

ISLAMIC EXTREMISM: THE GREATEST THREAT TO BRITAIN'S FUTURE

Clare George-Hilley, a Public Affairs Director and Head of Research for Parliament Street, outlines how we have allowed religious extremism a free reign for too long, and makes recommendations to the Government on how to counter it.

INTRODUCTION

Britain has long been the home of tolerance and equal opportunity for people from all walks of life. We are the country that defeated Nazi Germany, ridding the world of one of the greatest evils known to man, proudly upholding liberty and never giving in to tyranny, no matter what the cost.

Our forefathers gave their lives so that our generation can live in peace and enjoy freedoms that are now so commonplace that we almost take them from granted. Many hundreds of thousands of people have travelled to Britain to make it their home; their culture and diversity enriching our society as well as enhancing our economy.

Yet it is in this climate of tolerance that is so recognisable in the British way of life, that we have allowed intolerance to flourish behind the scenes. Under the guise of free speech and respect for other cultures, the evils of Islamic extremism have been able to fester unchallenged. We have in many ways been the architects of our own misfortune, allowing extremism to gain a foothold in different levels of society.

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The warning signs have been there for many years, but we chose to ignore them. From gender segregation in Islamic schools to alarming protests where extremists waved signs declaring 'behead those who insult Islam' without fear of arrest, Britain has been sleep-walking into the hands of extremists for the last decade.

THE PROBLEM

It is no surprise that our schools have been infiltrated as part of the Trojan Horse plot in Birmingham. In one school, facilities were used to copy and produce DVDs of Osama Bin Laden's training videos and children were addressed by Sheikh Shady al-Suleiman, a fundamentalist preacher who has called on God to "destroy the enemies of Islam."³¹

Many hundreds of extremists have packed their bags and travelled to Syria and Iraq to torture, to maim and to behead innocent people.³² The extent of their psychotic behaviour can be seen in their use of social media to glorify and to celebrate murder and brutality.

For many years, under the last Labour government, openly preaching hatred on the streets of Britain went unpunished. Abu Hamza, for example, spent months defying the authorities and enjoying taxpayer funding of his vicious agenda, which poisoned the minds of young Muslims without anybody able to stop him. Finally, under the Conservatives, he was extradited and jailed in the United States on charges of terrorism, but the fact that this dangerous criminal had evaded justice for so long is in itself a scandal.

³¹ Ware J, 'The plot to Islamise Birmingham's schools' *Standpoint* Sept 2014

³² Wintour P and Watt N, 'Up to 400 British citizens may be fighting in Syria, says William Hague' *The Guardian* 16 June 2014

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In Rotherham, gangs of young men were systematically abusing underage girls, again without fear of arrest. An independent report by Professor Alexis Jay revealed the true extent of the abuse, and highlighted the Police, Council and local government agencies failure to take action. The report concluded that "...the collective failures of political and officer leadership were blatant," yet there were no real punishments for the men who abused thousands of children.³³

Much of the material covered in the report was too shocking to print in the press. Children were raped by multiple perpetrators, trafficked to other towns and cities in the north of England, abducted, beaten, and intimidated.

Another was doused in petrol and threatened with being set alight, some were threatened with guns and others were forced to witness rape and warned they would be next. Another child in the report, known only as 'H' was found drunk in the back of a car with a suspected abuser, who had indecent photos of her on his phone – she was just 12 years old.

You may think such horrific incidents were impossible in modern Britain, but you would be wrong. These threats are regular, active and growing, and underline the problem that we have created for ourselves by allowing extremism to flourish in our country. They were happening then, and they are almost certainly happening now.

The left's solution to the problem is to brand anyone who dares confront it as 'racist' instead of taking action on a crisis that risks putting the British way of life at risk. After the murder of soldier Lee Rigby on the streets of Britain, the public no longer buy into the left's argument that we should sit back and shut up in the face of Islamic

³³ Jay A, *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013)*, 2014

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extremism. The public want tangible action and answers, and the left's usual defence of extremist practices has finally run out of steam.

If we wish to drain the swamp of hatred which is polluting our country, we must ensure engagement with moderate Muslims and do more to help them root out terror and prevent extremism from gaining a foothold. The positive example they set must be taken and projected across the whole of the UK, to capture the imagination of the young and make embarking on the road to extremism impossible and more importantly, immoral.

Eric Pickles, the Communities Secretary, received much criticism from the Muslim Council of Britain when he wrote a letter calling on Imams to, "explain and demonstrate how faith in Islam can be part of British identity".³⁴ Despite the name calling, Pickles was right, and those who are serious about ridding our country of extremism will be helping, not hindering his efforts.

His letter continued, "We must show our young people, who may be targeted, that extremists have nothing to offer them. We must show them that there are other ways to express disagreement, that their right to do so is dependent on the very freedoms that extremists seek to destroy."

These were wise words from a Minister seeking to ensure that moderate Muslims are empowered to tell a positive message about Islam and can help young, impressionable people practise their religion peacefully. Such cohesive activity will ensure that negative perceptions about Islam amongst the British people are tackled and that young people will no longer be preyed upon by those seeking to indoctrinate and radicalise for their own twisted ideology.

³⁴ Pickles E, Open letter to Imams, 2014

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NEXT STEPS

There are three 'next steps' that Britain must take if it wishes to win the war against Islamic extremism, which is without doubt a huge threat to the freedoms which we all hold dear. There is no single solution to this problem, but, by working together, we will find that solution to overcome it.

The first is to work with Muslim leaders in mosques and other organisations to make it clear that Islam totally rejects violence and that those who go down that path have no place within the religion, or in Britain. This requires moderate Muslims to speak up louder than the extremists, with full government and public backing, to ensure that the narrative is not hijacked by those who wish to do us harm. Muslim leaders in Britain need to feel empowered and supported when they speak out, and we should do everything in our power to enable them to do so.

The second is to come down much harder on extremism. It is a national scandal that Britain is one of the leading suppliers of terrorists to Syria. We have to ask ourselves what is happening to our country when this is the case. But then again, when we allow our schools to be transformed into mini-training camps and enable preachers to spread hatred openly, what else should we expect? The recent rush of recruits heading out to commit unspeakable atrocities grew up in modern Britain and it is therefore clear that this can no longer be tolerated. Passports should be seized and perhaps more importantly, family members and friends should be properly questioned to find out exactly how much individuals knew. It is the only way to gather the necessary intelligence and prevent further atrocities.

The third and final step is for the Muslim community to become more proactive in rooting out extremism. Often when an atrocity has been committed it is easier to stay quiet than it is to speak up and condemn,

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for fear of unnecessary and unfair association. But in a modern, free Britain, the public should provide total support for Imams and other leaders who are doing their best to prevent and condemn terrorist activity and to keep our country safe.

Whatever our challenges, Britain remains a strong, tolerant and fair country, where people of all faiths and indeed views are welcomed, but we cannot afford to allow our culture of freedom to become an escalator for those who wish to do us, and others, harm. For too long we have allowed jihadists to fund their illegal activities on a life of benefits and preach hatred without being properly reprimanded by the Police.

We have fought many wars at home and overseas in our quest to maintain our values and keep our country and others safe. We have overcome great evils against all odds and upheld the flame of liberty and freedom despite our darkest days.

Working together, Britain will overcome and at last rid itself of Islamic extremism, but our failure to tackle this serious problem wherever and whenever it occurs will mean that task may take decades instead of years.