

Press Release

Thursday, February 16, 2023

National Association of Muslim Police response to the Independent Review of Prevent

As a police association NAMP fully support attempts to improve policing, protect the public and to create a safe and secure country. The Independent Review on Prevent has made recommendations, some of which NAMP support. However, the report also contains many concerning statements, assumptions, and biases against Muslims. This response focuses on some key issues but does not seek to address the full review.

NAMP is one of many recognised police associations. We are a fully constituted network made up of mostly Muslim volunteers working in various police forces across the UK. All work we do is for the benefit of our membership, the community, and crucially the wider police service.

We are apolitical on all matters and abide by the College of Policing Code of Ethics. We do not associate with any organisation or individuals that fall outside the expected standards of professional behaviour. Where possible, we seek to work with partners that already have an established relationship with the police service.

Recommendation 1 states that Prevent's first objective should be to "tackle the ideological causes of terrorism". NAMP agree with this statement, however we disagree on the methods used to identify ideologies and believe that changes made to counter terrorism terminology to provide more accurate descriptions would be beneficial to this recommendation.

Terrorism expert Professor Robert Pape conducted a study into suicide bombings across the globe and concluded that: *"There is not the close connection between suicide terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism that many people think. Rather, what nearly all suicide terrorist campaigns have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal: to compel democracies to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland."*

In 2020 NAMP surveyed members and found 94 per cent of respondents felt vulnerable in some capacity when terms such as "Islamist" are used and 85 per cent were certain that the use of this term has a direct correlation to Islamophobia. Many accounts have been provided to evidence this, both within policing and within the community. It is disappointing that none of this evidence has been considered.

Professor Pape's research alongside the NAMP survey, shows that using terms such as "Islamist" are not conducive in tackling the ideological causes of terrorism, if anything, this term exacerbates the situation.

Not only does this term reinforce Islamophobia, by creating a higher risk of Extreme Right-Wing radicalisation, it also re-enforces a narrative that makes an association between Islam and terrorism, creating a greater risk of radicalisation amongst vulnerable Muslims. Thereby, proving such terminology to be counter-productive.

Greater Manchester Police saw a 505 per cent rise in anti-Muslim hate incidents the month after the Manchester Arena attack compared to the previous year. There are several examples like this showing a strong correlation between the stated motivation behind the attack - in this case reported Islamism - and subsequent attacks on Muslims or those perceived to follow the Islamic faith.

Anti-Muslim hatred is increasingly problematic within the UK. Recent Home Office crime statistics show that 42 per cent of all religious hate crimes are targeted against Muslims. In 2022 a study was conducted by the University of Birmingham which found Muslims to be the UK's second "least liked" group. The study also found that just over a quarter of the British public feel negative feelings towards Muslims.

In 2019 there was a 692 per cent increase of anti-Muslim hate incidents within the UK in the week following the Christchurch attack in New Zealand. Unfortunately, the impact of such incidents has not been considered within the review.

Section 4.89 of the review does however cite the prevalence of anti-Muslim hatred within Extreme Right-Wing terrorism ideology, referencing the Finsbury Park mosque attack. Experiences of Muslims are also mentioned, yet the review appears dismissive of their perceptions in relation to Prevent.

Generally, the threat of Extreme Right-Wing seems to have been played down, with some attacks such as the Dover firebombing in October 2022 not even being mentioned. In contrast there is a strong focus on addressing so called Islamist ideology, despite statistical data suggesting otherwise.

Home Office data from 2020 to 2021 shows that 25 per cent of all Prevent referrals are Extreme Right-Wing and 22 per cent categorised as Islamist. Those that are subsequently adopted as a Channel case are 46 per cent Extreme Right-Wing and 22 per cent labelled as Islamist.

This data clearly shows that there are more Extreme Right-Wing referrals coming into Prevent, with more than double that of so-called Islamist ideology making it through to Channel which is deemed as more serious.

The review suggests this is down to a failure to identify warning signs concerning Islamism. This is partially correct, but only in the context that many “warning signs” have historically bore no connection to extremism with many referrals just relating to common practices amongst Muslims, i.e. appearance, clothing, praying etc. This has led to the opposite being true with many referrals being made as a result of Islamophobia as opposed to concerning behaviours.

Recommendation 16 relates to the improvement of Prevent datasets by revising how referrals are categorised. NAMP agree with this recommendation as 51 per cent of Prevent referrals are categorised as MUU (Mixed, Unstable and Unclear) according to Home Office data from 2020 to 2021. NAMP highlighted this as an issue in 2020, as the data provides no benefit to understanding the bigger picture of where the main threat is coming from and therefore unable to pinpoint where the focus should lie.

This also contradicts recommendation 7 which advocates the use of the term Islamist and Extreme Right-Wing ideology. A deeper understanding is required to understand the motives behind different ideologies to combat radicalisation. The review itself refers to “hatred of the West” being one of the motivating factors behind groups such as al-Qa’ida. Based on research previously mentioned and experiences of Muslims, NAMP state that this is the main factor when it comes to the reason for radicalisation as opposed to anything rooted within the Islamic belief.

NAMP have previously stated Anti-Western Extremism would be a more suitable way to categorise groups such as Daesh, al-Qa’ida, Boko Haram etc. This would not only be a more accurate description, but it would also reduce Islamophobia and provide a counter narrative to combat radicalisation.

The review recommends training to understand ideological drivers and radicalisation. NAMP support this recommendation, however with the caveat that training should ideally be delivered by those who fully understand the subject matter, both as a practitioner within that field and as a member of the community.

This type of training has been delivered by NAMP for many years, which has helped to equip those working within Counter Terrorism Policing with the tools to improve engagement with Muslim communities, build better relationships and deliver a tailored service.

Whilst the Prevent Strategy does not apply to Northern Ireland, research to understand alternative solutions that are applied there should have formed part of the review. NAMP will continue to work with the police service to support efforts in tackling radicalisation, whilst also working to reduce bias against Muslims and tackle anti-Muslim hatred. It is vital that we work together, as the community should be part of the solution and not labelled as the problem.

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