Chapter Two

Islam and the Politics of Terrorism: Aspects of the British Experience

John Strawson[*]

Introduction

The debate about the relationship between Islam and terrorism is at a critical stage. While crass Orientalist arguments[1] that Islam is essentially violent have been largely removed from the agenda, the attempt to construct a distinction between moderate and extremist Islam has been revealed as overly simplistic. Since 11 September 2001 (9/11) most governments have attempted to distinguish between Islam as a religion practised by millions and the tiny minority of Muslims who subscribe to an interpretation of Islam that authorises the use of violence against its enemies.[2] However, this approach fails to engage with the complexities of Islam as a social category, which has a long and varied history.

Moreover, Islamic history is one of disputation. There is not one Islamic category, but many 'Islams'. As a result there are trends within Islam that have an ambiguous relationship to violence and offer justifications for its use or even extol it. There is in fact an intense conflict within Islamic discourse over the issue, which since the late nineteenth century has been connected to the position of Muslims in a world that has been perceived to be dominated by colonialism and since 1945 increasingly by the 'West'. In this discourse Muslims as a community are portrayed as marginalised and humiliated by a materialist powerful West.[3] In this chapter I want to suggest that making the distinction between Islam and terrorism requires an active engagement in an ideological battle rather than a passive identification of a neat sociological distinction between moderates and extremists. There is a genuine terrorist threat and it is nourished by an international political current, which while it has roots in Islam, is aggressively opposed to the great contribution of Muslim civilisation to law,

[1] On Orientalism generally see E W Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
[2] See J Strawson, 'Islamic Law and the English Press', in J Strawson (ed), *Law after Ground Zero* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2002) 205-14.
[3] See, eg, T Honderich, *Humanity, Terrorism, Terrorist War: Palestine, 9/11, 7/7* (London, New York: Continuum Books, 2006).

philosophy and the arts. Its strategy to acquire legitimacy is based thus not on the defence of this rich Islamic heritage but through an essentialist campaign against 'the West', which is portrayed as anti-Muslim. The challenge, I will argue, is to engage in an ethical political campaign that eschews the West's past stereotypes of Muslims and Islam and yet offers a robust alternative to the legitimisation of violence. Policy-makers in Britain, however, have constructed a model of the issue that is highly problematic.

The British Government's Approach

My starting point is the British Government's attempts to grapple with the issue. The British Government's approach to the issue of terrorism 'in the name of Islam' has been the attempt to make a distinction between 'Islamist terrorism' and the mainstream Islam of the 'Muslim communities'. This position is well summed up in one of the opening paragraphs of a document tabled in Parliament by the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in July 2006, *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy*:

> The principal current terrorist threat is from radicalized individuals who are using a distorted and unrepresentative version of Islam to justify violence. Such people are referred to in this paper as Islamist terrorists. They are, however, a tiny minority within the Muslim communities here and abroad. Muslim communities themselves do not threaten our security; indeed they make a great contribution to our country. The Government is therefore working in partnership with Muslim communities to help them prevent extremists from gaining influence here.[4]

In this account there is a clear distinction between 'Muslim communities here and abroad' and 'a tiny minority' who 'are using a distorted and unrepresentative version of Islam to justify violence'. The slippage between the 'radicalized individuals' to the 'tiny minority' perhaps hints at the difficulty of deciding what the critical test of 'a distorted and unrepresentative version of Islam' actually is. In this and other related government documents there appears to be a view that individuals in the Muslim community are in danger of being won over to this form of Islam. If this is so then we must assume that there is a distinct form of Islam that already exists, and indeed the text of the strategy document names the threat as emanating from 'Islamist terrorists'.[5] This term is explained in a footnote in rather problematic terms:

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[4] HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy* (July 2006), com 6888, 1 <http://www.intelligence.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.intelligence.gov.uk/countering.pdf>.
[5] Ibid [25].

> The majority of groups usually referred to as Islamists are not terrorists. Islamism is a term with no universally agreed definition, but which is usually used to suggest that a particular group or movement is seeking to build political structures it deems Islamic.[6]

This definition is rather confused as it conflates movements that regard Islamic political structures as a necessary condition for the practice of Islam with those who advocate models of Islamic governance as a possible choice. However, Islamism is useful in identifying a form of political Islam that is categorical, makes no distinction between politics and religion, regards Islam as a complete, unchangeable and finished system and is usually associated with authoritarianism.[7] The choice of Islamism as a way of describing such movements was on the whole adopted by scholars to avoid the misleading description of 'fundamentalism', which became common in the media following the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

The Government is also keen to stress the assumption that there is a genuine, undistorted and representative form of Islam, which can be identified and used as a counterweight to the Islamist version. This approach in my view produces a confused and contradictory policy towards the 'Muslim communities'. I will argue that the Government's binary division between an assumed genuine Islam and a distorted version is flawed.

In the same year *Countering Islamic Terrorism* was produced, the Department of Education and Skills published a government guidance document entitled *Promoting Good Campus Relations*, which is aimed at helping administrators of universities and colleges engage with Muslim students. The document seeks to help Higher Education Administrators (working with 'the vast majority of students on campus') to isolate and challenge what it calls 'violent extremism'.

> Unacceptable extremism can range from incitement of social, racial or religious hatred, to advocating the use of violence to achieve fundamental change to the constitutional structure of the UK, to carrying out terrorist acts. Individuals can and do hold extreme views without espousing violence. The authorities are concerned with any form of extremism that espouses, promotes or leads to violence: 'violent extremism'.[8]

The document then explains that 'violent extremist activity in the name of Islam is justified by using a literal, distorted and unrepresentative interpretation of Islamic texts to advocate and justify violence in order to achieve fundamental

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[6] Ibid 6.

[7] See generally, F Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London, New York: I B Tauris, 1996) especially 110-12.

[8] Department for Education and Skills (UK), *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Working with Staff and Students to Build Community Cohesion and Tackle Violent Extremism in the Name of Islam at Universities and Colleges* (2006) 6 <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/pnattach/20060170/1.txt>.

change in society'.[9] This view is further emphasised by adding that a 'clear distinction should be made between these extremist individuals and the faith that they might claim to be associated with or represent … Moreover propagating false perceptions about the values and beliefs of Islam potentially adds to a vicious circle that may fuel discrimination and Islamophobia'.[10] Such statements reinforce the view expressed in *Countering International Terrorism* that terrorist danger arises from those who propagate 'false perceptions' of Islam, which are to be regarded as 'distorted and unrepresentative'. In this narrative the character of the distortion of Islam is identified as 'a literal' interpretation. Again the character of the terrorist threat is named as 'Islamist terrorism'.[11]

The document then outlines the way in which the Government thinks that such ideas spread in universities. It suggests that there are several catalysts that individually, or in combination, can be responsible for propelling individuals towards violent extremism. Amongst these it cites:

> the development of a sense of grievance and injustice; a negative and partial interpretation of history and recent events and of the perceived policies of 'the West'; a sense of personal alienation or community disadvantage arising from socio-economic factors such as discrimination, social exclusion and lack of opportunity; and exposure to extremist ideas, whether from the internet, peers or a forceful and inspiring figure already committed to extremism.[12]

These factors, it is suggested, create a pool of individuals who will attract the attention of existing extremists who will then, in the terms of the document, 'groom' individuals into their agenda. Universities and colleges, it is said, provide environments in which extremist individuals can develop networks through student societies and the like. This pool of potential extremists is composed, according to this view, of both those who are just interested in exploring their faith and those who actively seek extremist views. In either case the involvement of such students in faith-based societies or attendance at Friday prayers can expose them to recruiters who might be 'charismatic radical speakers', or whose 'scholarly background' might be 'emphasized in order to give them greater credibility in the eyes of students'.[13] There is concern that through these societies and religious activities students might be subject to peer pressure and bullying as those 'who have a differing viewpoint can be afraid to speak and differentiate themselves from the majority'.[14] The sudden turn from individual recruiters peddling a 'literal, distorted and unrepresentative interpretation of Islamic texts'

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[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid [2(4)].
[12] Ibid 7.
[13] Ibid 8.
[14] Ibid 9.

to a majority within a given student society is not explained. Nevertheless, according to the process described in the document, the views have become representative at least of this group, which will now attempt to pressure the individual into accepting the majority view. This scenario is in reality quite likely, as the many Islamic societies may well be within the orbit of one variant or other of political Islam or indeed Islamist groups. Unfortunately, instead of tackling this sensitive issue, the document falls back on pathology. In this account the individual is constructed as prey to be seized by the clever extremist. The student is seen as an individual at risk from infection. Extremism is a virus that appears to be capable of being passed from one individual to another. The remedy is to break the cycle of infection. University administrators must therefore vet literature on the campus, note speakers being invited to meetings and consider inappropriate use of the internet.[15] Strangely, university administrators are directed to these technical issues rather than to the more complex task of how to deal with an influential political movement, which while not necessarily in itself violent, may have an ambivalent attitude to violence in some circumstances.

Islamism's Place in Political Islam and its Relationship to Violence

The implication of the regular references to 'Islamist terrorism' in the Government literature is simply not thought through. Islamism is a form of political Islam that is a well-established and growing trend both within Muslim communities in Europe and particularly in the Islamic world. Political Islam comes in many strains and certainly not all are marked by an attachment to violence.[16] As we have noted, the term 'Islamism' has been used especially since the early 1990s to identify movements that are based on an assumption that Islam has a predominant political mission. The essence of such movements is their view that the ability to practise Islam fully as a religion is dependent upon the ability to create an Islamic political system. Western political systems, as well as the current political systems in the Muslim world, are seen as obstacles to this. Some variants of Islamism, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which is powerful in the Middle East, and of which the Palestinian Hamas is a component, do subscribe to violence as a method of establishing their aims. In the Middle East, Islamist parties have had great success at the polls in the recent past, as evidenced by elections in Palestine, Egypt and Bahrain. This prominence gives supporters of the Islamist movement in Europe a high degree of legitimacy. The Muslim Brotherhood works within Mosques and is well represented in Britain through the Muslim Association of Britain, which is a component of the Muslim Council of Britain,

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[15] Ibid 9-10.

[16] On political Islam see G Kepel, *Jihad, The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I B Tauris, 2006). For a fascinating account of contemporary political Islam in Egypt see R W Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 2003) esp 165-211.

a group often seen by the Government as representative of the Muslim communities. This is not to say that the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain supports terrorism within the country. However, its support for terrorism in the Middle East, in particular against Israel, does show that there is a great blurring at the boundaries of where 'violent extremism' begins and ends.

An example of this problem is Sheikh Yusef Al-Qaradawi, who is associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Is he a moderate because he condemns terrorism in Britain or an extremist because he supports it against Israel? In July 2004, Al-Qaradawi was asked on the BBC why he supported suicide bombings in Israel. His answers were instructive:

> It's not suicide, it's martyrdom in the name of God, Islamic theologians and jurisprudents have debated this issue. Referring to it as a form of jihad, under the title of jeopardizing the life of the mujahideen. It is allowed to jeopardize your soul and cross the path of the enemy and be killed.[17]

The enemy in the case of Israelis can be civilians as he explains in a highly gendered statement, 'Israeli women are not like women in our society because Israeli women are militarized'. As a result he continues, 'I regard this type of martyrdom operation as justice of Allah almighty. Allah is just. Through his infinite wisdom he has given the weak what the strong do not possess and that is the ability to turn their bodies into bombs like the Palestinians do.'[18] Al-Qaradawi has a major influence on Muslims through his teachings, which are broadcast through his web site (*Islamonline*), and his regular television program on Al Jazeera, 'Law and Life'. He has been regarded by many as a moderate and has shared platforms with many Western politicians including former United States President Bill Clinton and the former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone. The latter has made an extensive defence both of Al-Qaradawi and of his own association with him. At the time of the BBC interview, Al-Qaradawi appeared at a London conference organised by the Mayor and when objections were made to his presence due to his position on suicide bombing, Livingstone's defence was posed in these terms:

> Like many people in the Middle East, he is a strong supporter of the rights of the Palestinians. He takes the view that in the specific circumstances of that conflict that, where Israel is using modern missiles, tanks and planes in civilian areas to perpetrate the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, it is justified for Palestinians to turn their bodies into weapons.[19]

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[17] BBC News, 'Al-Qaradawi Full Transcript', *Newsnight*, 7 July 2004.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Mayor of London, *Why the Mayor of London will Maintain Dialogue with all London's Faiths and Communities: A Reply to the Dossier Against the Mayor's Meeting with Dr Yusuf Al Qaradawi* (London: Greater London Authority, 2005) 3.

This statement from the Mayor of London, while not constituting approval of the position of Al-Qaradawi, as he later makes clear, nonetheless presents a rather neutral rendering of it. As Livingstone explains his own position, he appears to equate suicide bombings with the military policy of Israel: 'it would be impossible to refuse to speak to a person like Dr Al-Qaradawi who has no personal involvement in violence of any kind, but at the same time speak to an Israeli Government, which kills Palestinian civilians with modern weapons every week'.[20] Despite Livingstone's disavowal in the same interview of violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ('I condemn violence in Israel and Palestine'), the Mayor is rather gentle with Al-Qaradawi's position. Thus, support for suicide bombings in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is constructed as just one opinion amongst others. As such, Livingstone appears to legitimise it as a policy choice. This policy choice if applied to Britain would no doubt come under the Government's view of 'violent extremism'.

Al-Qaradawi's support for suicide bombing as a legitimate tactic against Israel is not an isolated position but is commonly held amongst many segments of political Islam. It is a position that has its roots in the methodology of a political movement that is founded on the distinction between Muslims and Non-Muslims, as well as the distinction between full Muslims and failed Muslims. The prominent leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, sought to create a Muslim vanguard that would overcome the false Muslims and offer new leadership to Non-Muslims.[21] Central to his argument is the use of the concept of *Jahilliyyah*, which originally referred to the period of ignorance before the Prophet's mission in the seventh century. Qutb adapts this concept to the contemporary period: in this account the leadership of the Muslim world, both political and religious, is in the state of *Jahilliyyah*. As a result the Muslim community is

> buried under the debris of the man-made traditions of several generations, and … crushed under the weight of those false laws and customs which are not remotely related to the Islamic teachings and, which in spite of all this, calls itself the 'world of Islam'.[22]

Qutb contrasts the state of the Muslim world with

> the era during which Europe's genius created its marvelous works in science culture, law and material production, due to which mankind has progressed to great heights of creativity and material comfort. It is not easy to find fault with

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[20] Ibid.

[21] See D Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2005) 102-6.

[22] S Qutb, *Milestones* (Dehli: Markazi Maktaba Islami, first published 1964, 1991 ed) 11-12.

the inventors of such marvelous things, especially since what we call the 'world of Islam' is devoid of all this beauty.[23]

However, while material issues are not unimportant, Muslims must 'have something to offer besides material progress' and this 'faith and a way of life must take concrete form in human society — in other words, in a Muslim society'.[24] The main obstacle to achieving this is that the 'whole world is steeped in *Jahilliyyah*'.[25] Qutb explains his very modernist use of the term. First, according to this view, it takes the form of a 'rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth'.[26] Second, 'it is now not, in that simple and primitive form of the ancient *Jahillyyah*, but takes the form of claiming the right to create values to legislate rules of collective behaviour, and to choose any way of life rests with men, without any regard to what God has prescribed'.[27] He regards both capitalism and communism as being similar in emphasising the priority of mankind over God. The task of Muslims is to aim for international leadership to liberate humanity from this secular materialism through a revival of Islam. A revival of a genuine Muslim society can become a model for the whole world. As all Muslim countries have been infected by *Jahilliyyah* the central task is to remove the corrupt leaderships.

To prove this point, Qutb contrasts the actions of politicians of his day with the practices of the Prophet, as developed during his leadership in Medina and then in Mecca (622-632 AD). It is at this point in the seventh century that Qutb constructs the pure Islamic society and it is to this pure moment that Muslims need to return. The means of doing this is Jihad, which is seen as both a religious and a military struggle. Nor does he see the use of Jihad as confined to defensive action, as 'this diminishes the greatness of the Islamic way of life'.[28] Rather Jihad 'is a means of establishing the Divine Authority'.[29] Initially this will be within a Muslim country that then becomes the 'headquarters for the movement for Islam',[30] which can in turn be the springboard to bring Islamic rule to the rest of the world. Qutb emphasises that Islam uses force to remove all the barriers to the creation of a Muslim society. The '*Jahili*' leadership is such a barrier and exists in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. The aim is to create a society in which individuals will be 'free from the servitude to men and have gathered together under the servitude of God and to follow only the Shari'ah of God'.[31]

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[23] Ibid 12.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid 15.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid 130.
[29] Ibid 131.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid 135-36.

This is a universal struggle in which national and ethnic differences are to be disregarded.

Qutb's approach is a program for an international political Islam, the purpose of which is the creation of a universal Islamic political system. Violence can be justified. Indeed it is an indispensable means to the achievement of such a system.

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928, and although it was banned there, through its front organisations it is a powerful opposition in society and in the National Assembly. It also received a boost when its Palestinian affiliate, Hamas, won the Palestinian election in 2006.[32] It has branches in most Arab countries. It has an influence amongst Muslims throughout the world. Al-Qaradawi is not therefore simply an individual of some prominence within the Muslim world but rather part of a political movement that, like all other political movements, vies for support and attempts to create organisations.

Islamist Politics and 'The West'

Islamist politics are not, however, reducible to the Muslim Brotherhood, but are varied and heterogeneous. In South Asia, movements inspired by the late Sayyid Abdul Ala Mawdudi,[33] who founded the Jamaat-e-Islami in colonial India in 1941, have had great influence. Mawdudi advocated an Islamic state based on Islamic law. His views are very similar to Qutb's and the two are often thought of as the founders of modern political Islam. The Jamaat is a powerful political force in Pakistan and has branches in India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Organisations that support these views are also active in Britain and have a dominant presence in many Mosques. The Jamaat has gained its influence through working through a variety of organisations in Britain, including the United Kingdom Islamic Missions, Dawatul Islam, the Young Muslims Organisation and the Islamic Forum Europe. Saudi Arabia's Wahabi movement has also created an international network of organisations that espouse the *salafi* (or purist) form of Islam — a current that also has a strong political element. Among organisations working in Britain in support of the Wahabi movement are the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth. The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran has been a springboard for the development of political Islam amongst *shi'a*. The most prominent organisation that supports a version of the politics associated with Khomeini is the Islamic Human Rights Commission. In addition there are many other smaller organisations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), which is organised on an international basis and projects a united Islam under a restored Caliphate.[34]

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[32] On Hamas see S Mishal and A Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).
[33] 1903-1979.
[34] The Caliph was the combined religious and political leader that replaced the Prophet. In Islamic history there has rarely been agreement on one center of authority, nonetheless the Ottoman Empire

Hizb-ut-Tahrir's organisation has much in common with far-left methods of party building; it is highly disciplined, revolves around frenetic levels of activity and holds out the prospect of an imminent breakthrough in one Muslim country or another.[35] It is very active amongst students and offers not only a political vision but also a way of life, as members spend most of their time with each other. The organisation is careful to make public statements against violence in Britain, but it has been suggested that its radical ideology can provide a conveyor belt to violent activities, which is the reason that the British Government was considering banning the organisation.[36]

The Islamist insistence that Islamic religious values can only be safeguarded within an Islamic state of some sort is accompanied with an attack on democracy. This view is based on two levels of critique. The first is that democracy represents the rule by human beings and this is counter-posed to God's rule. The second attempts to appeal to contemporary political discourses and concentrates on flaws in democracy, particularly with democracy as practised by Western states, including their human rights records. The main critique of democracy and human rights is linked to an analysis of colonialism and current Western international relations.[37] In this account, democracy and human rights are sham products of the West as evidenced by centuries of colonialism and all its attendant evils.[38] It is certainly the case that the excessive claims within the West to the patrimony of democracy and human rights with deep roots in the West's history, is highly problematic.[39] It is also the case that much of the Muslim world did experience European colonialism. However, this was not true of Iran or of most of the Ottoman Empire.[40] Nevertheless, under this account, the history of subordination to Western interests in the colonial period becomes entangled with current Western policy in the Muslim world. The tendency is to construct Muslims as continuing victims of Western intrigue. The West's responsibilities are not limited to direct interventions such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also for the bolstering of authoritarian regimes in Egypt and Pakistan. The international failure to solve long-running conflicts, such as in Kashmir and the

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maintained the Caliphate as a feature of its rule. The office was abolished in 1924 when the Ottoman Empire was dismantled in its entirety with the formation of the secular Republic of Turkey under Mustafa Kemal.

[35] For an account of the organisation from the inside see E Husain, *The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, What I Saw Inside and Why I Left* (London: Penguin Books, 2007).

[36] According to reports, the police opposed the idea of a ban, as it would merely drive the organisation underground.

[37] See K Dalacoura, *Islam, Liberalism and Human Rights* (London, New York: I B Tauris, 2003) esp 65-8.

[38] See A S Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001) 1-28.

[39] See J Strawson, 'A Western Question to the Middle East: Is There a Human Rights Discourse in Islam?' (1997) 1 *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10, 31-58.

[40] The European powers arrived late in this part of the world with the British Occupation of Egypt in 1882, and then after the First World War with the British and French Mandates for Palestine (and Jordan), Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are offered as evidence of the Western complicity in Muslim suffering. Western interventions on the side of Muslims such as in Bosnia or Kosovo are either edited out of this account or seen as even more suspicious. Equally, states within the Muslim world that are occupiers, such as Turkey in Cyprus or Morocco in Western Sahara, are passed over. The humanitarian tragedy in Darfur at the hands of an Islamist regime is a situation usually too inconvenient to mention.

The construction of the Muslims into a community of victims by Islamism has the purpose of instilling a high degree of Muslim solidarity. It also creates an all-powerful single enemy, the West, which stands behind all the disasters of the Muslim world. The radically different causes of the conflicts, which the Islamists list on their roll call of victims, are ignored. Palestinians are reconstructed from a people struggling for self-determination into Muslims under attack by the Western supported Israel. In the same way, Egypt is not seen as a society torn between supporters of authoritarian rule and a movement for democracy, but as Muslims bearing the weight of Western-backed oppression.

Creating a Space where Islam can Define Itself

The British Government's policy of attempting to isolate 'violent extremism' in the same way it might deal with bird flu, fails to take into account the character of Islamism, and indeed of politics within Islam itself. In its approach, the Government assumes that there must be an Islam that is the opposite of the 'distorted' Islam it says leads to violence. In this account the Government appears to presume that there is a core Islam that is widely accepted and capable of being represented. In this presumption there is an uncanny echo of Qutb's distinction between the real Islam that he is fighting for and the fake or *Jahili* version that the current authorities project. Furthermore, the Government's analysis that certain views are 'unrepresentative' is quite untested. Indeed it can be argued that one of the great strengths of Islam is that the divine message in the Qur'an is addressed to the individual, which means that there is no established singular point of authority.[41] Islamic history has been a series of challenges, rebellions and conflicts precisely over this issue since the death of the Prophet. Islamic law (*shari'a*) to which political Islam appeals as the basis of the future of the Islamic state is not reducible to a singular code. Indeed no such code exists. Rather Islamic law is a rich discourse that is not only divided into major schools, but also into differing trends of interpretations within those schools.[42] The Government wisely refers to 'Muslim communities' rather than to the Muslim

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[41] There are several sources of authority within Islam such as the Al Azhar University in Egypt for Sunnis and the Najaf Schools in Iraq for the Shi'a, but these exercise influence over and indeed compete with other centres. This situation does mean that there are many interpretations of Islam and no single arbiter of which is correct. For an enlightening discussion of this issue see K A El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001).
[42] See, eg, S Zubaida, *Law and Power in the Islamic World* (London: I B Tauris, 2003).

community. It does not, though, draw the conclusion that this is to some extent because Islam itself is not reducible to a singular essence.[43] However, in the search for the Islam that rejects 'violent extremism' the existence of a single Islam is nonetheless assumed. The view that there is an essentialist Islam that operates according to strict identifiable principles derives from Orientalist discourse. For Said, Western constructions of Islam are to some extent the fear of the closeness of Europe to the Islamic world. As he says: 'the whole history of the creation of the Orient involves a continuous diminishment, so that now … in the Western press, the things you read about Islam and the Arab world are really horrendously simplified and completely belie the two or three hundred years of close contact'.[44] Close contact is equally rejected by the Islamists who fully utilise the space created by this distance to stake out their own 'Islam'. While the Western stereotyped Islam may have little traction within Muslim communities, the Islamists buttress their appeal by narrating familiar Islamic concepts, but through the prism of Islamist politics.

Islamism just reverses the Orientalist construction of a singular Islam. Instead of embracing an Islam open to interpretation and application, an authoritarian closure is imposed. This strangely mirrors the way in which the British Government's discourse, in its desire to construct a violence-free Islam, offers a stable and unchanging Islamic core. This choice between two rigid visions is highly problematic. However, as we see the British discourse unfold, its Orientalist roots often mean it leaves core Islamic principles to the Islamists. It is this approach no doubt that led a former Home Secretary, Charles Clark to say:

> There can be no negotiation about the re-creation of the Caliphate; there can be no negotiation about the imposition of Sharia law; there can be no negotiation about the suppression of equality between the sexes; there can be no negotiation about ending free speech. These values are fundamental to our civilization and simply not up for negotiation.[45]

Such statements assume both that there is a singular content to *shari'a* and that this content is inimical to 'our civilization': civilisation exemplified here by gender equality and freedom of speech. It should be said that if Clark is referring to 'our civilization' as the West, both gender equality and freedom of speech are of relatively recent acquisition. Such observations apart, on this view *shari'a* is necessarily opposed to both gender equality and freedom of speech. Both propositions ignore the lively debate within Islamic law and jurisprudence over

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[43] See generally A Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993).
[44] G Viswanathan (ed), *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward Said* (New York: Vintage, 2001) 238.
[45] C Clarke, 'Contesting the Threat of Terrorism' (Speech delivered at The Heritage Foundation, 5 October 2005).

both issues — debates which have a long lineage.[46] Clark therefore delivers *shari'a* to the Islamists and in so doing implies that all Muslims who disown violent extremism must do the same. A similar fate has befallen the concept of Jihad. Once seized by Islamism, and in particular by its extremist fringes, the concept has become a byword for terrorism. Indeed it is now common for Islamist organisations that support terrorism to be described as 'Jihadi' organisations and for individual terrorists to be labeled Jihadis. This must delight Osama bin Laden and all other extremists in the Muslim world. Their definition of Islam has come to be accepted.[47]

One of the main features of Islamist movements is the wholesale rejection of Islamic civilisation. This is a common feature of many different groups including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Wahabi movement in Saudi Arabia. In the latter's case the religious authorities teach that the mere existence of buildings associated with the Prophet, even his house and grave, can lead to idolatry. Accordingly, many of these sites are being progressively destroyed. This is symbolic of the Islamist approach to Islamic history much of which is dismissed as human corruption of the true message of Islam. The early Islamic empires of the Umayyads and Abbasids are also characterised as essentially corrupt systems. This results in the rejection of the elaborate jurisprudence that was established during these periods.[48] It was particularly in the early Abbasid period that the schools of law appeared and the Islamic world made its contribution to international law through the Siyar works.[49] Islamic law was formed through different schools with competing interpretations and applications.[50] This pluralism within legal discourse does not appeal to those movements that think Islam teaches only one path. The consequences of the rejection of the development of Islamic jurisprudence are highly significant. It means that when the Islamist exponents speak of *shari'a* they do not mean a sophisticated legal system based on highly complex jurisprudential arguments, but rather a newly invented rigid legal system that would justify authoritarian rule. At the same time, by removing the *Siyar* (Islamic international law) from their agenda, the Islamists very conveniently also remove the Islamic legal restraints on the use of force from their obligations. Amongst these restraints are that civilians are not legitimate targets. As Khadduri comments in his introduction to *Shaybani's*

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[46] For a progressive Islamic approach to these issues see F Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).
[47] For a discussion on this issue see J Strawson, 'Holy War in the Media: Images of Jihad' in S Chermak, F Y Bailey, and M Brown (eds), *Media Images of September 11* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2003) 17–28.
[48] See W H B Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[49] See M Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations: Shaybani's Siyar* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966).
[50] See, eg, M Khadduri (ed), *Al-Shafi'i's Risala: Treatise on the Foundation of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987).

Siyar, 'unnecessary damage in the prosecution of war was disapproved and practices such as killing noncombatants, mutilation, and treacherous attacks were prohibited'.[51] Al-Qaradawi would thus find no legal justification for his position on Israeli civilians from these sources. Nor would Osama bin Laden and the Al Qa'ida groups he has inspired find legal sanction for the long lists of attacks on civilians since 9/11.[52] Indeed such groups are not even permitted to use Jihad at all as it is a collective and not individual obligation and can only be authorised by Muslim authorities.[53] In other words, the question of the use of force in Islam is neither decided by the individual Muslim nor by the individual scholar. Within Islamic history, Jihad can only be decreed by those with recognised authority within whatever political state structure exists. This necessity derives from both the legal position of the government and the requirement for an organised collective effort.[54] Islamist ideology thus rests on a rejection not just of Western civilisation but of Islamic civilisation.

The ability of Islamist organisations to gain influence within the Muslim communities and in Mosque leaderships is due in part to the weakness of Islamic education. The portrayal of Islam in Orientalist terms as being backward during the colonial period, had a major impact on the approach to education as a whole in which a Western narrative of history and culture tended to predominate. Education within the colonies, such as India, was also seen as playing a major part in attaching the colonised peoples to the Imperial project. This had two long-term effects. First, mainstream education in the schools and universities tended to replicate the syllabus of the metropolitan countries. Within this context Islam was seen as a break on modernisation and progress. As a result, several generations of the elite within the colonised countries became detached from their own societies — often sharing the same prejudices about Islam as their colonisers. Consequently, a second effect took root: the continuation of Islamic education at the periphery in a form that was largely unregulated and certainly ignored by both the colonialists and the local elites. The combination has been lethal. By the twenty-first century most Islamic schools within a country like Pakistan are effectively controlled by Islamist groups, including the Taliban. While most of the elites remain 'Western educated' the masses have received an Islamic education at the hands of Islamists. While there are no doubt many examples of good Islamic schools with an enlightened syllabus, most have a rigid and highly ideological approach to Islam.

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[51] Khadduri, above n 49, 53.
[52] On Al Qa'ida see J Burke, *Al-Qaeda: Casting a Shadow of Terror* (London: I B Tauris, 2003).
[53] See H M Zawati, *Is Jihad a Just War? War Peace, and Human Rights under Islamic and Public International Law* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).
[54] See I Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist's Primer* (I A K Nyaze trans, Reading: Garnet, 1994) vol 1, 454-78 [trans of: *Bidayat al-Mujtiahid*].

Meanwhile in the West, Islamic studies for the most part have remained highly esoteric and confined to a few institutions. While the hold of Orientalism has weakened greatly, its effects still remain. There are few experts in the field with the result that those who do exist can exert a powerful influence on policy-making.[55] There is virtually no broad Islamic education within the school system. Where there are attempts to introduce the topic to the syllabus, the construction of Islam tends to be highly reductive and narrowly rigid. In education, as in the media, the imperative seems to be the production of 'an Islamic position'.[56]

Islamic education in many parts of the Islamic world, as well as within the West, is thus in need of great intellectual and financial investment. Western intellectual arrogance all too often has sought to claim exclusive patrimony over science, politics and law. As we have noted the same has been true for democracy and human rights, which, far from being seen as recent universal gains, are rather viewed as essentially part of an exclusively Western heritage. This has also played a part in undermining a rigorous assessment of the development of ideas across all civilisations and their impact on one another. In the case of Islam this arrogance has assisted in producing its mirror image.

A Humanist Response to the Authoritarianism of Terrorism

While the West's history and current policies have played a role in the rise of Islamism, it would be an error to assume that it is the main factor in its formation or influence. The idea that the current incarnation of terrorism is mainly the result of Western policies in Afghanistan or Iraq, for example, is erroneous.[57] The emergence of Al Qa'ida and like organisations is a political phenomenon that predates these policies. The political ideas that sustain these organisations have been in circulation for many decades and sometimes, as with the Wahabis, for centuries.[58] The lazy politics that have laid the blame for the emergence of Islamist terrorism on 'justified anger' at Western policies are merely a form of Orientalist re-inscription of Western centrality in international politics. In particular, such politics draw on the stereotype of Islam as a violent religion. It is one thing to be critical of Western policies in relation to the Middle East and quite another to kill civilians on trains and buses in London or Madrid. Furthermore, it needs to be stressed that the main victims of Islamist terrorism

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[55] An example is Daniel Pipes who has extremely essentialist views of Islam, in particular about its alleged violent nature. He writes frequently in the press and is an advisor to the Bush Administration. For an example of his work see D Pipes, *The Path of God: Islam and Political Power* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

[56] I know this personally as someone often asked by both students and the media to provide single line answers to such questions as: 'Is e-commerce compatible with Islamic Law?' or 'Does Islamic law permit husbands to beat their wives?' The questioner wants a yes or no answer — or at most a sound bite.

[57] See, eg, T Ali, *Bush in Babylon: the Recolonisation of Iraq* (London: Verso, 2004); for a spirited reply to such views see N Cohen, *What's Left? How Liberals Lost Their Way* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007).

[58] See, eg, A Rahnema (ed), *Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed Press, 1994).

have been Muslims, not in Europe, but in Iraq itself. In Iraq, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians are not the result of United States or United Kingdom military action, but of the calculated decision by Al Qa'ida in Mesopotamia and by like-minded organisations that bombing mosques, markets, hospitals, universities and other civilian targets will bring them political advantage. Yet these actions have been reconstructed as a form of 'resistance to occupation' not just by Islamist organisations, but also by segments of the Western left. This further complicates the delineation of the divide between ideas and violence.

Responding to Islamist terrorism involves grasping that Islamism is a major factor in international relations. Islamism has become the fastest growing movement in the Middle East. As soon as free elections took place in Iraq, Islamic-based parties won the lion's share of the Arab vote. As we have noted, in the past two years, Islamist political parties have won the Palestinian legislative elections and have polled well in Egypt and Bahrain. If free elections were to be held in all the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Islamist parties would probably be the largest groups in most legislatures.[59] Islamism and the parties themselves are composed of many trends and factions. Many are opposed to violence. Nonetheless, the categorical politics that the movement espouses create a space that too often legitimises violent acts. In this space notions of resistance to oppression, martyrdom and God's immutable law play a key role. The politics of Islamism thus provide the space in which toleration of violence becomes acceptable. The problem for governments in their attempt to combat violent extremism is that they have to deal with not just tiny groups of radicalised individuals, but with a major political movement that is well rooted and which circulates through mosques, schools and above all the media and the internet. The battle of ideas is not therefore engaged with tiny unrepresentative groups, but rather with a broad and influential current, which takes different political colourations. It has spawned groupings that are mobilised as supporters of different centres; the Wahabi leadership in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Sudanese Government, Hamas in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia. It is within these movements that the possibility of terrorism can be debated as a policy option. If, as Al-Qaradawi suggests, the killing of Israeli civilians in Israel is justified, then perhaps it would be equally justifiable to kill Israelis abroad, or indeed, to kill supporters of Israel anywhere. It is a short step from this to argue that the suffering of the Palestinians is the result of the policies of the West and that therefore all people in the West are implicated and thus potential targets.

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[59] See C R Ryan, 'Jordan: Islamic Action Front Presses for Role in Governing' (2006) 4(3) *Arab Reform Bulletin* http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18233&prog=zru#ryan.

The British Government's attempt to focus on isolated violent extremism as a distinct phenomenon underestimates the forces that produce it.

Terrorism involves relatively few people, and, within the West, terrorist acts cause terrible suffering to their victims, but they do not threaten governments or the political system. This is not true in some parts of the Islamic world where the alliance between terrorism and powerful Islamist political organisations does pose a serious threat to the existing political regimes. Western countries and governments in the Islamic world do have a common interest in developing a coherent response to these threats.

Islamist-based terrorism does not, however, mean that the threat we face is Islam itself.[60] Indeed it is Islamic civilisation that is perhaps the main resource that can be mobilised against terrorism and extremism. Islamist movements were not created as a reaction to Western power, but rather a response to the perception of corruption within Islam. Nonetheless, they have become adept at using the West's (often inept) policies opportunistically to mobilise their supporters. The old Orientalist images that portrayed Islam as backward, incapable of change, if exotic, play into the hands of the Islamists whose reverse discourse categorises Islam as a fixed tradition with stable values. Its attempt to appropriate the Prophetic period as an essentialist mimetic moment is an interesting re-inscription of the Orientalist account. Like Orientalism, however, it deadens Islam and reduces this critical period to a reified mythic trope.[61]

Islamic civilisation with its great contributions to theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, science, architecture and literature is itself under attack from such movements. Islamic civilisation's great dynamism and energy is in stark contrast to the narrow restrictions of the Islamist perspective. The West and the Islamic world both have an interest in investing in a major intellectual effort to overcome the effects of colonialism and Orientalism as a contribution to restoring the critical role that Islam has played within world civilisation. The intellectual project to overcome the Orientalist prism offers more than just an end to the exclusion of Islam, as Said seductively wrote:

> For the first time, the history of imperialism and its culture can now be studied as neither monolithic nor reductively compartmentalized, separate, distinct. True, there has been a disturbing eruption of separatist and chauvinist discourse whether in India, Lebanon, or Yugoslavia, or in Afrocentric, Islamocentric, or Eurocentric proclamations; far from invalidating the struggle to be free from empire, these reductions of cultural discourse actually prove the validity of the

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[60] See J J Esposito, *Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[61] See A Dashti, *23 Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammad* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1994).

fundamental liberationist energy that animates the wish to be independent, to speak freely, and without the burden of unfair domination.[62]

For the Islamic world and the West this has a special significance. It also demonstrates that colonialism and its consequences are equally problematic for the former Imperial powers as for the former colonised peoples.

The British Government, in common with most other Western powers, faced terrorism 'in the name of Islam' within a dominant intellectual environment connected to Orientalism. Despite this it was important to note the efforts that were made after 9/11 to avoid connecting terrorism to Islam in a crass way. However, the problem came as these governments attempted to identify the root problem of terrorism while at the same time 'engaging' with Muslim communities and seeking their genuine representatives. At this point, there was a relapse to an essentialist view that there was a core Islam and that terrorist extremism could be isolated as if it were a virus. The recognition within British Government documents that 'Islamism' and 'Islamist terrorism' are the threat should alert us that a political battle on an international scale is now required. Bio-security is not a model for human security.

Marginalising the Islamist current and narrowing the intellectual space for terrorism should be the aim of this political campaign. The importance of Islamic civilisation should be its core message.

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[62] E W Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) xxiii.