



BEYOND PREVENT

A REAL ALTERNATIVE TO
SECURITISED POLICIES

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CAGE is an independent advocacy organisation working to empower communities impacted by the War on Terror policies worldwide. The organisation highlights and campaigns against such policies in hope to achieve a world free from oppression and injustice.

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FOREWORD

PREVENT has been criticised in many quarters for a range of reasons that range from its lack of scientific credibility to the racist profiling that it engages in at a societal level. In thinking about how we can move beyond PREVENT, many arguments trap themselves within the logic of PREVENT and its existence, rather than seeking a more complete understanding of how we can move society to a place of increased justice and safety.

'Beyond PREVENT' seeks to present a new way forward for all those communities organising towards a new future, one that places trust back in the public, and rejects the militarisation of the state. Whether it is environmental activists, young black men being suspected of being involved in gangs, or Muslims suspected of being on the pathway to 'radicalisation', there is increasing need for communities to come together in order to reject the hostile environment that has perpetuated a fear that we as communities are supposed to have of one another.

This report seeks to foreground principles that we can use as a baseline for the activism we are engaged with in order to move far beyond the lowest common denominator arguments that are often presented as providing short term solutions to securitisation. Building 'human rights' safeguards into racist profiling policies can never bring about healthy, safe societies, and so by CAGE presenting the landscape

of moving beyond PREVENT within a stratosphere of other demands, a clearer image emerges that provides long-term solutions.

We believe that in seeking a just and secure future we cannot impose a poverty of ambition on ourselves, hence the broad scope of the demands here. We hope that those who are willing to meet the challenges we collectively face will join with us in organising in our respective areas, but with the intention of bringing about an end to all repressive policies and legislation.

Dr Asim Qureshi

CAGE Research Director

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Review of PREVENT, initiated by a House of Lords amendment to the Counter-terrorism and Border Security (CTBS) Act 2019, is due to commence imminently, and will be headed by crossbench peer Lord Carlile, who oversaw the 2011 review of PREVENT.

The government's communications around the review since its announcement - which lay down the gauntlet to PREVENT's critics to, effectively, put up or shut up - give the impression of a self-assured administration, who believe themselves to be firmly in control of the process.

In their eyes, the review will only need to be a superficial exercise concerning itself with the administration of the program, or its perception among communities, rather than the substantive political questions that have long haunted it.

As a result, the review is likely to offer little more than surface-level changes, while legitimising the prevailing direction of travel - namely the cementing of PREVENT under the banner of 'safeguarding', its expansion to cover the far-right (and other 'extremisms') and the devolution of its administration to local authorities.

There, it is important to push the debate on PREVENT and counter-extremism wider, rather than allow it to be boxed in to the terms as set by government.

The question we should collectively be asking is not *how can we make PREVENT better*, but rather *how can we build healthy, safe, societies* - and in order to do so, *what are the social and political conditions necessary to be able to organise collectively for a better world*, and *how can we do so without allowing our principles of safety and justice to be co-opted by the logic of counter-extremism*.

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate these discussions by:

- i) Rethinking the foundations of PREVENT
- ii) Reimagining a path to healthy, safe societies in Britain
- iii) Moving beyond the circular discussions on the 'effectiveness' of PREVENT that have captured much of the discourse in recent years.

Through this, we hope to broaden our collective political horizons and begin to think about what a post-PREVENT society can actually look like.



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**THE QUESTION WE SHOULD
COLLECTIVELY BE ASKING
IS NOT HOW CAN WE MAKE
PREVENT BETTER, BUT
RATHER HOW CAN WE BUILD
HEALTHY, SAFE SOCIETIES**

THE STATE OF PREVENT

It is worth briefly revisiting the state of PREVENT in 2019, because it looks very different from how it did a mere five years ago, let alone since its inception.

REFERRALS

After an upsurge around 2014, the referral figures for PREVENT have stabilised at 7,000+ annually (7,318 in 2017/18)¹.

Of these, consistently a third come from the education sector (33% in 2017/18)² and 95% are 'false positives' - in that only 5% receive Channel interventions for 'deradicalisation', whilst the others are discarded or offloaded along the way.

Those exhibiting 'far-right ideology' have increased as a proportion of referrals (to much hype³⁴⁵), constituting 18% in 2017/18⁶.

This has given credence to the notion of 'cumulative extremism', or 'reciprocal radicalisation' - whereby 'Islamist extremists' stoke far-right 'extremists' in reaction, and so 'extremist' activity is perceived as travelling back and forth⁷, itself giving the perception that far-right and racist narratives did not exist prior to 7/7.

The latest stats have also produced a new ideological category of "Mixed, unstable or unclear" ideology, which is now perceived as a 'threat', and can effectively act as a catch-all⁸.

THE TRIPOLAR COUNTER-EXTREMISM APPARATUS

As of 2015, the counter-extremism arena has split into a tripolar system, consisting of:

PREVENT, Countering Extremism, and Integration.

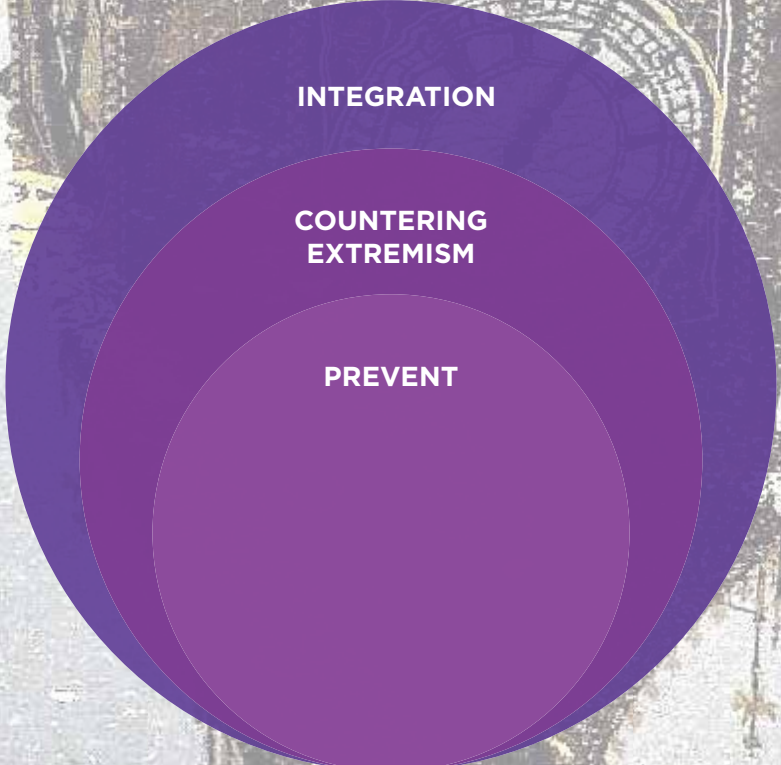
What was once confined to PREVENT in the singular has now expanded and been diffused between these interlocking poles of the counter-extremism apparatus.

To make a rough distinction, the three poles are connected as such:

PREVENT deals with defusing people who are perceived to be being drawn towards terrorism, via 'extremist ideology'; Countering Extremism deals with wider socio-cultural anxieties and issues which are supposedly indicative of 'extremist ideologies' flourishing; and Integration deals with creating "resilient communities" which can be buffered from 'extremist ideologies' and practices.

All are threaded through with the preoccupation with 'extremist' ideology

- as spearheaded and defined by PREVENT
- at the individual, institutional and community levels. In combination they form a whole-society apparatus of counter-



The counter-extremism apparatus c.2019

extremism.

The Counter Extremism Strategy⁹ was launched in 2015¹⁰ following, and directly influenced by, the false ‘Trojan Horse’ affair in Muslim-majority schools in Birmingham.

As such, the Strategy drew within the ambit of counter-extremism the issues of extremist ‘entryism’ within schools, charities and universities, as well as ‘hate crime’, Sharia arbitration councils, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) falls under the work of this Strategy, as does the Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT)¹¹ scheme, which provides funding for civil society organisations in order to build a state-sponsored counter-extremism network.

The BSBT is very much a throwback to the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder scheme under the Labour iteration of PREVENT, the funds-with-strings-attached model that was heavily criticised towards the end of the Labour government’s tenure^{12 13}.

The Integration agenda concerns itself with ‘community cohesion’ and combating segregation, which is posited as a vulnerability factor for radicalisation.

Despite promises made at the beginning of the decade that “the Government will not securitise its integration strategy. This has been a mistake in the past”¹⁴, this connection between community cohesion and counter-extremism is described as such in the CONTEST (Counter Terrorism Strategy) 2018 paper:

“cohesive communities by tackling segregation and feelings of alienation, which can provide fertile ground for extremist messages”¹⁵.

The Integrated Communities Action Plan published in February 2019¹⁶ turns towards sectors like English language lessons for migrants, regulation of independent education and homeschooling, and marriage certification, as well as promoting

the more robust promotion of Fundamental British Values.

‘A successful integration strategy is important in its own right. It is also important to counter-terrorism, and to Prevent in particular, because there is an association between support for terrorist violence and a rejection of a strong and integrated society. We judge that communities who do not or cannot participate in civic society are more likely to be vulnerable to radicalisation.’

CONTEST strategy, 2018¹⁷

‘Such division in our communities can also be exploited by extreme right-wing and neo-Nazi groups to stoke tensions and fuel hatred. These can in turn reinforce others’ desire not to identify with our country, its institutions and values, leading to reciprocal radicalisation.’

Counter Extremism Strategy, 2015¹⁸

This ballooning of the counter-extremism apparatus only further underscores why a review tinkering with PREVENT in isolation is insufficient. It is now safe to say that PREVENT has become but one cog in a counter-extremist machine which must be dismantled from its root.

Since the Counter-terrorism & Security (CTS) Act 2015, PREVENT has assumed the mantle of ‘safeguarding’¹⁹; it has been consistently framed as a means of protecting vulnerable people from ‘radicalisers’, and as slotting in to the pre-existing safeguarding policy framework.

“[The] brand is safeguarding; I will sell safeguarding all day long. We call it Prevent, but it is about safeguarding people from being exploited.”

- Ben Wallace MP, former Security Minister²⁰

This rebrand has been promoted enthusiastically by government and PREVENT practitioners.

It has also helped smooth out resistance from education and healthcare workers now subject to the Prevent duty, by recasting surveillance as benign safeguarding.

As part of this safeguarding turn, there has

been a move in the Channel component of PREVENT from policing towards localised provision; being administered by Local Authorities.

Operation Dovetail was a scheme piloted in 2017 across seven areas, Brighton, Croydon, Haringey, Kent, Kirklees, Lancashire, Luton, Oldham and Swansea.

It was initiated with the purpose of '[de-securitising Channel by transferring responsibilities for some elements of Channel from the police to local government, sitting more closely with local authorities] wider safeguarding responsibilities.'²¹

Though the pilot results were mixed - with the scheme failing to 'resolve challenges around police data sharing, managing referrals in smaller towns, and oversight of programmes'²² - the Home Office appears to be pushing ahead with the transition²³.

Operation Dovetail was also promoted in the Greater Manchester Combined Authority's 2018 report A Shared Future report on Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion, commissioned after the Manchester Arena attacks, and which promoted a second run of the pilot²⁴.

The Counter-terrorism & Border Security Act 2019 opened the door further for this transition, by allowing Local Authorities to refer individuals to Channel panels, whereas previously only police had that ability²⁵.

Despite being described as a way of 'de-securitising Channel', what this transition actually does is to further securitise local government, and draw local authorities more deeply into the web of PREVENT.

The idea that PREVENT is safeguarding must be challenged as an opportunistic rebrand by security agencies, that has the potential to do great damage to the notion of safeguarding itself.

AN EXPANDING ARRAY OF EXTREMISMS

Since the 2011 revision of PREVENT, 'extremism' has been defined by the strategy as 'vocal or active opposition to Fundamental British Values...and calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in [the UK] or overseas'²⁶ - and this has applied predominantly to 'Islamist extremism' and more recently to the far-right whilst covering both violent and non-violent 'extremism'.

That definition has served as both a boon and a hindrance to the government's ambitions.

It has proved malleable enough to allow PREVENT and other executive counter-extremism powers to be extended at will, but on the other hand it has failed to gain mass acceptance, and has rendered the term unfit for placing on a legal footing²⁷²⁸. This legal footing would have been a prerequisite for more wide-ranging powers, such as those in the aborted Counter-Extremism/Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill^{29,30}.

To circumvent this problem, the government has now embarked on an exercise to generate popular consensus around a working definition of 'extremism', which will then likely form the basis of future counter-extremism legislation and powers, without having to define 'extremism' legally.

That work is currently being undertaken by the aforementioned Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE), which has conducted research into public experiences and understanding of 'extremism' - which it describes even more loosely, as something that can be instinctively felt upon observation:

*"Throughout our engagement, we have found people are able to describe what extremist activities, attitudes and behaviours look like; and talk about the harms they believe these are causing...For our Study, we want those providing evidence to consider the definitions **we have***

provided but to use their own perceptions on what they consider to be extremism.”

- Commission for Countering Extremism³¹

Its October 2019 report, Challenging Hateful Extremism, proposed the adoption of the term ‘Hateful Extremism’, moving even further away from the notion of violence, and defined as consisting of:

Behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred, or equivocate about and make the moral case for violence; and that draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to the wellbeing, survival or success of an in-group; and that cause, or are likely to cause, harm to individuals, communities or wider society.

- Commission for Countering Extremism³².

Javid referenced, in the context of ‘extremism’, protests against LGBT lessons in Birmingham schools, homophobic attacks, forced marriage, anti-semitism and racist attacks, whilst government and popular discourse has consistently drawn attention to the mediums through which ‘extremism’ is proliferated - namely, the threat presented by social media and the online space^{33, 34, 35}.

The ‘extremism’ net has also been cast wider.

The CCE has taken an interest in the idea of “far-left”^{36,37} and Sikh ‘extremism’³⁸, and the Home Office’s Extremism Analysis Unit is known to have compiled a report on ‘far-left extremism’³⁹ whilst the influential rightwing think-tank Policy Exchange released a report calling for the CCE to ensure that “far left, anarchist and environmentalist extremism are sufficiently recognised and challenged within a wider national strategy on extremism”⁴⁰, in response to the work of the environment direct action group Extinction Rebellion⁴¹. True enough, news has emerged that an Extinction Rebellion protestor had been referred to PREVENT by his local NHS Trust⁴².

Indeed the Home Office’s admission to Netpol that they have “agreed to stop using the term “domestic extremism””⁴³ - effectively, the political variant of ‘extremism’ - in light of its ongoing efforts to “refine and mainstream new terminology” may foreshadow the merging of political dissent into the broader ‘extremist’ category.

This has all been underscored by demands from the public - including Muslims - to capture far-right activity under the banner of ‘extremism’/‘terrorism’, alongside Muslim ‘extremism’.

To reiterate: expanding the range of targets will not make us any safer, nor undermine the Islamophobia intrinsic to modern counter-terrorism - it merely legitimises the repressive counter-terror apparatus, to everybody’s detriment.

As stated succinctly by the University & College Union (UCU) at their Annual Congress 2019:

“That promoting Prevent as a tool to combat Islamophobia is cynical and lacking credibility, given the role of Prevent in institutionalising Islamophobia.

...the media campaign to rehabilitate Prevent is designed to further entrench the repressive apparatus of Prevent in universities, colleges and other public bodies.”

- University & College Union⁴⁴

Having honed its craft on Muslim communities, counter-extremism is being exported to other causes and communities, and being expanded to include more behaviours and social ills which are far removed from political violence in any meaningful sense of the word.

The meaning of 'extremism' is being stretched so far beyond the realm of violence that it loses any analytic power as a term, which only serves to strengthen the state's coercive power.



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**WITH THIS CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS,
WE CAN REASONABLY EXPECT THE
UNVEILING OF A NEW DEFINITION OF
‘EXTREMISM’ IN THE NEAR FUTURE
WHICH WILL CAPTURE A WIDER RANGE OF
POLITICAL ‘THREATS’, PARTICULARLY THOSE
EMANATING FROM THE POLITICAL LEFT,
WHO WILL THEN LIKELY FIND THEMSELVES
UNDER GREATER SCRUTINY BY PREVENT.**

PART 1: RETHINKING THE FOUNDATIONS OF PREVENT

PREVENT has been buffeted by opposition, coming under harsh criticisms and dismissed as being flawed, discriminatory, inadequate and counterproductive almost since its launch.

In the intervening 13 years, the failures have only mounted.

Cases of individuals going on to commit acts of violence despite being within the purview of PREVENT and/or security services have only increased - a recent prominent case being attempted Parsons Green bomber Ahmed Hassan⁴⁵.

Meanwhile, thousands of other baseless PREVENT referrals/false positives and interventions have left in their wake swathes of deeply distressed individuals and generated widespread distrust of public institutions among Muslims, whilst undermining the very social fabric of Britain for all.

Every grim warning proclaimed by PREVENT critics as the Counter-terrorism and Security Act was making its passage through Parliament has come true.

The statutory Prevent duty imposed on the public sector in that Act has seen PREVENT referrals skyrocket, and has cast a chilling effect on discussion and organising within the education sector.

Not only this, but PREVENT has also embedded itself in social services and institutions across society - indeed CAGE has documented its role in court-sanctioned removal of children from their parents⁴⁶.

Calls have been issued from prominent institutions, politicians, trade unions and organisations - Muslim and non-Muslim - to scrap the program, whilst others have put forward the more timid suggestion that it be "reformed".

But the question that emerges, and is always demanded of opponents to the programme, is: *what is the alternative?*

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF BUILDING SOCIETY, NOT AN ALTERNATIVE TO PREVENT

Indeed former Security Minister Ben Wallace has gone on record saying:

“Whenever I hear people criticise Prevent and I ask, “Okay, what would you do?”, they just describe Prevent, and they come back to the bit about the Prevent brand being tainted”

- Ben Wallace MP⁴⁷

At CAGE we are firm in our belief that the issues with PREVENT are systemic and go far deeper than perceptions of the “brand”; PREVENT must be abolished, not merely replaced with an alternative.

Insofar as an ‘alternative’ to PREVENT means a program predicated on the same foundations - namely one operating at the level of pre-crime, that considers ‘extremist ideology’ as a determinant of political violence, and therefore accepts the state must intervene to defuse and change such ideologies - we oppose this.

Such an approach has only amounted to thought policing, legitimised the arbitrary encroachment of coercion and repression by the state into the public and private spheres, pathologised beliefs and ideas

within a racist programme, and opened the gateway for all manner of state abuses under the guise of ‘countering extremism’.

So an alternative that only replicates the work of PREVENT by another name must be resisted.

The pursuit of ‘security’ in counter-terrorism is designed to be never-ending, generating its own justifications - we must step outside of this frame in order to formulate new ways of understanding society.

How to stop extremism therefore cannot be the ‘zero point’ from which our analysis proceeds, as this comes embedded with many assumptions that lend themselves to discriminatory, securitised outcomes like PREVENT.

Though hinging on reasonable, practical demands, this is no small task: we are effectively calling for a wide-ranging re-evaluation of how politics in Britain works, and a different way of building society.

And so this briefing is directed less at

government(s), than at the civil society -
activists, communities, trade unions, NGOs
- that can generate the political will needed
to force governments into action, and help
begin the process of rebuilding a post-
PREVENT society.



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BREAKING THE IMPASSE

Contained within the inner world of PREVENT and British counter-extremism is a set of assumptions that we believe must be challenged.

These include the notions that:

i) Extremism - as a set of beliefs or ideology that deviate from a prescribed norm - is a thing (and conversely, that any such mainstream ideological norm exists in the first place).

ii) Extremism precedes and can predict terrorism/political violence - whether analogised as a conveyor belt, iceberg or otherwise - and this is an essentially a linear process, even if presented as multi-faceted.

iii) The state is the only arbiter of safety - meaning it must exercise its power to intervene into the realm of 'extremist' ideologies.

These assumptions are in turn crystallised in tools like the ERG22+ (Extremism Risk Guidance factors), PREVENT training and PREVENT itself.

This is the ideological basis upon which PREVENT functions.

And it is jealously guarded: once the conveyor belt narrative was debunked it was reformulated as the 'iceberg analogy'⁴⁸⁴⁹⁵⁰; once the state surveillance aspect of PREVENT was challenged it was recast as stated-sponsored 'safeguarding', and any challenge to the notion of 'Fundamental British Values' can now automatically be designated 'extremist' ideology, to be combatted.

Over the years, the state has morphed its response as each new challenge arises; anything to circumvent the problems with the substantive underpinnings of the programme.

However, if this basis remains untouched, then all we are able to do is to pivot around the question without striking the core, and any alternative framed around this will only ever end up as PREVENT by another name.

To invert the government's favoured analogy: PREVENT is the tip of the iceberg, whilst these ideological assumptions often remain submerged below the surface.

REASSESSING ‘SAFETY’

PREVENT draws most of its legitimacy through the notion that it - alongside counter-terror policies more broadly - “keeps people safe”; be that the individuals safeguarded from radicalisation, or the public protected from the radicalised individuals seeking to do harm.

PREVENT OPERATES ON A REDUCTIVE FRAMEWORK

However this is ultimately a non-starter. PREVENT operates on a fundamentally reductive framework that cannot be said, or proven, to have prevented any acts of political violence - because it intervenes well before any violence, or indeed the threat of violence, exists.

That framework posits that intervening at the stage of ‘extremist’ ideas can block the pathway to violence - yet the closest that the government has to an empirical basis for this claim is the clandestine study underpinning the ERG22+, which itself has been called into question by academics across the board⁵¹.

In lieu of concrete evidence of the ‘effectiveness’ of the programme,

PREVENT advocates take the circular logic that Channel referrals are evidence in and of themselves of the success of PREVENT⁵².

This logic accepts at face value the idea that the “thought crimes” identified by PREVENT in and of themselves justify state intrusion - and implicit in their statements is the acceptance that this apparent ‘success’ makes the 95% of ‘false positive’ referrals worthwhile.

In response to this we quote Maina Kiai, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of assembly - whose substantive point remains true, even though we would avoid legitimising the language of counter-extremism:

“By dividing, stigmatising and alienating segments of the population, PREVENT could end up promoting extremism, rather than countering it”⁵³

- Maina Kiai, former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association.

CONFLATING SAFETY AND SECURITY

“Security prioritises some people and some interests over others, with no necessary match between the extent of potential harm and selected priorities...Pre-crime [deepens] the selective and partial nature of security by fortifying the imaginary border between the community to be protected and those deemed to be threats”

From Pre-crime: Pre-emption, precaution and the future⁵⁴

More broadly, the assertion that PREVENT keeps people safe rests on the conflation of public ‘safety’ with state security - a conflation through which that which protects the state is taken as acting in the interests of the population at large. They are presumed to be one in the same interest.

This conflation is present within the definition of ‘terrorism’ itself, as defined by the Terrorism Act 2000, which spans both acts which cause serious injury to people, and those which cause serious damage to property, and/or that are designed to influence the government (and later, an international governmental organisation)⁵⁵ - in short, placing the security of life and of property on equal terms.

We believe that this is a conflation that must be unpacked, and that the meaning of safety should be reassessed. Otherwise, we will continue to find ourselves in a position whereby our ‘safety’ is weaponised against us through intrusive measures like counter-terrorism.

This notion of counter-terrorism acting in the interests of society, collectively, legitimises the invasive dragnet policing and surveillance undertaken of individuals in pursuit of security - the individual right to privacy is outweighed by the collective’s right to ‘safety’.

There is a fundamental mismatch between ‘safety’ as lay society understands it - as social peace - and as the state and its agencies frame it - which is predicated on the smooth continuation of the political status quo.

According to the latter, society at large - in particular, the dispossessed among it - is seen as a problem to be managed, whereas we understand society as the source of the durable solutions.

‘Safety’ in the view of PREVENT and security services is based on suppressing grievance and defending damaging policies, both of which run directly at odds with the type of society that citizens would want to see.

“...‘we’ in our various movements are the crisis of national security. ‘We’ are the ‘national security risks’ that they are fighting against. We need to resist their national security since their ‘security’ is based on our insecurity, oppression and exploitation.”

- from Forgetting national security in ‘Canada’: Towards pedagogies of resistance⁵⁶

Our vision of safety is based on tackling the root causes of discord and disharmony, and this should not be subordinated to the needs of the security state.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

One assumption that should be assessed is the idea, related to the above, that the state is the only guarantor of safety in society.

This is expressed as the seemingly benign notion that the state’s role is to protect citizens, through mobilising forces like policing and counter-extremism. This in practice serves to legitimise the ever-increasing intervention of the state into the public and private sphere.

But as the state is not an apolitical, neutral arbiter, its intervention can often - intentionally or otherwise - aggravate social discord, especially among populations whose relations to the state are already fraught; not least, Muslims.

The state can not, and should not, do it all. And the relentless push for the government to do something about the issue of political violence can instead be recast as: what can the government stop doing, or being doing

A young woman wearing a black hijab is focused on writing in a notebook. She is sitting at a desk in what appears to be a classroom or study hall. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and desks. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from a window on the left. The overall mood is one of quiet concentration and academic pursuit.

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**THERE IS A FUNDAMENTAL
MISMATCH BETWEEN ‘SAFETY’ AS
LAY SOCIETY UNDERSTANDS IT -
AS SOCIAL PEACE - AND AS THE
STATE AND ITS AGENCIES FRAME
IT - WHICH IS PREDICATED ON THE
SMOOTH CONTINUATION OF THE
POLITICAL STATUS QUO.**

instead, to prevent it deepening the social crisis that it has helped usher in?

Rather, we should delineate between the distinct spheres of responsibility: that between the state and its citizens, and that between citizens and other citizens in society.

The role of the state should be focused primarily in establishing and maintaining the material conditions in which social harmony is possible - for example, by working to eliminate poverty, social decline, withdrawing itself from illicit conduct at home and abroad and so on.

The role of the people in society should be building towards social harmony as an actuality.

Therefore what is needed is to redefine and re-assert the boundaries between the role

of the state and the role of the people. Everyone has a role to play in building healthy, safe societies - but these roles should not be filtered through the prism of counter-extremism, nor should they be carried out by deputising surveillance throughout society, as PREVENT and counter-extremism currently do.

PREVENT and securitisation have had a corrosive effect on the type of trust, solidarity and openness that are needed to make communities function - therefore a 'community-led' PREVENT is a contradiction in terms.

Healthy, safe societies can only be built through individuals having a mutual investment in society, not by becoming nodes in a network of surveillance.

RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP OF IDEOLOGY TO ACTION

Central to PREVENT is the idea that ideology plays a pivotal role in political violence - first as 'extremist ideas' create a climate conducive to 'terrorism', then as radicalisers draw 'vulnerable' individuals towards actualising those ideas through violent acts.

PREVENT proposes to intervene in this process, and therein lies its apparent value as a preventative tool.

This particular conceptualisation of the 'gap' between thought and action stems from the idea that action is preceded by ideas, which are the net product of rational enquiry, and therefore errant ideas lay the groundwork for later violent actions.

Whilst the government has been at pains to distance itself from the initial 'conveyor belt theory' of radicalisation⁵⁷, this relationship still relies on an essentially linear pathway. As pointed out by Kundnani & Hayes, "for all the nuance, typologies and acknowledgement of the inherent complexities, the idea of some kind of linear pathway persists"⁵⁸.

This relationship does not appear to be

borne out by reality; it has already been established that so-called 'extreme' ideas and acts of political violence cannot reliably predict one another.

Instead, lecturer Dr Tanzil Chowdhury describes the function that 'ideology' plays as such:

"Rather than being the precursor to violence, extreme ideas are the 'language that speaks us', giving the perception of a purpose to the violent act to the individual. This is why a seemingly coherent set of beliefs may have wildly contradictory and different readings. Catholicism for example, meant something very different in Belfast and Latin America to what it meant in Bristol."

- Dr Tanzil Chowdhury⁵⁹

Rather than accept a linear, unidirectional model connecting thought to action, a more nuanced model that we ascribe to is thus: ideas and action are in a dialectical relationship with material conditions and social actors, rather than operating in a distinct, discrete realm of 'ideas'.

That is to say, political action is not narrowly informed by ideas developed in



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A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS.**

isolation, but that both are developed in response to, and in dialogue with, material circumstances, which shape the perceived field of possibilities.

Drawing examples from the literature on political violence, the report *A Lost Decade: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism* describes this in this manner:

“Whether a social movement or network makes the leap into using a particular form of violence or not cannot be reduced to the question of its ideological content. It is necessary instead to examine how states and social movements have mutually constituted themselves as combatants in a conflict...and address under what conditions each has chosen to adopt tactics of violence, in response to the political circumstances they find themselves in.”

- from *A Lost Decade: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism*⁶⁰

Meanwhile, making reference to relational models in understanding why groups make recourse to violence, Francesco Ragazzi speaks on the need to open up the framework to account for the relation between actors - namely, the actors carrying out violence, and the state and/or government authorities against which they direct their violence:

“Taking as a starting point the relationship between the various social actors rather than individual or group logics paves new avenues for seeking to understand the phenomenon of resorting to political violence. It involves studying the space of reciprocal relationships as well as the moves that various actors make in a given social and political context.”

- Professor Francesco Ragazzi⁶¹

In short, it is not that ‘extremist’ ideas produce ‘extremist’ acts; moreso that violent circumstances beget further violence.

Therefore it logically flows that, rather than trying to change thoughts and ideas, the focus of the state’s interventions should be on transforming material conditions in which those thoughts are grounded.

Taking the rise of the British far-right, for example.

It would be a grave disservice to sideline the material conditions of deprivation brought about by post-industrial economic decline, austerity and state neglect that gives legitimacy to authoritarian, racist and xenophobic far-right politics as a seemingly viable way out of crisis for economically disenfranchised communities.

Targeting far-right ‘extremism’ under PREVENT, with a view to changing racist ideology held by individuals, will therefore clearly not stop the rise of the far-right - especially given that far-right politics itself has been given legitimacy by successive governments pandering to those same authoritarian and racist impulses.

In terms of how PREVENT functions then, displacing the locus of attention from those material circumstances that are at the root, onto ‘extreme’ ideas does not, and cannot, block violence.

Instead, it only serves to generate more discontent, while bolstering the power of the state.

PREVENT AS AN IDEOLOGY

Whilst PREVENT, wrongly, overstates the role and relationship of ideology to political violence, what is often left unchallenged is the idea that PREVENT itself constitutes an ideology.

PREVENT reflects dominant ideology - not in the sense of a collection of disembodied thoughts and ideas, but rather as a framework for organising society operationalised by the political, social and legal apparatus and backed up by the media and a growing academic circuit.

This happens at three levels:

PREVENT as a means of articulating ideology

PREVENT as an ideology of managing society, and

PREVENT as ideological surrender.

1) PREVENT AS A MEANS OF ARTICULATING IDEOLOGY

Once we understand the facts above, it becomes clear that, at the most basic level, PREVENT is used to advance an ideology of the state.

This has become more explicit since the

2011 revision of PREVENT, and David Cameron's move to more aggressively promote 'Muscular Liberalism' through counter-extremism⁶².

Since 2015, the legal obligation on nurseries, schools and colleges to actively promote 'Fundamental British Values' as part of the Prevent duty⁶³ has deepened the ideological reach of the policy. In this way, PREVENT is a tool to mark out the boundaries of acceptable ideas and designate others as errant and worthy of intervention. This has usually been articulated as an ideological clash between 'Islamism' and/or extremism versus liberalism⁶⁴.

2) PREVENT AS AN IDEOLOGY OF MANAGING SOCIETY

PREVENT is subject to, and is an expression of, what we would term an overarching counter-terror 'logic of governance'.

This has emerged gradually since the War on Terror - and most forcefully since the 2011 revision of PREVENT, with its demand that "there should be no 'ungoverned

spaces' in which extremism is allowed to flourish"⁶⁵.

This logic of governance is the political centre of gravity of British politics, the core around which policies are developed and articulated and the means through which social issues are managed.

It works at the level of external political 'threats', which are to be dealt with through the prism of counter-terrorism, and at the level of internal bureaucratic administration, which is increasingly carried out through this mode as well.

This is expressed through increased militarisation to deal with the former, and securitisation and surveillance in the case of the latter; the 'War on Terror' abroad and the war on dissent at home are connected by this logic.

Through PREVENT, this is experienced as securitisation across society, and the disturbing shift from the British welfare state, to an all-encompassing surveillance state, predicated on monitoring, threat analyses and pre-emptive intervention.

This logic of governance now transcends PREVENT. The model underpinning it has been exported to deal with more and more social problems - from knife violence, to cyber crime, to "illegal immigration".

This authoritarian and fear-driven logic of governance has become the new way of managing society.

3) PREVENT AS IDEOLOGICAL SURRENDER

As long as PREVENT exists, it exerts a centralising force drawing the rest of society towards it. Through this, it grows into an all-encompassing system for managing society, until it is presented as the solution to all social ills, from every shade of 'extremism' to social violence, all of which are expected to run through it.

More and more of society will be 'plugged in' to the counter-extremism apparatus in this way; this means that society will come

to be dependent on it, and furthermore, unable to imagine a way of society that existed, or could exist, outside of it.

In this way, the expansion and normalisation of PREVENT demands an ideological surrender on our part; the end goal is to force us to accept there is no alternative other than to submit to the framework of society legitimised by PREVENT, and/or the counter-terror logic of governance.

PREVENT absorbs and forecloses ideological alternatives, and re-routes them back into counter-extremism - in this way, surveillance becomes a stand-in for healthy and safe societies.

In doing so, any history before PREVENT is erased. The culture of state dependency that PREVENT has gradually forced upon the public sector and civil society is recast as the history of public life: if we can not imagine communities functioning without it, why bother trying to think of different ways of society?

In combination, this ideological assault by PREVENT is designed to reprogramme society to fit a particular ideological mould, and scale back our horizon of possibilities to the realm of tweaks and reform, rather than real change.

The aim of PREVENT as ideology is, effectively, to change the ideas in our minds to align with the emerging facts on the ground.

It is for this reason that we must actively organise around the idea of abolishing PREVENT, and challenge the idea that all we can ask for is a like-for-like alternative, or reform.

Instead, we must begin the crucial all-encompassing and inclusive discussions around what a better society would look like, without PREVENT.

THE QUESTION OF REFORM

Given how expansive the architecture of PREVENT has become, many feel unable to articulate the demand for abolishing PREVENT, and instead lean on incrementalist reforms.

The problem arises in the fact that reform usually amounts to a distraction, and extends the life of PREVENT - whereas what is needed is movement towards its abolition.

Most reforms proposed regarding PREVENT are almost always directed against aspects of how PREVENT is administered, whilst avoiding the core issues with the programme.

THE PITFALLS OF COMMON REFORMS

Common reforms are often articulated around:

- **Improving competency of PREVENT officers**

The practice of PREVENT often deviates from the way it is described on paper.

Cases that CAGE and others have dealt

with attest to the fact that children are routinely interrogated by PREVENT officers without consent being sought from their parents, and despite PREVENT being described as 'voluntary', coercion is often applied to those who do not immediately acquiesce with the programme.

In response to the public backlash generated by these abuses, PREVENT officials and government figures often lean on the defence that what is needed is better training or improving the competency of PREVENT officers. That is to say, their argument is that the fault lies in the individuals discharging PREVENT, rather than with PREVENT itself - and is often linked, explicitly or implicitly, to calls for better training for officers.

This argument functions in the same way as the 'bad apples' theory of policing - that police brutality and abuses are the fault of individual officers, rather than being rooted in the institution of policing itself.

This diverts attention on to individualistic 'solutions' to officer abuses based on their conduct and competency - and in the context of PREVENT, it tries to dislocate these abuses from the wider political backdrop against which they emerge.

Looking at the similar context of racist policing in 1980s Britain, the late scholar Sivanandan responded to the emerging trend towards prescribing US-inspired 'Racism Awareness Training (RAT)' to deal with structural racism with the following:

*"The fight against racism is...a fight against the state which sanctions and authorises it - even if by default - in the institutions and structures of society and in the behaviour of its public officials. **My business is not to train the police officer out of his 'racism', but to have him punished for it"***

- A. Sivanandan⁶⁶

• Improving PREVENT training

PREVENT training has by now been delivered to up to a million frontline workers, and for many this is their first encounter with PREVENT.

These training sessions are often short, shallow, cast the net of problematic beliefs and behaviours even wider^{67,68,69,70,71} - and amount to encouraging workers to use their 'gut instinct' to spot individuals potentially being 'radicalised'.

The fact that legions of workers are then sent forth to monitor the population following these brief training sessions is deeply problematic, and the nature of training more than likely does exacerbate issues associated with PREVENT such as Islamophobia and racism.

Nonetheless, reform demands that focus solely or predominantly on the quality of training slips into the same problem of individualising an institutional problem, and can serve to mask the fact that PREVENT training mostly legitimises the discrimination which already permeates society.

That is to say, Islamophobia and racial discrimination exist out there in wider society, fanned by the wider rhetoric and political culture from which PREVENT emerged - and PREVENT training helps validate that.

Better training cannot undo that wider

context of discrimination, nor does it take us any further towards minimising the scope of PREVENT.

• Expanding targets

PREVENT targets Muslims in a disproportionate manner, and always has.

In recognition of this, there have been calls for reform - from Muslims and from non-Muslims - to extend the boundaries of 'extremism' and/or 'terrorism' to other groups, namely the far-right, and to target them through PREVENT alongside Muslims.

As mentioned above, the government has responded by doing precisely that, and capturing far-right 'ideology' through PREVENT has been repeatedly stated as increasing in the last few years.

However, if we accept that PREVENT is practically incapable of preventing political violence, and that in practice it amounts to surveillance and the erosion of civil liberties more broadly - then 'diversifying' PREVENT targets is surely counter-intuitive.

Rather, redistributing PREVENT only legitimises the basis upon which it operates, mainstreams it to other groups in society and swells the numbers and coffers of organisations seeking to implement it. This is a fundamentally regressive reform, as it gives a new and alarming lease of life to PREVENT.

Given that PREVENT displaces focus from the material basis of political violence, it remains unfit to tackle the risk of far-right violence or to capture the top-down nature of far-right politics.

Instead, given the way that they are often profiled in the public imagination, far-right PREVENT referrals are likely to hone in on the 'footsoldiers' of the far-right, and target working class white communities - rather than those in positions of power and who are in fact propelling its rise.



“

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WHY DOES PREVENT MATTER?

PREVENT cannot be isolated from the political context from which it emerged.

With government aggressively promotes neoliberalisation, extractivism and militarism as policy on one hand, while disenfranchising the population without even the pittance of social welfare in return^{73, 74, 75, 76} on the other, social contradictions and conflicts are invariably intensified throughout society.

What PREVENT does is deflect much-needed discussions around the political direction of the country, and its willingness to provide all its citizens with a better way of life, onto consent for further surveillance.

In this way, PREVENT serves the same function as law and order policing.

Crime is largely the product of inequality and dispossession, which is intensified by processes like social decline and unemployment.

Rather than re-build the core of society

to challenge inequality, increased policing is deployed to mark out the peripheries; to exclude and disappear those most sharply impacted by state policy, and, in a circular descent, further entrench the social conditions in which crime emerges. As a form of pre-criminal policing, PREVENT, just like policing itself, keeps in motion a vicious cycle that will only increase the likelihood of social discord.

Ending PREVENT, therefore, is not a single issue struggle.

Rather, PREVENT, and the campaign against it, must be seen as at once a mirror onto the nature of British political culture today, a window into the future of political organising, and the gateway towards envisioning the type of society that we wish to live in.

It is the most invasive and pervasive among the suite of War on Terror-era powers that the government has gifted itself, and the one that most intimately shapes the lives of Muslims and others across Britain.

Ending PREVENT is what makes the fight for broader political transformation possible, by allowing the public to reclaim the political sphere as a worthwhile terrain of struggle.

In short, PREVENT must be abolished for society to flourish.

PART 2: REIMAGINING A PATH TO HEALTHY, SAFE SOCIETIES IN BRITAIN

In this section we outline eight practical steps and objectives for moving beyond PREVENT, putting an end to the conditions from which it draws legitimacy.

A roadmap towards a post-PREVENT society should run through the following considerations:

- 1)** Addressing the root grievances from which violence draws strength
- 2)** Countering disenfranchisement and alienation that hinders communities from organising for their betterment
- 3)** Dismantling the repressive policy architecture established by PREVENT and counter-terrorism

Therefore these eight steps are envisioned not as an arbitrary wishlist of unconnected ideals, nor narrow prescriptions for countering 'extremism', but rather as a framework towards establishing the baseline for a healthy, safe society which can inherently be resistant to violence.

A political programme for abolishing PREVENT and establishing widespread - and actual - social reform therefore cuts across a range of government policies.

It is not enough to get rid of PREVENT in its current form, especially if the logic that underpins it, and the wider architecture of counter-terrorism, remains rooted in place.

These can only be the seeds from which an alternative PREVENT will develop.

So alongside campaigning for an end to PREVENT, we as civil society, political organisers and the public must direct our organising efforts towards transforming the social and political context from which PREVENT has emerged.



ABOLISHING PREVENT

1. SCRAP
PREVENT

2. ABANDON
THE FRAMEWORKS
UNDERPINNING
PREVENT

3. CLEAN
MONEY:
RESTORE SOCIAL
SPENDING
WITHOUT
STRINGS

4.
SECURE AN
ETHICAL
FOREIGN
POLICY

5. STOP MANAGING
SOCIAL ISSUES
THROUGH SECURITY
MEASURES

6. REINSTATE A
SOCIETY WHERE
DEMOCRATIC
RIGHTS CAN BE
EXERCISED

7. DECOUPLE
WELFARE AND
SAFEGUARDING
FROM COUNTER-
TERRORISM

8. REPEAL
COUNTER-
TERROR LAWS
INSTITUTED
SINCE 2000



**CREATING
HEALTHY, SAFE
SOCIETIES**

**ADDRESSING ROOT
GRIEVANCES**

**CLEAN MONEY:
RESTORE SOCIAL
SPENDING WITHOUT
STRINGS**

**SECURE AN
ETHICAL FOREIGN
POLICY**

**COUNTERING
DISENFRANCHISEMENT
AND ALIENATION**

**DECOUPLE WELFARE
AND SAFEGUARDING
FROM COUNTER-
TERRORISM**

**REINSTATE A
SOCIETY WHERE
CIVIL RIGHTS
CAN BE
EXERCISED**

**DISMANTLING THE
REPRESSIVE POLICY
ARCHITECTURE**

**SCRAP
PREVENT**

**ABANDON THE
FRAMEWORKS
UNDERPINNING
PREVENT**

**STOP MANAGING
SOCIAL ISSUES
THROUGH SECURITY
MEASURES**

**REPEAL COUNTER-
TERROR LAWS
INSTITUTED SINCE
2000**

1) SCRAP PREVENT

The first, but by no means last, step in moving beyond PREVENT should naturally be: getting rid of PREVENT.

This should include PREVENT under CONTEST, the Prevent duty under the Counter-terrorism and Security Act 2015, and Channel.

These are positions supported in whole or in part by a number of national organisations, including UCU⁷⁷, FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies)⁷⁸, Liberty⁷⁹, the NUS (National Union of Students)⁸⁰ and more.

As the following demands in this section indicate, getting rid of the policy and its associated programmes, should by no means be the end of the matter. It must be complemented by the transformation of the wider political culture and of society.

But this fact - which can seem overwhelming to some - should not be used as an excuse to delay or defer the point that PREVENT must go.

2) ABANDON THE FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING PREVENT

The design of counter-extremism strategies in the UK have largely rested on a number of premises and frameworks which are countered by the evidentiary basis, or whose evidentiary basis is fundamentally defective.

We must divorce ourselves from these frameworks, otherwise the risk remains that a like-for-like programme will be introduced to bring PREVENT back through the backdoor, or it may be instituted through another policy area - as we have seen with its shifts from 'social cohesion' to 'integration' to 'safeguarding'.

• Violence Is Predominantly About Ideology

Throughout the lifetime of PREVENT, it has concerned itself with connecting 'extremist'

ideology with violence.

As outlined in Part I, we would argue for a model based on reciprocal dialogue between ideas, material conditions and action; that is to say, a dialectical relationship.

Honing government policy and state interventions in the realm of 'ideology' only opens the door for invasive exercises in criminalising thought, and does nothing to address the root causes of political violence.

What is required is a break from this hollow but deep-rooted assumption.

The attention of policy makers should be on those material conditions from which political violence draws its perceived legitimacy - core grievances must be addressed.

This is much more likely to undermine the use of political violence than focusing on 'ideology' and criminalising a wide range of perfectly un-violent beliefs and political activity.

• ERG22+

For the UK version of PREVENT, the basis for identifying 'extremism' is expressed in the ERG22+, a set of 22 "risk factors" that are reproduced in the Channel Vulnerability Assessment Framework. These "risk factors" are used by frontline workers to assess individuals and refer them.

The empirical base for the ERG22+ itself is itself minimal - for the most part, the theory rests on clandestine research conducted by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), which drew upon a small sample of criminal offenders, which, by the researchers' own admission, were unrepresentative of the general populace.

"1. The authors have not provided sufficient evidence to support the ERG22+'s 'science'.

2. The study's conclusions have been implemented far beyond the original intention.

3. A process that should have only ever been used by experts in a limited circumstance has

been opened up to the entire public sector.”

- from The ‘Science’ of Pre-Crime⁸¹

A group of 140 leading academics have protested against the lack of transparency and scrutiny of the science behind the ERG22+ framework that is being used for assessing risk of radicalisation and referral to the Channel programme:

“Tools that purport to have a psychology evidence base are being developed and placed under statutory duty while their “science” has not been subjected to proper scientific scrutiny or public critique.

Of particular concern is the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG22+) framework that is being used as the basis for assessing risk of “radicalisation” and referral to the Channel programme.”⁸²

The ‘scientific’ foundation of ‘extremism’ theory therefore lies in tatters, yet the theory is still operationalised through PREVENT against the population.

Disturbingly - and outside the framework of this briefing document - it is also being used as one of a number of frameworks to legitimise the global PREVENT programme known internationally as CVE (Countering Violent Extremism).

However, policies of a national and global nature, should not be based on paper-thin and opaque research, and the prevailing ‘extremism’ theory should be laid to rest.

• ‘Fundamental British Values’

Since the 2011 revision of PREVENT, opposition to ‘Fundamental British Values’ - Democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs - has been used as the litmus test to designate ‘extremist’ positions.

This was both a product of the Cameron government’s ideological turn from state multiculturalism to ‘muscular liberalism’ and a US-style British exceptionalism, as well as a continuation of an overarching theme, whereby ‘extremist’ ideas have come to be articulated in opposition to Liberal values.

This has been ratcheted up even further in recent years, with former Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 framing the battle against ‘extremist ideology’ as a generation-defining struggle, akin to that between fascism, the Irish Republican Army and Communism in the 20th century⁸³.

In terms of the wider counter-extremism apparatus, the enforcement of Fundamental British Values has become an increasingly prominent feature of the Integration pole.

Here, these values are framed as buffers against ‘extremist’ ideology penetrating communities, and the whole notion is particularly mobilised around the idea of integration of migrants, lending credence to its discriminatory framework.

Fundamental British Values is nothing other than an ideological exercise to give PREVENT some semblance of formal procedure, whilst cementing the nexus between counter-terrorism and immigration enforcement powers.

Moreover, by employing the notion of British Values, PREVENT weaponises the notion of these values and gives them a nationalist bent.

This can tear at the very fabric of society. Therefore, the notion of British Values, inasmuch as it is now deeply connected to PREVENT, should be removed.

3) CLEAN MONEY: RESTORE SOCIAL SPENDING WITHOUT STRINGS

Austerity since the turn of the decade, alongside more long-term post-industrial decline throughout Britain, has underfunded and eroded much of its social institutions - including social initiatives, frontline services and civil society organisations.

Previously, it was these institutions that were able to positively channel and address grievances which, if left unresolved, might

have spilled over into social violence and political violence. So, defunding and the presence of counter-terrorism in the public sector specifically, has had profoundly negative effect:

“The intensification of counter terrorism work in recent years has dovetailed with drastic budget cuts...The prioritisation of policing and enforcement over other forms of engagement has had a significant impact on the wellbeing of young people and social cohesion generally”
- from *Rethinking Prevent: A case for an alternative approach*⁸⁴

In place of traditional public grants, various streams of funding have been introduced under the aegis of counter-extremism, to ‘fill the gap’, simultaneously diffusing PREVENT ideology through the system, while drawing civil society into a web of dependency on these streams.

At the moment, this is best represented by the Building a Stronger Britain Together⁸⁵ funding programme, which explicitly aims to build a counter-extremism network among civil society organisations for government to mobilise.

Communities have long been at the forefront of maintaining social peace - in spite of, and even in opposition to state policy. This happened well before the ‘resilient communities’ agenda sought to subordinate them to the imperatives of counter-extremism policing.

These community groups should be permitted to continue their work in an atmosphere of trust, with maximum independence from systems of policing and surveillance.

To this end, the reintroduction of public funding must go hand-in-hand with the de-securitisation of civil society.

Austerity as a policy must be stemmed and reversed - but it is equally vital that this is decoupled from counter-extremism.

Community funding should be provided through ‘clean money’, without pre-conditions to do the work of counter-extremism and policing.

Civil society is needed, but not one under

the aegis of the counter-extremism apparatus, or one sustained through ‘dirty’ money - this will only poison relations between communities and civil society.

4) SECURE AN ETHICAL FOREIGN POLICY

Though political violence is regularly recast as a clash of ideologies, there is consistent evidence - from empirical research, assessment by security services and by perpetrators themselves - for the role of state’s foreign policy as a driver of political violence.

Aggressive foreign policy has both destabilised nations abroad, creating the political vacuum within which violent groups can rise, as well as stoking grievances at home.

Military operations abroad, as well as support for regimes which are perceived as illegitimate, who have been proven to be involved in torture, rendition and extrajudicial killings can all serve to undergird the notion, for some, that political violence is a viable course of action.

This was a fact corroborated by an internal study by the FBI⁸⁶, as well as being cautiously, and half-heartedly, accepted in the 2009 version of CONTEST, before being withdrawn under the Cameron governments:

“...violent extremism in the UK is the result of a combination of factors [including]... a perception that UK foreign policy in the Muslim world (notably military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan) is hostile to Islam; the experience of wider conflict in the Muslim world and conflict involving Muslims (often attributed either to western intervention or to western indifference)”

- CONTEST (2009)⁸⁷

This shift away from addressing root causes of political violence, particularly with regards to the role of foreign policy, has been commonplace across counter-extremism strategies internationally⁸⁸.

The British state and the British military-industrial complex are intimately bound up in warfare across the Third World, in particularly 'the Muslim world'.

For Muslims in the UK, this is epitomised by its role in the arms trade and arming repressive states such as Saudi Arabia, as well as its explicit and practical support for exploitative and tyrannical governments such as Sisi's Egypt and Israel.

With regards to Britain's role in the invasion of Iraq, and the likelihood this would have on ratcheting up retaliatory attacks at home, warning were raised on the eve of the invasion by the Joint Intelligence Committee⁸⁹ and just prior to the 7/7 bombings by the Joint Terrorist Analysis Centre⁹⁰.

Meanwhile in the words of Baroness Manningham-Buller, head of MI5 between 2002 and 2007:

"Our involvement in Iraq, for want of a better word, radicalised a whole generation of young people, some of them British citizens who saw our involvement in Iraq, on top of our involvement in Afghanistan, as being an attack on Islam"

- Baroness Manningham-Buller⁹¹

She said this before adding: "not a whole generation, a few among a generation".

Meanwhile, former US president Barack Obama described the rise of ISIS, euphemistically, as one of the "unintended consequences" of the invasion in Iraq⁹². Following the Manchester Arena attack, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn stated that:

*"Many experts, including professionals in our intelligence and security services have pointed to the connections between wars our government has supported or fought in other countries, such as Libya, and terrorism here at home"*⁹³

- Jeremy Corbyn MP

This is a position with which, as polls have demonstrated, just over half of the British public are in agreement⁹⁴.

These assessments are underscored by the words of perpetrators themselves, who have consistently cited the role of British foreign policy as a core motivation for their actions.

This ranges from Westminster Bridge attacker Khalid Masood⁹⁵ to 7/7 bomber Mohammad Sidique Khan, who recorded himself beforehand stating that

*"Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters."*⁹⁶

Lee Rigby's killer Michael Adebolajo was recorded as saying that "The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers"⁹⁷, whilst anger at warfare against Muslims overseas has been attributed as a driver of violence by the siblings of Westminster Bridge attacker Khuram Butt⁹⁸ and Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi⁹⁹.

A deep transformation of Britain's foreign policy, is therefore needed - withdrawing from international warfare, divesting from the arms trade and severing support for autocrats and occupiers - to ensure that the British state's foreign policy doesn't hinder the legitimate aspirations of people for self-determination.

This is a task that will be made immeasurably more difficult if anti-war activism continues to be flagged up as a radicalisation risk¹⁰⁰, is captured by the dragnet of 'extremism' going forward¹⁰¹, and if those highlighting the root causes of political violence continue to be accused of being 'apologists' for it.

"Western foreign policy has meanwhile been airbrushed from the 'root causes' debate, to the preposterous extent that those of us who maintain this has to be at the heart of any in any credible causal analysis for the rise of terrorism across the world are now routinely referred to... as 'useful idiots', 'apologists', 'terrorist sympathisers' and so on"

From The globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism policies

*Undermining human rights, instrumentalising civil society*¹⁰²

This highlights the interconnectedness of our demands: whilst abolishing PREVENT we must talk about the root causes of violence, but in order to be able to talk about those root causes, PREVENT must be abolished.

It is also crucial that true accountability takes place when state institutions and officials are alleged to have been involved in illegal activities. This should happen through a transparent and firm process, rather than the weak, politicised attempts¹⁰³ that we currently witness, let alone the high-level cover ups that often ensue to subvert justice^{104,105}.

5) STOP MANAGING SOCIAL ISSUES THROUGH SECURITY MEASURES

As described in Part I, PREVENT forms part of an expanding counter-terror “logic of governance” whereby domestic policies are articulated through the security lens. Everything from ‘extremism’ to social violence is filtered through this prism of pre-crime and pre-emptive policing.

In place of social care and social investment, we have surveillance and securitisation. Rather than welfarist measures to strengthen the ‘core’ of society, the status quo is tougher policing of the boundaries of acceptability.

This counter-terror logic is intimately tied up with the wider prevailing logic of law and order policing which has become characteristic of the last few decades of governance.

This speaks to both the ever rightward turn of politics in Britain, and the erosion of the social forces that forced that welfarism on the agenda in the first place, particularly

worker militancy.

The recent example of ‘knife crime’/serious youth violence, for which a statutory duty modelled on PREVENT has been announced¹⁰⁶ is an example of how this counter-terror logic has inked its way through policies and practises of the state and the police¹⁰⁷.

Much discussion around the issue of rising serious youth violence has centred on greater policing, including increasing stop-and-search and harsher criminal sentencing, and now through to preventative policing. This is all but inevitable given that the logic of the times is geared towards policing.

However - and importantly - grassroots responses to the issue have posited a more comprehensive approach focused on developing a community infrastructure of support, and tackling the underlying causes of social violence, rather than criminalisation.

The following framework is presented by the youth collective Take Back the Power in their publication *Insiders Looking Out: Solutions to youth violence from people who have lived it:*

Calls for community support

1) Critical Understanding, to allow young people to take control of their lives

2) Emotional Amnesty, for young people to speak without fear of punishment

3) Mindset Change

4) Help to Get Out, as long term practical support

Demands for systemic change

1) Listen to and involve young people with lived experience of youth violence

2) Stop the mass exclusion of young people from mainstream education

3) Change the narrative about young people who are involved in youth violence, recognising that they are people with

complex needs.

4) End poverty for young people and their families

5) Challenge structural violence

6) Stop the criminalisation of young people; tackle the core issues which result in violence, not just the violence itself.

- Take Back the Power¹⁰⁸

The direction of travel should be towards a society in which social issues can be addressed and resolved collectively, not one kept under siege by policing and security services.

For this to be possible, we must break from the logic of pre-crime and securitisation being presented as the only and right solution, and move towards greater social investment in society.

6) REINSTATE A SOCIETY WHERE CIVIL RIGHTS CAN BE EXERCISED

One cannot deny, when the evidence is presented, that PREVENT is part and parcel of a move to usher in a “closed society” where political pluralism is undermined, dissent is increasingly criminalised and democratic rights are eroded.

All of this serves to disenfranchise communities in Britain, who are then viewed with suspicion through the lens of counter-extremism - something which these self same communities have been aware of and have experienced deeply for some time.

Moreover, the elastic definition of extremism allows it to be wielded in such a way to designate more ideological avenues as beyond the pale. The parallel but interrelated use of the label “domestic extremism” since 2005 has captured more overtly political action as ‘extremist’¹⁰⁹, and organisations advocating against PREVENT have regularly found themselves derided as “on [the] side of extremists”¹¹⁰ from

the highest echelons of government on downwards.

While the “chilling effect” of the Prevent duty in academia has been well documented^{111,112,113}, this “chill” permeates society and its institutions across the board.

Through the co-optation of sector regulators like Ofsted, the Office for Students and the Charity Commission into the counter-extremism ambit, the forms and forums of popular organising - from community groups to political organisations to mosques; the spaces in which solutions to social issues can be deliberated, articulated and actualised - have been consistently under fire, or subjugated.

Whilst the opportunity for authentic social intercourse presented by these institutions that are key to an open society has been undermined, their actual work has been absorbed by and steered through counter-extremism programmes (for example, the ‘astroturf’ organisations supporting by state departments like RICU¹¹⁴). This only further securitises society and perpetuates the closed society.

It is important, for youth and community leaders in particular, to be able to freely engage and express views around religion, philosophy, ideology, foreign policy and identity, without being afraid of becoming a subject of interest for a multitude of security agencies.

So, as part of the process of abolishing PREVENT, it is crucial to move towards an open society, where civil rights can be exercised and civic organisations can breathe, grow and flourish.

7) DECOUPLE WELFARE AND SAFEGUARDING FROM COUNTER-TERRORISM

PREVENT’s turn to the notion of “safeguarding” as a means to justify itself, has overseen its enmeshment with welfare services.

This has served to undermine and securitise those services and generate distrust between patients and practitioners, services and service users, most notably the very young:

“...Where [a Prevent referral] exposes the child to lasting trauma, this may be inconsistent with safeguarding’s primary consideration of serving the best interests of the child...Notably, all of the case studies [in the report] relating to children appear to be examples of Prevent being applied in a manner that does not give primary consideration to [their] best interest”

- from Eroding Trust: The UK’s Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education¹⁵

Within the healthcare sector specifically, PREVENT referrals are being incentivised¹⁶ so that “patients can gain access to the housing, psychiatry and social care which patients are otherwise denied because of government cuts”¹⁷.

More broadly from journey of PREVENT referrals, it appears that PREVENT is emerging as something of a triage service, through which “vulnerable” individuals are referred before being signposted to more appropriate services (see figure in next page).

If we are to restore the credibility of the safeguarding process itself, welfare and social services must be decoupled from counter-terrorism.

The imperatives of national security run directly against the individual-centred interests of safeguarding and they should not be conflated.

Embedding PREVENT and counter-terrorism within welfare/health services will only see those services decay from the inside out, as they will be utterly corrupted by the demands of national security.

So it is vital, especially at this point in time where the existence of the NHS hangs in the balance, and the work of healthcare and welfare services are comprehensively decoupled from the demands of counter-terror policing.

8) REPEAL COUNTER-TERROR LAWS INSTITUTED SINCE 2000

And finally, in responding to the question of what we should do about terrorism, we believe that we do not need counter-terror laws to deal with acts of actual political violence when they occur.

Acts of violence should be treated as criminal law matters through pre-2000 legislation such as the Offences Against the Person Act.

Strict liability offences that relate to possession of materials or the dissemination of ideas should be removed entirely from the statute book and any crimes that incite violence, should be dealt with as crimes of incitement. Frameworks exist for prosecuting crimes of violence, which precedes modern counter-terror law, and which are adequate on their own terms.

Crucially, these concern themselves with actual acts or provable intentionality, rather than the crimes of thought, expression and “glorification” introduced by counter-terror legislation.

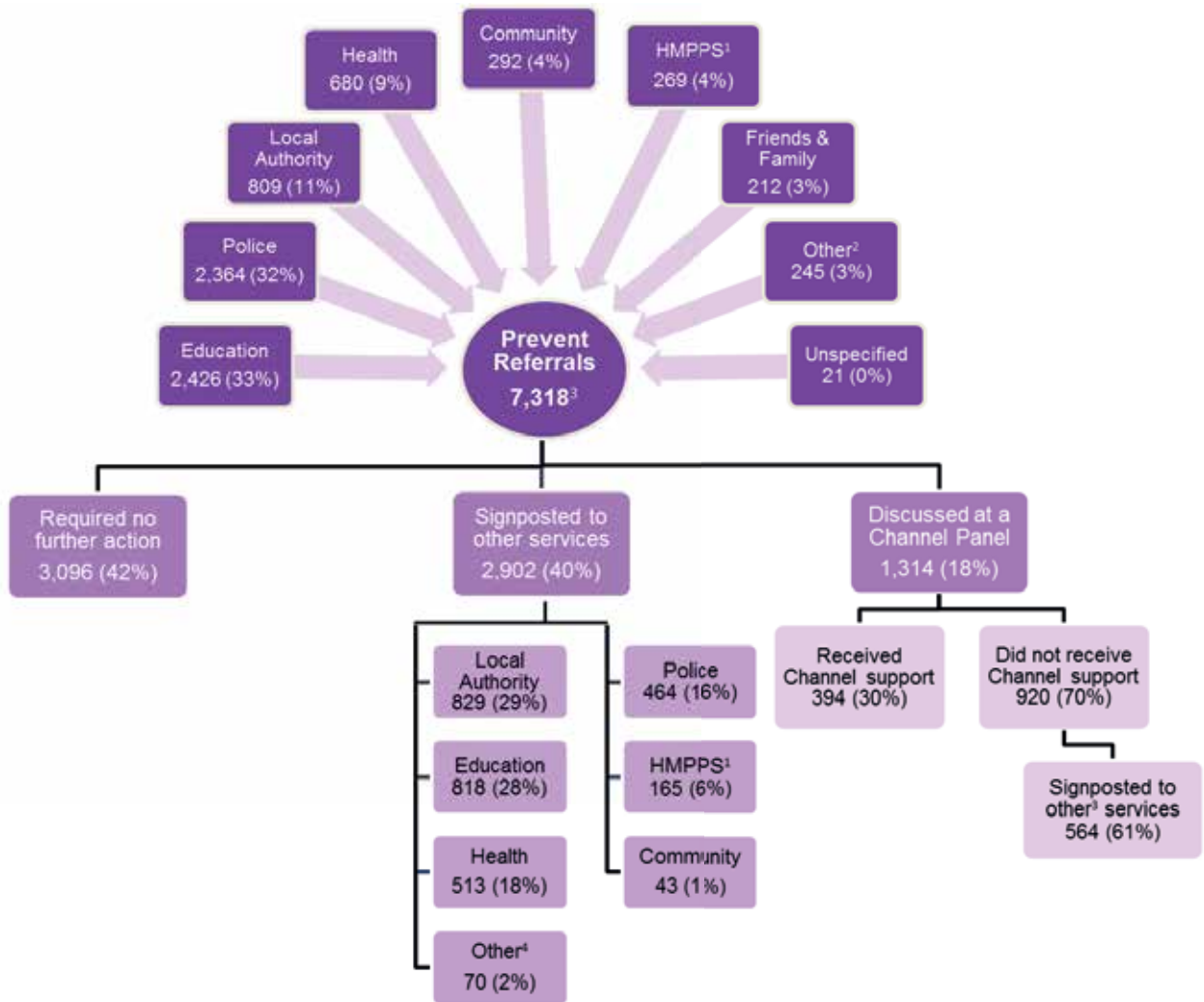
This is a view shared by current Director of Public Prosecutions Max Hill, whom in his previous role as Independent Reviewer of Terror Legislation said that:

“[Britain] has the laws we need [to deal with acts of terrorism]...we should review them and ensure they remain fit for purpose, but we should have faith in our legal structures, rather than trying to create some kind of new situation where the ordinary rules are thrown out.”

- Max Hill QC¹⁸

Modern counter-terror laws are deeply politicised powers, and only serve to criminalise more actions and behaviours, and increase sentence limits - but are not themselves required for prosecuting acts of violence.

Ultimately, PREVENT is merely one strand of a wider apparatus of counter-terror policies that have proliferated since the wide ranging Terrorism Act 2000,



being augmented year upon year by new legislation.

Cumulatively these counter-terror laws and powers have drastically narrowed the political space in British society, and weakened civil society.

It has done so by stretching the meaning of “terrorism” far from the traditional notions of violence, and empowered the British state with an unparalleled array of powers with global reach.

And yet state figures continue unabated. A mere four months after the latest Counter-terrorism law - the Counter-terrorism and Border Security Act 2019 - was passed, former Home Secretary Sajid Javid stated the “need” to fill “gaps in the law” and introduce further powers¹¹⁹

This only exposes the fallacy at the heart of the British counter-terrorism complex, which rests on an unending circular logic that has less to do with “security” and everything to do with increasing state power.

Therefore we must push for the repeal the complex web of overbearing, deeply politicised counter-terror legislation.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES?

PREVENT has eroded the foundations necessary for strong communities, transforming the bond of support into the bind of suspicion.

The process of moving beyond PREVENT must necessarily involve a concerted element of healing, to undo the damage that the programme has inflicted on communities.

This would have to include, amongst others:

- Re-establishing trust between communities and civil society actors - including faith spaces and charities that have bought in to PREVENT.
- ‘Decommissioning’ the thousands of frontline workers who have received

PREVENT training, and are primed to spot ‘radicalisation’.

- An acknowledgement and recognition by government of the harm done to communities affected by PREVENT and counter-extremism.

The framework proposed in this paper provides a policy ‘umbrella’ under which communities can begin the vital work of rebuilding themselves on the principles of trust, support and solidarity.

This is something that impacted communities must be allowed the space to think through and develop on their own terms.

The abolition of PREVENT is both a prerequisite to, and part of, a process of wider social transformation in Britain, which is being held back in the straightjacket of securitisation that PREVENT has ushered in.

Therefore abolishing PREVENT is as much about dismantling the architecture of surveillance and securitisation as it is about re-building society.



“

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CONCLUSION

The Independent Review of PREVENT will quite possibly help to secure PREVENT's continued existence, with minor only tweaks.

To counter this it is incumbent on us to both withdraw consent, practically and ideologically, for the programme, whilst simultaneously putting forward and agitating around a vision for the kind of society we want to see instead.

We have produced this briefing with a view to starting a proper conversation among society about how to move beyond the contrived conversation on what an 'alternative to PREVENT' would look like.

We also hope that this helps counter the accusation that opponents of PREVENT are single-mindedly fixated on the programme, are merely "terror apologists", or that critics are unconcerned with society at large - but we also know that this is unlikely, given the tenor of official discourse on the matter.

This is a process, not a single event, that may not bear fruit immediately - we must contend with the reality that society is in a state of deep upheaval, and so we cannot expect instant results.

But we must also acknowledge that scrapping PREVENT is not a case of abandoning a successful model for a leap into the unknown - PREVENT is an abject failure, and tinkering with or further augmenting it ad infinitum, is not an option.

The process of moving beyond PREVENT is one that requires political will, openness and generosity in order to be seen through, rather than the personal attacks and finger pointing that critics have increasingly been subject to.

We hope that other groups, organisations and organisers genuinely interested in the task of building a healthy, post-PREVENT society, can join us in discussing and expanding the road map we have outlined here.

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