the UK.

8. Exclusion from the UK would have a negative impact on our relations with British Muslim communities, particularly given the current situation. The Muslim Council of Britain have made it clear they consider Al Qaradawi a mainstream force against extremism. Qaradawi has argued that it is a religious duty on Muslims in the West to integrate and become fully active members of their multicultural societies. The Metropolitan Special Branch Muslim Contact Unit have commented that: "*Sheikh Qaradawi has a positive Muslim community impact in the fight against Al Qaida propaganda in the UK.*" (See Annex 1). This assessment is also applicable in the context of the wider Islamic world. By taking such action the UK could turn mainstream Muslim opinion further against the UK and could encourage some to move to violence against British targets.
9. Qaradawi has already passed through legal scrutiny. During his visit to the UK, as a result of a dossier presented by the Board of Deputies on his alleged views, the Crown Prosecution Service looked into possible prosecution of Qaradawi but found no grounds for action.

BACKGROUND

10. Al Qaradawi is a highly respected Islamic scholar of Egyptian descent who is now based in Qatar and who has Qatari nationality. He last visited London in July 2004, although he has previously been visiting the UK for the last 10 years without incident. As the Head of the European Council for Fatwa and Research he convened a meeting of the Council in London to announce the establishment of The International Council of Muslim Clerics. During this visit he was invited to a meeting by London Mayor Ken Livingstone at City Hall.
11. A significant number of the accusations against Qaradawi seemed to have been as a result of a dossier compiled by the Board of Deputies,

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based on information from Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). The founding President of MEMRI is retired Colonel Yigal Carmon, who served for 22 years in Israel's military intelligence service. MEMRI is regularly criticised for selective translation of Arabic reports.

12. Qaradawi has strongly argued the compatibility of Islam and democracy and the need for reform in the Arab world. He was strongly critical of the Taliban's restrictions on women and the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, which he argued were un-Islamic, and has himself faced criticism for calling for greater liberty for women in Islamic societies.
13. Al Qaradawi's religious authority and fatwas- based on a long and established career in Islamic scholarship -strikes a chord throughout the Muslim world. He has participated in a number of international conferences tackling contemporary issues, such as Islam and democracy, and improving relations between the West and Islamic countries.

NEWS AND PARLIAMENTARY IMPLICATIONS

14. Whether Al Qaradawi is excluded or not, there will be difficult handling issues. If Qaradawi is excluded, there will be significant interest from the Muslim media - both overseas and domestic - most likely spearheaded by Al Jazeera, as Qaradawi is one of their biggest names and attractions. We would also need to defend a policy decision now to refuse Qaradawi's entry to the UK, despite permitting him to visit in the past. This could also fuel media reports of conspiracy theories - especially in the UK Muslim media - about the involvement of Jewish lobby groups and their influence on British Government policy.
15. If Qaradawi is not excluded and decides to come to the UK, there will be renewed press interest. The position can be defended given the clear CPS view that there was no case against Qaradawi. Unless, of course, Qaradawi makes any inflammatory statements while in the UK.
16. In either scenario, there is likely to be interest from Parliamentarians, particularly Muslim MPs and Peers, most of who regard Qaradawi as a mainstream Muslim scholar.

ANNEXQARADAWI QUOTES:Suicide bombing:

He views suicide bombing as a "weapon to which the weak resort to...if the Palestinians had weapons similar to those of Israelis- tanks [etc] they would not have resorted to turning themselves into human bombs...I was careful to say only in that circumstance inside Palestine is such a method permitted because the Palestinians have been left with no options. I don't condone it anywhere else..."

9/11 attacks:

He described 9/11 as "*a grave sin*". In fact immediately after 9/11, the Sun carried quotes from Qaradawi condemning the attacks and commented that Qaradawi's view carried 'vastly more weight' than Bin Laden's. In October 2001 he supported a Fatwa authorising American Muslims to fight in the US Army in Afghanistan.

Ken Bigley Kidnapping:

He was reported in the Sunday Herald as "begging the hostage-takers to release Bigley, "whose only fault is having come to Iraq to help rebuild and restore the development"".

Madrid bombings:

He said "*Islam does not permit aggression against innocent people*"

Bali:

He described as "*total barbarism*".

Bombings in Qatar:

He condemned the recent bombings in Qatar by saying "*Islam...sees an aggression on innocent lives as a major sin whose doer deserves punishment in this life and in the Hereafter...it is an insane action that has nothing to do with religion. It is not accepted by any logic - related to religion, morals, tradition and interests.*"

The Metropolitan Special Branch Muslim Contact Unit

"*Sheikh Qaradawi has a positive Muslim community impact in the fight against Al Qaida propaganda in the UK. His support for Palestinian suicide bombers adds credibility to his condemnation of Al Qaida in those*

sections of the community most susceptible to the blandishments of Al Qaida terrorist propoganda."

DOCUMENT 7:

Series of emails within the Foreign Office regarding the issue of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, labelled a "Bangladeshi Extremist". 13-14 September 2005. These emails are in reverse order.

To: Mockbul Ali; Alexander Evans; Rod Wye; Jason Grimes Dhaka - CONF;
Antony Stokes
From: Eric Taylor
Subject: RE: REST RE: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi - Bangladeshi
extremist
Sent: 14 September 2005 15:32:31 GMT

Mockbul

Thank you for your comments. A few points (in no particular order):

a) I am not sure if an ad hominem critique on the sources quoted is constructive - who documents Sayeedi's reported comments is irrelevant. Rather, we (the FCO) should be seeking to verify whether or not he actually said them. Drishtipati's file is thoroughly referenced to sources on the Internet and in the Bangladeshi media. I've already checked e.g. the Muslims Wake Up and the Reporters Without Frontiers sites. The content of those sites reflects Drishtipati's claims. Our High Commission in Dhaka would be best placed to verify Sayeedi's reported comments in the vernacular press. Perhaps Stephen in Dhaka could commission his LE press team to undertake some preliminary research on this?

b) Sayeedi's views about Ahmadiyya's not being Muslim may well be shared by the Muslim community. It was his reported comment in support of the Khatme Nabuwot's aggressive campaign against Ahmadiyya's places of worship which could be interpreted as an incitement to religious violence (and thus fall under the purview of the ongoing work within HMG).

c) The IFTWCB website you say I repeatedly refer to (it was actually twice) may well have a domestic Bangladeshi agenda. My attachment of the link was intended to paint a picture of the level of controversy that Sayeedi's visits to the UK have reportedly engendered in the past amongst some elements of the Bangladeshi community.

d) My understanding of HMG's current work on Islamic extremism is that it is based on the premise that, in the PM's words, 'the rules of the game have changed'. What may have been tolerated pre-7/7 is no longer the case. You say that Sayeedi has a very big following in the mainstream Bangladeshi community here, and that any steps taken on his exclusion from the UK must take that into account, especially at a time when we require increasing support on the Prevent/CT agenda from Muslims in the UK. Indeed. But the inference here is that excluding a cleric associated with extremism might endanger that support. I am not sure if that is true. The Prime Minister and his Ministers have made repeated assurances that the Muslim community rejects extremism. If that is indeed the case then banning Sayeedi from the UK (if that is the final decision - we are a long way off from forming a definitive HMG view on this case) will, instead, be warmly welcomed.

-----Original Message-----

From: Mockbul Ali

Sent: 14 September 2005 13:29

To: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: REST RE: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi - Bangladeshi extremist

[REDACTED]

Thanks. I am aware of Sayeedi and some of his rhetoric.

However, I am extremely concerned about the sources being used to verify what he has allegedly said. For example, the website (www.iftwcb.org) you refer repeatedly to, is very obviously motivated by Bangladeshi politics.

The whole angle in the info you have provided of Sayeedi, is linked to anti-Jamaati Islam rhetoric (who some Bangladeshi opposition/secular/nationalist groups consider to be traitors to the cause of Bangladeshi independence in 1971).

The very fact that one of the pieces of 'evidence' referred to, is signed by the 'UK Committee for Resisting Killers & Collaborators of Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971' is evidence of some form of political bias. Other 'dossiers' have been compiled by a group who calls themselves 'Secular Bengali Activists'- as a Jamaati Islam politician, Sayeedi is an anathema to their political discourse.

The information you have referred to in terms of anti-inconography/tomb- worship' is a valid point of view within Muslim circles, and is shared by a number of Muslims. Also in terms of his views about Ahmadiyyas not being classified as Muslim is the majority view held by the Muslim community.

The events that you refer to in terms of the row in Banglatown in Tower Hamlets over Sayeedi- is arguably linked to Bangladeshi politics, rather than to Sayeedi- Awami league (the opposition in Bangladesh) vs. sympathisers of Jamaati Islam and the BNP (ruling parties). If you spoke to other groups to the one who you have quoted, they actually place the blame on others.

We should therefore be extremely careful of what/who we use to verify what he has allegedly said. Based on secondary reporting and the sources referred to by you- there seems to be a real problem with building grounds for exclusion. Websites of groups with a clear agenda/bias is not the way to prove a case for exclusion (if a case does indeed exist).

What is true, is that Sayeedi is a very conservative Muslim, even ultra-orthodox figure-with a number of views we would not endorse in any way.

But he is also someone who has a very big following in the mainstream British Bangladeshi Muslim community- and is viewed as a mainstream Muslim figure. Any steps taken on his exclusion from the UK must take that into account, especially at a time when we require increasing support on the Prevent/CT agenda from British Muslims.

Mockbul Ali
Islamic Issues Adviser
Islamic World Group (IWG)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Tel:0207 008 1619

-----Original Message-----

From: Eric Taylor

Sent: 14 September 2005 12:17

To: Alexander Evans; Rod Wye; Jason Grimes Dhaka - CONF; Antony Stokes

Cc: James Paver; Simon Bond; Rob Macaire * New Delhi -Conf; Stephen

Bridges Dhaka - CONF; Mockbul Ali; Jon Davies; John Bradshaw

Subject: RE: REST RE: I. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi - Bangladeshi extremist

Importance: High

Rod

I've had a further look at some of Sayeedi's reported comments. If the reports are correct, I think the case for excluding him is far stronger than the single RSF report suggests.

According to the attached report compiled by a Bangladeshi human rights organisation (and, I understand, submitted in the past to the Home Office), Sayeedi has said that the UK and US 'deserve all that is coming to them' for overturning the Taliban in Afghanistan. He has made a particularly offensive comment about Bangladeshi Hindus, comparing them to excrement. He also appears to defend attacks against the Ahmadiya community. <http://www.drishtipat.org/blog/wp-content/Sayeedi.pdf>

Sayeedi was reportedly touring mosques in the UK at the end of July 2005 (see [http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-295495](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-295495)). Previous visits to the UK have been reportedly marred by violence caused by his supporters. In 2000 during one of his talks in Oldham his supporters reportedly attacked and beat up

five Bengali elders. They also ambushed and attacked a newspaper representative. A rally in "Banglatown" was also attacked and three people, including a 65 year old, were injured (see: <http://iftwcb.org/suktrip.htm>). A Bangladeshi community group wrote to HRH The Prince of Wales in June 2004 appealing for Sayeedi to be banned from the UK. (see: <http://iftwcb.org/saidiuk.htm>).

Sayeedi apparently has an Islamic show on ATN Bangla, on which he reportedly expounds his views. EIWG should be able to advise if this can be received via satellite TV in the UK. If he gets banned from the UK, can his broadcasts be blocked?

Eric

Eric Taylor
India Pakistan Relations Desk Officer
South Asia Group
Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Tel: (00 44) 20 7008 2377
Fax: (00 44) 20 7008 3258

-----Original Message-----

From: Alexander Evans
Sent: 13 September 2005 17:41
To: Rod Wye; Jason Grimes Dhaka - CONF
Cc: James Paver; Eric Taylor; Simon Bond; Rob Macaire * New Delhi -Conf;
Stephen Bridges Dhaka - CONF
Subject: REST RE: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi 2. Narendra Damoderdas Modi

Rod

I attach filled forms for both these individuals. I remain doubtful as to whether Narendra Modi could be excluded on the basis of what he has said (I can find no direct reporting of statements by him that fit the criteria). However, as a controversial figure associated with the reported failings of the Gujarat state government to respond adequately to the 2002 riots, I can see a case based on a potential threat to public order in the UK to justify exclusion.

Delwar Hossain Sayeedi has said one thing that might justify exclusion, although the reporting is from a secondary source (RSF report). I do not have details of any past visits to the UK - Jason: could you verify whether Sayeedi has visited the UK in the past, or has current connections?

Alexander

-----Original Message-----

From: Rod Wye

Sent: 13 September 2005 14:23

To: Matthew Forman; Alexander Evans

Subject: FW: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi 2. Narendra Damoderdas Modi

These people were not on our list of 100. Their names have been suggested to the Home Office by others. We have nevertheless to provide information the two individuals named here, and I would be grateful if you could start work on them. I attach the template (please let me know if you cannot open it). South Asia Group are aware and will obviously need to be consulted when the Home Office submit. Our task for the moment is simply to provide the information.

Rod

-----Original Message-----

From: Robin Hoggard

Sent: 13 September 2005 13:40

To: Rod Wye

Cc: Charles Winnington-Ingram

Subject: RE: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi 2. Narendra Damoderdas Modi

Rod,

We spoke. SAG's advice to the HO on Modi (only) said, in effect, that there was simply not enough evidence. James Paver in SAG insists that he will want to see in draft any HO submission recommending the Home Sec consider excluding Modi.

Robin

-----Original Message-----

From: Robin Hoggard

Sent: 13 September 2005 13:20

To: 'Douglas Jackie'

Cc: Rod Wye

Subject: RE: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi 2. Narendra Damoderdas Modi

Catherine,

Thanks for this. We spoke. I understand that these are names suggested by domestic

sources; they are not among those we have so far collected from overseas posts. We will now work up cases on both individuals, and ask Eric Taylor or his section to provide policy advice on Sayeedi (which they will only be able to do once we have assembled the facts). While we will do this as quickly as possible, I'm afraid I can't give a deadline: we must seek help from at least one post and it is not impossible (given that the subject is an MP) that FCO Ministerial advice will need to be sought.

Robin

Robin Hoggard
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www.fco.gov.uk/researchanalysts

-----Original Message-----

From: Douglas Jackie [mailto:Jackie.Douglas7@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk]
Sent: 13 September 2005 12:40
To: 'robin.hoggard@fco.gov.uk'
Subject: 1. Delwar Hossain Sayeedi 2. Narendra Damoderdas Modi

Dear Robin,

I am covering Jackie Douglas's desk here in SSCU while she is on annual leave (I am working in SSCU until 23rd September).

I am doing preparatory work, considering the cases for excluding (i) Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, a Bangladeshi MP and (ii) Narendra Damoderdas Modi, the Gujarat State Governor.

I understand from Jackie that you may have some information on Modi; I should be grateful if you could provide me with any information that could be fed into a submission. I should also be grateful for any information you may have on Sayeedi.

I am unable to attach the advice received from Eric Taylor (India Pakistan Relations Desk Officer) but could fax one over (Eric's e-mail was sent to Jackie Douglas on 30th August at 10:21).

I would be most grateful for your advice by noon on Thursday. Do give me a call if you'd like to discuss. My mobile number is 07768 177825.

DOCUMENT 8:


Power Point presentation entitled "Working with the Muslim community: Key messages", produced by Strategic Policy team, Home Office and Foreign Office. July 2004

Restricted 1

Working with the Muslim community: Key messages

STRATEGIC POLICY TEAM, HOME OFFICE
FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

July 2004



3. Analysis - organisational (religious) structure Restricted 44

Reformist

- Non literalist, reason and logic based approach to interpretation of the faith
- Liberal approach to both traditional schools of jurisprudence and the literalist school
- Proponents of a flexible, balanced and moderate understanding of Islam
- A willingness for Islamic jurisprudence to adapt and evolve to suit differing geo-political and social circumstances
- Acceptance of democracy and the western paradigm in full
- Belief and emphasis on full participation in civil society- both western and Islamic context
- Emancipatory approach to women's participation
- Willingness to form alliances with wider non-Muslim movements
- Opposition to Muslim rulers via democratic means

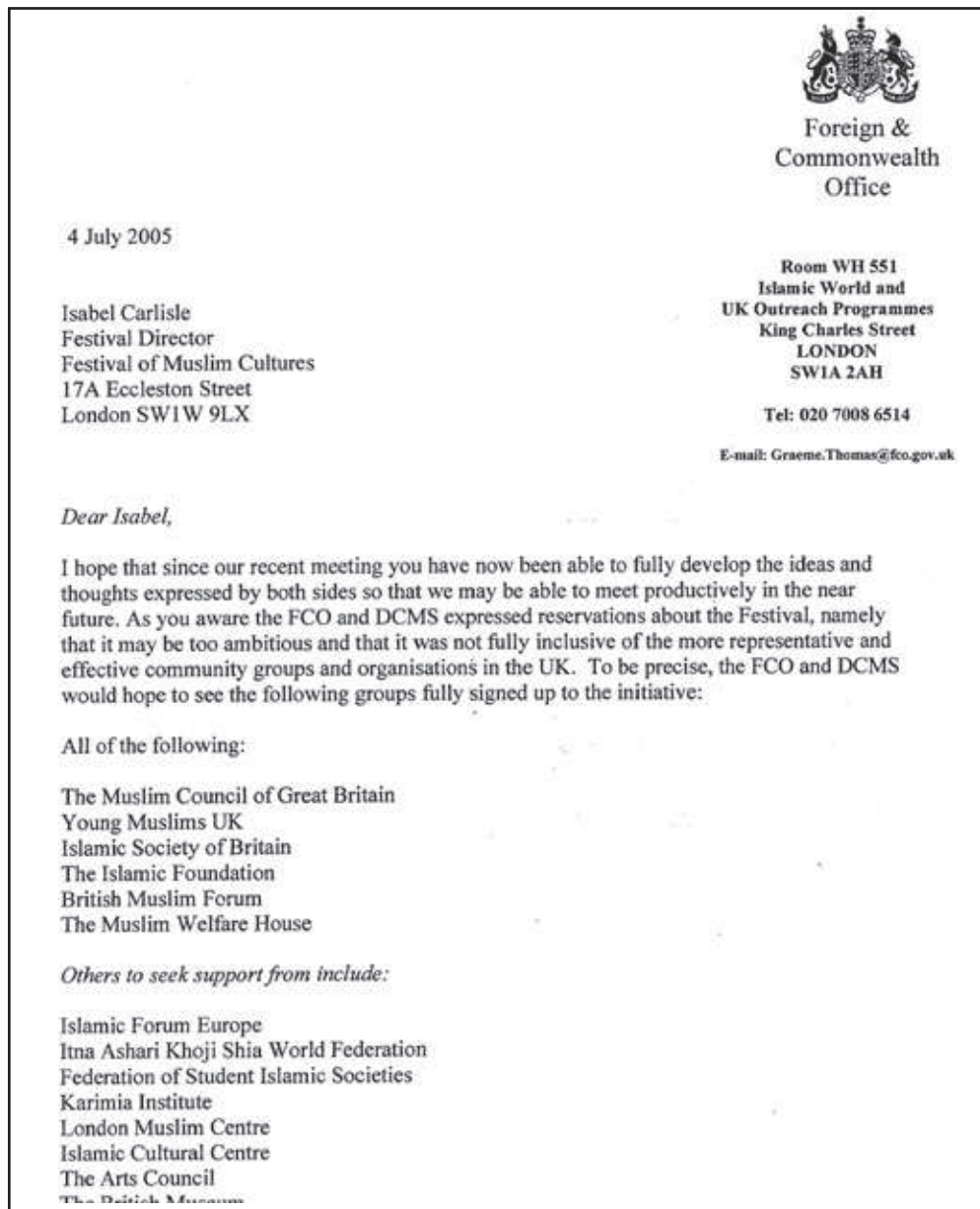
- The root of the reformist movement can be traced to the Muslim Brotherhood (Hasan Al Banna) and Jamaati Islam (Maulana Maududi), which was orthodox but pragmatic.
- However the reformist trends have evolved into a progressive and liberal movement, adapting to their own socio-political context, especially those in Britain.

"If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and human rights for the public, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy".

Rached Ghannouchi- Leading reformist

DOCUMENT 9:

Discussion between Graeme Thomas (Programme co-ordinator, Foreign Office Islamic World and UK Outreach Programmes) and Isabel Carlisle (festival director for Festival of Muslim Cultures) about the proposed creation of "Festival of Muslim Cultures UK 2006". Includes a report of "cross- Whitehall meeting at the Foreign Office on the proposed Festival". 4 July 2005



It was decided that a small working group, including representatives from the FCO and DCMS, would meet to discuss these points. In addition we would expect to see a comprehensive business plan and risk assessment at the meeting.

Please could we now take this forward to arrange a meeting as soon as possible.

Yours ever,

Graeme Thomas

Programme Co-ordinator
FCO Islamic World and UK Outreach Programmes

Report of cross-Whitehall meeting on 16 May at the FCO on the proposed Festival of Muslim Cultures UK 2006

Summary

High level of concern at lack of progress being made by the Festival team, despite financial and other support from Whitehall. Consensus reached that the Festival team should be given the opportunity to produce a revised business plan. Whitehall officials on receipt would then decide whether or not to endorse the Festival as previously proposed and on a 2006 timing.

Detail

1. Representatives from five Whitehall Departments (DCMS, DfES, British Council, Home Office and FCO) met to discuss the Festival of Muslim Cultures UK 2006 on 16 May. All present agreed that the aims and objectives of the Festival were worthwhile as that these should ideally receive the full backing of HMG. However, there were serious concerns over the project management of the Festival and the ability of the Festival Management team to deliver its objectives. Criticism was focussed on the following areas:

- Lack of a broad-base of involvement by the UK's leading Muslim organisations. The absence of the latter is making it difficult for the Festival team to achieve the credibility it requires to secure funding from, amongst others, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Funding problems are cited as being responsible for delaying progress in establishing the structure necessary to deliver festival events. However, it was pointed out that this was a problem of the Festival team's own making: by attempting to by-pass the assistance and experience that Muslim organisations could offer, for example in setting up regional co-ordination centres, it was trying to re-invent the wheel, while at the same time precluding itself from obtaining the funds in order to do this. A classic double-bind situation.
- The Arts Council have provided some of the funding (£ 25 k) for the Research and Development phase. The Festival team have been informed that their business plans more like a prospectus, lack sufficient detail and that their risk analysis was inadequate. No steps have been taken to remedy this and DCMS are now reluctant to give further support, unless evidence is supplied that this is being addressed. (Home Office have supported the development of the Festival's Film Live project with £ 46 k: this has provoked criticism from some Muslim organisations that have seen funding diverted from their activities. Potential for damaging criticism of HMG's policy if further support is forthcoming.)
- Festival too far behind where we believed it should be in its planning schedule for any of those present to have confidence that the majority of scheduled events would

consider postponing the Festival until 2007 or 2008 to ensure full support and inclusion from an essential list of backers. Other organisations may be tempted to stage a rival festival.

- Frequent staff changes within the Festival Management team led to a perception of mismanagement and a lack of coherence, continuity and prioritisation. There is recognition of the inspirational qualities of the Festival Director, but strong doubts about the business management of the proposal.

2. Next steps. The Festival Management team should supply a revised business plan including the following:

- A list of signed -up organisations that are seen as essential for a successful outcome. The business plan should attach recent letters of support.

Support seen as vital from:

The Muslim Council of Great Britain
Young Muslims UK
Islamic Society of Britain
The Islamic Foundation

Others to seek support from include:

Islamic Forum Europe
Itna Ashari Khoji Shia World Federation
Federation of Student Islamic Societies
Karimia Institute
London Muslim Centre
Islamic Cultural Centre
The Arts Council
The British Museum
British Muslim Forum
The Muslim Welfare House

The present business plan is not sufficiently comprehensive and is seen more as a prospectus of proposals. Business plans should include full financial forecasts with time lines, and detailed risk analysis. The present risk management register in the Summary Action Plan of January 2005 is unacceptable in this respect and requires far more detailed risk analysis.

- An indication of how the Festival Management team would spread control: evidence is required that other organisations with experience of hosting events for Muslims will be drawn into the decision-making processes.




24 May 2005

DOCUMENT 10:

Letter from William Ehrman (Director General of Defence-Intelligence, Foreign Office) to Sir David Omand (Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator and Permanent Secretary at Cabinet Office) regarding "Hearts and Minds of Muslims".
23 April 2004

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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

23 April 2004

Sir David Omand KCB
Security & Intelligence Co-ordinator
And Permanent Secretary
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

London SW1A 2AH

Tel: 020 7066 1000
Fax: 020 7066 1000

William Ehrman
Director General
(Defence & Intelligence)

Dear David

HEARTS AND MINDS AND MUSLIMS

1. Thank you for copying me your letter of 20 April to Nigel Sheinwald. FCO and SIS have already had some discussions in this area, and I understand that MOD have also done some work on information operations in the Islamic world (on which we would be interested in knowing more).
2. Seen from here, the potential for information operations backfiring on us is even greater than during the Cold War, when IRD and US counterparts had a mixed record. Dealing with Islamist extremism, the messages are more complex, the constituencies we would aim at are more difficult to identify, and greater damage could be done to the overall effort if links back to UK or US sources were revealed. The only sources that will be listened to are those with impeccable Muslim credentials. But the question is valid: can we play any role other than bystander as the various currents within Islam contend for hearts and minds of Muslims worldwide?
3. Our view is that actions will affect views in the region far more substantively than any form of message. Given that we will never eradicate extremist tendencies, the key question is: what action is most likely to marginalise them, and deprive them of the (often only) passive support they need to do real damage? So far, too many Middle Eastern regimes are sticking with the wrong answer: suppression and gerrymandering of superficial bits of democratic furniture, instead of bringing moderate Islamist tendencies into the power structure while they are still moderate, and confronting them with the realities of power and responsibility.
4. That does not fully answer the question about whether, in parallel to our reform efforts, there is scope for more effective and coordinated delivery of key messages. I think we need to make a clear distinction between messages that will bolster moderate, Western-oriented currents of thought in Islam (which is something that can be done overtly, through Ministerial and other public diplomacy, and which also needs to include genuine

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two-way dialogue) and messages aimed at more radicalised constituencies who are potential recruits to terrorism. The latter won't be convinced by calls for the Middle East to become a zone of peace and prosperity, or for market reforms in Arab countries to increase living standards (though they would be moved by it actually happening). They might, however, listen to religious arguments about the nature of jihad that, while anti-Western, eschew terrorism. The latter may be a more appropriate sphere for information operations.

5. I believe SIS are already talking to their liaisons in the Arab world who are engaged in 'hearts and minds' activity, to see what we can learn, and if we can help export models used by eg Egyptians or Saudis. We should recognise that these governments are always likely to have a more sophisticated understanding of the ideological issues, and more potential conduits for the message, than we do – but there may be scope for channelling these efforts more productively.
6. The McColl paper also mentions Cyberspace. I presume there are opportunities for engaging in the debates on Islamist websites, unattributably. But whoever was doing this would need a carefully worked-out script. There may also be ways to disrupt or impede extremist websites. I hope some proposals on all this will emerge from the ongoing cross-government work on setting up better systems for monitoring websites.
7. So we would not rule out developing new work in this area, some of which may spin out of our programmes on Engaging the Islamic World. But as always we are up against the problem of resources, and in particular linguists and experts. Perhaps a first step would be a one-off meeting between the relevant Departments and Agencies, to see if a common way forward can be adopted. Would you be interested in chairing such a meeting?
8. I am copying this to recipients of your letter.

Yours sincerely

[signed]

William Ehrman
Director-General (Defence & Intelligence)

DOCUMENT 11:

Email exchanges between Whitehall officials on Foreign Secretary Jack Straw's conversation with Home Secretary Charles Clarke on how to handle Hamas, Hizbollah and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. 30-31 August 2005. These emails are in reverse order.

TO: Robert Tinline
From: David Richmond
Subject: RE: CONF: CT: Foreign Secretary's conversation with the Home Secretary, 28 August
Sent: 31 August 2005 11:04:04 GMT

Rob

I have now spoken to C who says that he is not aware of any particular SIS view on proscription of H/H. He sees this as a political issue and a matter for the Foreign Secretary. On Eliza's concern about evidence, he points out that this is a perennial problem.

My conclusion is that there is no opposition to proscription from the Agencies but we shall need to make a careful judgment on whether we can make a case which will withstand legal challenge.

David

-----Original Message-----

From: David Richmond
Sent: Tuesday, August 30, 2005 12:50 PM
To: Robert Tinline
Cc: Philip Parham; Carl News; Claire H Smith; Michael Wood; Emily Willmott; Edward Oakden; Philippa Drew; Peter Gooderham; Anna Jackson; Alison Kemp; Derek Plumby * Cairo - Conf; Irfan Siddiq; Liz Kane
Subject: RE: CONF: CT: Foreign Secretary's conversation with the Home Secretary, 28 August

Rob

I have spoken to E M-B and will speak to C this afternoon. Eliza's account of the SyS position is in line with your summary - they do not oppose proscription but oppose reliance on their assessment to justify what they see as a change of policy not fact. She did, however, query some of your detailed description of SyS's position, claiming that the original 2001 assessment did not provide a watertight case for proscribing either the military or the political wings. Whether or not she is right in her recollection, the key point is that they have no new evidence which in their view would satisfy a court or tribunal that the political wings should now be proscribed in the event of a challenge.

She also made the point that the opposition to the proscription of H/H at the 19 August meeting came not from the Agencies but from the NIO because of the read across to Sinn Fein.

David

-----Original Message-----

From: Robert Tinline
Sent: Tuesday, August 30, 2005 11:16 AM
To: David Richmond
Cc: Philip Parham; Carl News; Claire H Smith; Michael Wood; Emily Willmott; Edward Oakden; Philippa Drew; Peter Gooderham; Anna Jackson; Alison Kemp; Robert Tinline; Derek Plumby * Cairo - Conf; Irfan Siddiq; Liz Kane
Subject: RE: CONF: CT: Foreign Secretary's conversation with the Home Secretary, 28 August

We will incorporate all of this into the briefing going up tonight, attaching, on Hizballah and Hamas, the four FS's letters to the HS and the supporting submissions; and on HuT, the latest Research Analyst paper and the SyS assessment for the last Proscription Working Group.

Could you speak to EMB (and "C" if possible) to confirm that our understanding below remains correct, alert them to the likely discussion on Thursday and allow us to brief the SoS on their likely stance?

CCs: grateful for any comments on my summaries below.

Rob

Rob Tinline
CTPD
x2585

H/H

As I understand it, the agencies do not oppose proscription, they oppose reliance on their assessments to justify what they see as a change of policy not fact.

The agencies (especially SyS who write the assessments on which proscription is considered) are reluctant to argue that the nature/structure of either organisation has fundamentally changed since 2001. They argue that their assessment in 2001 could have justified proscribing the whole of both organisations. A policy decision was taken only to proscribe a part of each. Their current assessments could similarly justify proscribing the whole of both organisations but, given the assessments have not substantially changed, could not explain a change of policy between 2001 and now. We have argued that we have more evidence to justify proscribing the whole of both organisations and that the context in which they are operating has changed dramatically since before 9-11. The agencies have been unmoved, arguing it is a policy decision. While the HO, and now the Home Sec, have argued that unless the agencies change their assessment the risk of losing a challenge is too high.

HuT/HM

The under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Sec may proscribe an organisation if he believes the organisation: "(a) commits or participates in acts of terrorism, (b) prepares for terrorism, (c) promotes or encourages terrorism, or (d) is otherwise concerned in terrorism."

The Home Office explained their first listings against the following criteria:
"(a) the nature and scale of an organisation's activities
"(b) the specific threat it poses to the UK
"(c) the specific threat it poses to British nationals overseas

"(d) the extent of the organisation's presence in the UK
"(e) the need to support other members of the international community in the global fight against terrorism"

HuT is active in many countries and banned in some (Azerbaijan, Egypt, Germany Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan). A number of governments cite HuT involvement in violence and links to terrorist organisations (with little supporting evidence). There are unconfirmed claims that HuT cells and individual members have participated in attempted coups in the Middle East. And it is certainly extremist. But there is no apparent case to proscribe HuT because its activities abroad include involvement in terrorism. Indeed it is not entirely clear whether they would be caught under a future criterion of "justifying or condoning violence". Much of their literature explicitly rejects the use of violence.

Supporting other States' work against terrorism is not one of the statutory tests, so I doubt we could rely on that alone if we did not think HuT were involved in terrorism, especially as most of those who have banned it are not known for tolerance of democratic dissent. (The only Western democracy to act, Germany, banned it as anti-semitic not terrorist.)

-----Original Message-----

From: Irfan Siddiq
Sent: 30 August 2005 09:35
To: David Richmond, Philip Parham, Carl Newson, Claire H Smith, Michael Wood, Emily Willmott, Edward Oskem, Philippa Drew, Peter Gooderham, Anna Jackson, Alison Kemp, Robert Tinline, Derek Plumbly * Cairo - Conf
Cc: Peter Hayes (London)
Subject: CONF: CT: Foreign Secretary's conversation with the Home Secretary, 28 August

The Foreign Secretary spoke to the Home Secretary on 28 August about a number of CT related issues.

Hamas/Hizbullah:

The Foreign Secretary raised the proscription of Hamas and Hizbullah, reviewing the history, the recent evidence suggesting that there was no distinction between the political and military wings and repeating his belief that both organisations should be proscribed in full. Clarke said that he had no strong views on the matter and viewed it as a foreign policy lead, which was the Foreign Secretary's call. He noted, however, that the agencies were arguing against the move and that the Foreign Secretary was "isolated" in his view. The Foreign Secretary was surprised by the view of the agencies, which he said he would look into. Clarke said that he was happy in principle (i.e if the Foreign Secretary could square the agencies) to include Hamas and Hizbullah with the batch of organisations that he was already planning on putting up for proscription before the next session of parliament.

ACTION: Careful for information on what exactly the agencies'

arguments against proscription are. The Foreign Secretary has also asked for the relevant back papers on Hamaz/Hizbullah proscription for today's box, in preparation for the PM's meeting on Thursday.

Hizb ut Tahrir / Al Muhajiroun:

The Foreign Secretary asked about proscription of HuT/AM. HuT was banned by the NUS and a number of school boards and he felt that we should move against them now. He was prepared to look into constructive arguments against HuT on foreign policy grounds. Clarke said he would prefer putting off proscription of HuT until after the proposed amendments to the current legislation: it would, for example, be much easier to argue that HuT met the criteria of "justifying and glorifying violence". Clarke said that his fear was that the Government would lose the case for proscription and so wanted to act cautiously. The Foreign Secretary added that he felt that we should in any case move against AM. If it was now no longer functional, there would be no problem, and if the move was challenged it would prove that AM was no longer defunct and would help identify those associated with AM.

ACTION: The Foreign Secretary has also asked for the relevant back papers on HuT/AM proscription for today's box. He would also like as soon as possible, work to be done on HuT activities abroad. He would like to pursue the foreign policy argument approach and wants to know if there is a case that can be made on foreign policy grounds. He feels that the distinction currently drawn between HuT in the UK and HuT abroad is spurious. He recalls that MeK were proscribed in the UK on the basis of their activities abroad.

MoUs:

The Foreign Secretary said that proscription of HuT, could potentially help improve CT understanding and co-operation with states such as Egypt where HuT was already banned. Clarke said he had wanted to raise the MoU with Egypt. The Foreign Secretary explained the sensitivity of the September Presidential elections. Clarke said he was content to wait until after the Presidential elections, but did not want to wait until the November parliamentary elections. The Foreign Secretary said we would re-engage with the Egyptians after the Presidential elections.

Clarke raised the issue of resources dedicated to the MoUs. We had to have the resources necessary. The Foreign Secretary said that as far as he was aware no potential MoUs were being held up for resource reasons. He agreed that we could not allow progress to be held up by resource constraints.

Irfan

Irfan Siddiq

DOCUMENT 12:

Email from Riaz Patel (Foreign Office, Engaging with Islamic World Group) to Andrew Jackson (Foreign Office, Deputy Director of Engaging with Islamic World Group) regarding the subject of creating a "UK Muslim Scholars Roadshow". Organisations such as Q-News, FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies) and the YMO (Young Muslim Organisation) are recommended. 16 August 2005 .

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From: Riaz Patel, EIWG
Date: 16 August 2005

cc: Frances Guy, Director
Mockbul Ali, EIWG
Ian Felton, GOF

Reference: //2005

To: Andrew Jackson, Deputy Director - EIWG

SUBJECT: UK NGO SELECTION FOR ROADSHOW PROJECT

Summary

1. EIWG was tasked to recommend a UK NGO to deliver a successful UK Muslim Scholars Roadshow. This project will be delivered under the auspices of the Empowering Voices of Mainstream Islam GOF project.
2. I recommend we appoint a coalition made up of Q-News, Federation of Student Islamic Society's (FOSIS) and Young Muslim Organisation (YMO) to do this. The coalition would be known as, 'Mahabba-un Limited' Scholars Tour.

Detail

3. EIWG officials short-listed three UK NGO's considered to have the relevant experience to run a Muslim Scholars Roadshow. Evaluation of each NGO was conducted through a mixture of basic Internet research and direct contact. Four broad evaluation criteria were used; interest in the event, subject expertise, organisational capacity and regional networks. The simple table below highlights my findings;

NGO	Interest	Expertise	Capacity	Networks
FOSIS	√	Moderate experience of managing large projects	√	√
Q-News	√	√	√	√
YMO	√	√	Limited resources to deliver UK wide	√

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			projects.	
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Why the coalition?

4. The coalition appears to meet all of our basic requirements. Collectively they have experience of successfully organising events across the UK and the capacity to deliver the Roadshow on time and within available resources. In addition they have the support and credibility with a wide range access of Muslim organisations should they need to augment their team with specialists. All the organisations were asked detailed questions ascertaining what we want from the event and were very open and transparent about their organisational strengths and limitations. They did not just give assurances of success.
5. The capacity and experience of individual Muslim organisations is generally limited when tasked to deliver national projects. The target demographic of young Muslims is particularly challenging for the more established organisations. Bearing in mind the time sensitive nature of the project we were unable to formally approach these organisations. However, the coalition of the three Muslim organisations combines experience of managing major projects with experience of working with young people. We believe that the outcome, even with a more comprehensive process of elimination would have been the same.
6. This project is a key Ministerial priority and expectations from our own Ministers, and those at the HO are very high. We have been given clear direction to accelerate the delivery of the project as soon as practicably possible.

Next Steps

7. We have already started preliminary work with the three organisations and will be signing a contract with the coalition to formalise the project within the next few days.

Riaz Patel
Engaging the Islamic World Group
W2.81D
Tel: 020 7008 4139
Fax: 020 7008 2254

NO. OF ATTACHMENTS: 1 (GOF Project Bid)

Note regarding DOCUMENT 12: The Foreign Office have pointed out that Riaz Patel did not join the Department until 21 November 2005, so he could not have written such a minute.

Acknowledgements

The ideas in this pamphlet have been preying on my mind for too long. I am grateful to everyone at Policy Exchange for enabling me to make them flesh.

In particular I wish to thank Dean Godson, whose driving energy and immense professionalism kept the project on the rails. I also owe much to Policy Exchange's outstanding Research Associate, Zein Ja'far, who coolly fielded so many queries at the last minute.

The pamphlet was produced to coincide with a Channel 4 documentary on the same subject and the two exercises have fed into each other at every stage. The team at Mentorn TV has been inspiring in its dedication to making serious television. Producer-director Louise Turner has shown a devotion to the project beyond the call of duty and should rightly be credited as the joint author of this pamphlet. Sarah Robinson and May Abdalla were the perfect researchers.

Haras Rafiq generously gave of his time and explained many things that I had not previously understood. I will always be in his debt.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and ideas to the pamphlet and programme, especially if they did not make the final edit. These included Tahir Abbas, Khurshid Ahmed, Chetan Bhatt, Farmida Bi, Isabel Carlisle, Kishwar Falkner, Michael Gove, Murad Qureishi and Mecca2Medina.

John Kampfner, my editor at the *New Statesman*, should be thanked for allowing me to rehearse some of these ideas in the pages of the magazine and for giving me the flexibility to explore my obsessions

Finally, Vanessa has been an immensely patient partner when it often seemed as if the Islamists had taken over our lives.



Policy Exchange is an independent research institute whose purpose is to contribute to public understanding of a broad range of social, economic and political issues. Using an evidence-based approach to policy development, it generates fresh ideas in support of strong communities in a free society.

“Martin Bright’s unique run of classified ‘scoops’ on the British State’s policy of accommodating Islamist reactionaries at home and abroad has set all kinds of dovescotes a-flutter in Whitehall. Now, courtesy of Policy Exchange, Bright has brought them all together in one accessible pamphlet - as well as some hitherto unpublished materials which the Government would rather we never had seen. Normally, you would have to wait three decades under the 30 Year Rule for access to this sort of insider information. Now, we have that information in “real time”.

After 7/7, the Prime Minister rightly stated that the rules of the game had changed. Earlier this year, in an address at the Foreign Policy Centre, he specifically identified the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Wahabbism as sources of the poisoning of the discourse between Muslims and non-Muslims. Martin Bright’s work shows that whatever Tony Blair may say, inside the Government which he heads, little has changed. The British State continues to crave some unsavoury partners from the Islamist world. Meanwhile, in the words of one very senior British security official, “nice Muslims are spoken for. We don’t need to worry about them”. The problem with this approach is that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. No wonder radicalisation proceeds apace when the Government too often treats with radicals. Martin Bright gives us the gory details of how this is done - as no one before. ”

Michael Gove, MP for Surrey Heath and author of “Celsius 7/7”

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