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## THE BUILDING OF A DOCILE ISLAM IN BRITAIN:
## HOW NOT TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

# CONTENTS

## About Conflicts Forum

Conflicts Forum effectively acts as 'translator' of ideas and of politics, rather than 'reconciler'; situated in a space that is neither a part of Islamic nor Western spheres. It seeks to look deeply for the roots and causes of differences in thinking and narratives that explain the symptoms that are present in local conflicts throughout the region, and in tensions with the West.

The aim firstly is to pull the debate in the West on Islamism from the paradigm of one that sees the issues largely in terms of today's violence and militancy, to one that looks beyond the immediate—to the underlying ideas and thinking that gave rise to such symptomatic crises in the first place.

Secondly, it seeks to challenge the flawed Western understanding of the template of 'moderation and extremism', by clearly differentiating between intolerant dogmatic Islamism on the one hand, and political, reasoning Islamism on the other.

Thirdly, it acts as a catalyst, directly initiating 'politics' between the two spheres—encouraging shifts in language and thinking about 'how to do politics' without compromise to principles, and by challenging conventional models of 'peace processes'.

Conflicts Forum does this work because it believes in the principle that it needs to be done—irrespective of whether Conflicts Forum can be credited with specific achievements. We are passionately committed to bring about a fundamental reappraisal of what constitutes the essence and significance of Islamism. Conflicts Forum has a well-established record of challenging conventional thinking on Islamism and also on the construction of political processes.

**Cover**
Members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamist political party, demonstrate in London, England on 10 December 2005. The demonstration was called to protest against anti-terror laws and other government proposals which they claim attack all Muslims.

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# SPOOKED!

# HOW NOT TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The British government describes its *Preventing Violent Extremism* programme (hereafter *Prevent*) as a "community-led approach to tackling violent extremism". *Prevent* has become, in effect, the government's Islam Policy'.

*Written by* Arun Kundnani

**IT** believes that by selectively directing resources at 'moderate' Muslim organizations to carry out community development and 'anti-radicalisation' work, it can empower them to unite around 'shared British values' to isolate the 'extremists'. With hundreds of millions of pounds of funding, the *Prevent* programme has come to redefine the relationship between government and around two million British citizens who are Muslim. Their 'hearts and minds' are now the target of an elaborate structure of surveillance, mapping, engagement and propaganda.

The *Prevent* programme, with a budget in 2008/09 of £140 million, is a part of the British government's counter-terrorist strategy which focuses on mobilizing communities to oppose the ideology of violent extremism. Despite the government's claim that it is communities-led, the allocation of *Prevent* funding to local authorities has not been driven by decision-making process in which local agencies identify their own needs and access central government funds accordingly. Rather, local authorities have been pressured to adopt *Prevent* in direct proportion to the numbers of Muslims in the area-thereby constructing the Muslim popula-

tion as a 'suspect community'.

Local authorities (municipalities) have used *Prevent* funding, in its early stages, to carry out "targeted capacity building of Muslim communities", focusing particularly on young people, women and mosques. But serious problems arise when deprived communities with many needs consider that their voluntary sector organisations can only access the resources to meet these needs if they are willing to sign up to a counter-terrorism agenda. With the revised counter-terrorist strategy published in March 2009, the focus of *Prevent* widened to promoting shared values as well as opposing violent extremism.

So far, public discussion of *Prevent* has focused on the question of whether the programme is too soft on non-violent 'extremists' (who are said to clandestinely benefit from the funding stream) and the question of value for money (whether the money is being wasted on 'feel-good' projects which do little to actually prevent violent extremism). Our research set out to address these questions but also to ask: what is the general impact of *Prevent* funding at community level; what, in practice, is the definition of extremism in *Prevent*-funded projects; does *Prevent* funding foster cohesion across communities or exacerbate inter-communal conflicts and divisions; how do *Prevent* programmes interact

with local democracy; how does the *Prevent* programme view Muslim communities; and whether the *Prevent* programme involves non-police agencies in intelligence-gathering.

What we found in our research was that there are strong reasons for thinking that the *Prevent* programme, in effect, constructs the Muslim population as a 'suspect community', fosters social divisions among Muslims and others, encourages tokenism, facilitates violations of privacy and professional norms of confidentiality, discourages local democracy and is counter-productive in reducing the risk of political violence.

Moreover, there is evidence that the *Prevent* programme has been used to establish one of the most elaborate systems of surveillance ever seen in Britain. We also examined the general framework of the *Prevent* programme and found the underlying assumptions of a 'hearts and minds' approach to be themselves problematic.

These concerns have been largely ignored in the published literature, with the important exception of the An-Nisa Society's *Prevent: a Response From the Muslim Community* report of February 2009. Yet, as a result, of these concerns with *Prevent*, for the first time in 20 years there is a significant trend of voluntary

sector organisations refusing local authority funding on the grounds of principled objections. *Prevent* has come to be perceived as an integral part of an authoritarian counter-terrorist system that violates the human rights of Muslims through disproportionate arrests (less than a seventh of those arrested under anti-terrorist legislation since 9/11 have gone on to be convicted) through the control order regime, and the emerging evidence that the UK intelligence services have been operating a secret interrogation policy which facilitated the torture of Britain citizens by foreign agencies. If the objective of *Prevent* is to win the trust of Muslims in Britain, its failure cannot be overstated.

It goes without saying that there is a real and ongoing risk of terrorism within Britain. It is not the purpose of this report to downplay the seriousness of that danger or the difficulties involved in intercepting potential acts of violence. These difficulties notwithstanding, it remains vital to apply democratic and human rights standards to counter-terrorism programmes, not least because, in the long term, this is an essential precondition of ensuring community support. This report is therefore part of the essential project of researching, discussing and campaigning on the role of the police and security services in counter-terrorism, a project which should not shy away from taking a critical stand for fear of giving succour to extremists. The stated aim of the government's counter-terrorist strategy is to enable people to "go about their lives freely and with confidence". The question we pose here is whether freedom and confidence for the majority can be enabled by imposing a lack of freedom and confidence on a minority—in this case, the Muslim population of Britain.

### The *Prevent* programme

In 2004, the British government launched what *The Times* newspaper described as "one of the most ambitious government social engineering projects in recent years". Alongside the legislative and policing aspects of Britain's domestic counter-terrorism programme, it was decided there should be an attempt to win over the hearts and minds of young Muslims in Britain away from the extremist narrative. The aim was to reduce the circulation of "extremist ideas" and tackle the widespread discontent and disaffection which extremists were thought to exploit. This was to be achieved by strengthening

the hand of moderate Muslim leaders through government contact and targeted capacity building. As a senior civil servant explained: "We did the same in Northern Ireland in the 1980s when, as well as deploying police and troops on the streets, we had a massive programme of investment in the local community, raising living standards. We also set about bridge-building with the Catholic community."

The fact that the 7/7 bombings (7 July 2004) in London were carried out by 'homegrown' terrorists increased prominence of this broadly 'hearts and minds' approach. The Preventing Extremism Together taskforce, which was initiated by the British government in the wake of the 7 July bombings and was made up of a relatively wide cross-section of Muslim community representatives, made 64 recommendations in its November 2005 report, including a demand for a public inquiry into the 7 July attacks. Its key argument was that ultimately the solution to extrem

ism lay in tackling a series of issues that affected Muslim communities: inequality, discrim-ination, deprivation and foreign policy.

In April 2007 the government launched its *Prevent* programme, with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publishing *Preventing Violent Extremism: winning hearts and minds*, which set out "a community-led approach to tackling violent extremism". The ideas first aired three years earlier had by now evolved into a new strategy summed up in the dictum that "communities defeat terrorism". Counter-terrorism's 'hard' side of 'emergency' police power needed, it was said, to be complemented with the 'soft' side of community engagement and this meant a series of initiatives at the local level, involving both the voluntary and statutory sectors. The overall counter-terrorist strategy—known as *Contest*—was thus made up of series of distinct strands:

| There is evidence that the *Prevent* programme has been used to establish one of the most elaborate systems of surveillance ever seen in Britain |

**Above right**
Young British Muslim women on an anti-Israel demonstration. Israel had launched attacks on Gaza and Lebanon in retaliation for the capture of three of its soldiers.

**Pursue**: stopping terrorist attacks through detection, investigation, prosecution and other sanctions;

**Protect**: protection of infrastructure, crowded places, the transport system and border controls;

**Prepare**: mitigating the impact of attacks through strengthening the response of the emergency services and so on;

**Prevent**: stopping people becoming terrorists and supporting violent extremism.

However, the form which the *Prevent* programme's community engagement was to take turned out to be quite different from what the *Preventing Extremism Together* taskforce of 2005 had anticipated. The government's advice to local authorities involved in the *Prevent* programme stated that:

"Preventing violent extremism in the name of Islam must, first and foremost, be about winning the struggle of hearts and minds. Winning hearts and minds will take significant efforts by Muslim communities to tackle the pernicious ideology being spread by a small minority of extremists, and will mean local Muslim communities taking a leadership stance against sophisticated campaigning and extremist messages. Our aim is to support that through targeted capacity building."

This suggested that the focus of *Prevent*

would not be on inequality, discrimination and deprivation but on an ideological campaign that selected Muslim organisations would be empowered to carry out on behalf of the government.

Also in early 2007, a new department within the British Home Office, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), was formed with the aim of setting the general parameters of UK's *Contest* counter-terrorism strategy within which the police, the intelligence services and other agencies would operate. The creation of the OSCT was designed to overcome departmental boundaries and encourage cross-government working on counter-terrorism. Later in 2007, the OSCT defined the objectives of the *Prevent* strategy as:

**Challenging** the violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices;

**Disrupting** those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they may be active;

**Supporting** individuals who are being targeted and recruited to the cause of violent extremism;

**Increasing** the resilience of communities to violent extremism; and

**Addressing** the grievances that ideologues are exploiting.

The objectives were to be supported by two "cross-cutting streams" which were "key enabling functions" in delivering the

strategy: "Developing understanding, analysis and information; and Strategic communications".

The design of the strategy rested centrally on the notion that the work of "countering violent extremist ideology" would "rarely be done directly by government" but rather by Muslim communities themselves, supported in this work through "targeting capacity building". Embedding this ideological campaign within communities themselves would, it was hoped, provide for a far more effective rejection of "the ideology of violent extremism" and isolation of the "apologists for terrorism".

In 2007, the Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund (PVEPF) was established with a modest £6 million budget to support seventy priority local authorities in England in meeting these objectives. In April 2008, the amount of money being spent on *Prevent* increased significantly. The PVEPF money distributed by the DCLG to seventy local authorities developed into a three-year £45 million area-based grant which, by 2010, will be distributed among 94 local authorities. An increase to this budget of £7.5 million was announced in August 2009. A further £5.1 million is being distributed over the same three-year period through the CLF stand. Along with other smaller funding steams,

this means that the total money spent on *Prevent* by the DCLG from April 2007–11 is likely to be £80 million. It is expected that, by April 2011, over £61.7 million will have been provided to local authorities for *Prevent* work. Finally, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has a substantial *Prevent* programme with funding of £400 million over 2008–2010 (see below). Across all of these departments, the total *Prevent* budget in 2008/9 was over £140 million. In March 2009, it was anticipated that by 2010 the total *Prevent* budget would have increased by a further £100 million.

The British Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has a substantial *Prevent* programme "to counter extremists' false characterisation of the UK as being a place where Muslims are oppressed. This work has funding of £400 million over 2008–2010. It includes, for example, facilitating visits by delegations of British Muslims to Muslim-majority countries and a "dedicated team of key language specialists" working "to explain British policies and the role of Muslims in British society, in print, visual and electronic media" across the Muslim world. The FCO is also undertaking a programme entitled "Bringing foreign policy back home" which involves "explaining" foreign policy to Muslims in the UK. Since March 2008, FCO officials have taken part in forty-five events, including in Towers Hamlets, Birmingham, Bradford and Glasgow, designed to discuss foreign policy with British Muslims and "challenge myths often peddled by violent extremists". In addition, the FCO has paid £520,000 to an organization called Deen International to produce a public relations campaign in Pakistan. The campaign, entitled *I am the West*, involves television commercials featuring prominent British Muslims.

### Constructing Muslims into a 'suspect community'

The problem with attempting to mobilise all these Muslims against 'extremism' is that it, in effect, constructs Muslims into a 'suspect community' in which the failure of Muslim individuals or organisations to comply with this mobilization makes them suspect in the eyes of the counter-terrorist system and shifts them from the bottom layer of 'mainstream Muslims' to the middle layer of 'extremists.

However, Muslims may want to avoid participating in the government's *Prevent* programme for a number of reasons which have nothing to do with support for political violence. According to one local authority manager in the Midlands:

"There is strong pressure on the local authority to sign up to *Prevent*. They didn't adopt [the counter-terrorism agenda], but they still have to report on it. So it is frustrating to them when individuals raise criticisms and hold the agenda back. The Government Office and the police are driving the agenda and putting a lot of pressure on us but the local authority, which is generally made up of 'tickbox people', has no competency to deal with it. We have no information from the police as to whether there is actually a problem of extremism in this area. I want to do evidence-based work on the underlying issues of the housing, drug-dealing and so on—all the issues that lead to Muslims being an underclass. I also want to widen it to the far Right. But as soon as I say something critical about *Prevent*, I get called by management, police or a representative from the Government Office. There's scare-mongering if you raise questions. They say: 'When something does happen…', implying you're the one who's going to be responsible."

There is no doubt that the need for community development among Muslim populations is great. But there are serious problems when deprived communities with many needs find that their voluntary sector organisations believe that they can only access the resources to meet these needs if they are willing to sign up to a counter-terrorism agenda. This is particularly so when that agenda brings with it an element of surveillance. As one interviewee noted, it is counter-productive for the government to relate "to Muslims only through a counter-terrorism label rather than as citizens through mainstream policies". Another noted that "community development and counter-terrorism are fundamentally different and have different objectives".

### Contest 2

In March 2009, the government published a revised counter-terrorism strategy, written by the OSCT, known as *Contest 2*. The new strategy signaled a commitment to a much more overt campaign of challenging not just violent extremism but extremism in general. This was a response to two public criticisms which had been made of the *Prevent* programme as it had been implemented to date: first, that the criteria determining who was entitled to access funding were too loose so that groups which were extremist but not engaged in criminal violence could get funding; second, that much of the work being funded was of little relevance to actually reducing the risk of extremism and that there needed to be more of an emphasis on direct challenges to extremist ideas rather than general community development work.

As a result of these criticisms, the government was able to be more explicit in stating exactly what it wanted the *Prevent* programme to do. Thus the key shift in *Contest 2* is the government's attempt to lead British society in overtly challenging "views which fall short of supporting violence and are within the law, but which reject and undermine our shared values and jeopardise community cohesion".

### A brief history of "international terrorism"

With the publication of *Contest 2*, the OSCT included as part of its counter-terrorism strategy document *A Detailed Account of the History of the Threat*. This is the first time that the British government has decided to publish its own account of the history of international terrorism, which it traces back to 1968. "The first modern international terrorist incident", this official history claims, took place "when a faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) hijacked an Israeli commercial flight from Rome". The next key moment in this history is the early 1980s, when a "militant Islamist ideology", initially with only a domestic agenda, emerged in Egypt and Afghanistan. But this militant Islamism soon had a "growing influence" which was "seen elsewhere", notably in the first intifada, in the Occupied Territories from 1987 onwards. This trajectory then leads to the formation of Al-Qaida in the late 1980s in Afghanistan. In this rendering, as some commentators have noted, a whole range of movements involving Arabs or Muslims, including an uprising by Palestinians which was dominated by secular nationalist politics, is merged together to form an idea of Islamist international terrorism. The political context to international terrorism is minimized, and political violence by Muslims is implicitly taken to be a cultural problem located within Islam's failure to properly transition to modernity.

This point was illustrated when, on the eve of the publication of the *Contest 2* strategy document, the government wrote a letter to the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) stating that unless its deputy general secretary Daud Abduallah resigns, it would sever relations with the organisation. Abdullah had recently signed the so-called Istanbul declaration which called for Muslims to resist the blockade of Gaza. The public rift with the MCB was a symbolic matter; it had long since fallen out of favour with the government. But the government's distancing of a major Muslim organization sent a signal that, as one interviewee noted: "The crunch was now coming for all sorts of organizations which had received *Prevent* funding in the past". Much of the community development work that had been funded in the past would now have to involve itself in the explicit promotion of 'British values' and the rejection of 'anti-Western' views. A community activist put it like this:

"With the *Contest 2* agenda, it makes it impossible for us to continue the sort of work with young people we have been doing, for example theatre work, which is now considered too much of a 'softly softly' approach. When we did a play about a young person who becomes radicalized, we had a panel event afterwards, with discussion and young people asking questions. But the *Contest 2* agenda instructs people what is right or wrong in a more directive way. It tells young people 'you will not disagree', 'you will support British troops', that sort of thing. There is no room for us to let young people explore their anger in the way that they need to. With *Contest 2*, we can't listen to what young people tell us—as we have a duty to report it".

### Moderates and extremists

For Muslims organizations that are able to present themselves as 'moderate', significant financial and symbolic resources are being offered by central and local government. The danger is that the distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' is flexible enough to be exploited by government to marginalize those who are critical of its policies. And the use of government funding to promote particular interpretations of religious texts is potentially dangerous. One effect of *Prevent* is to undermine exactly the kind of radical discussions of political issues that would need to occur if young people are to be won over and support for illegitimate political violence diminished.

Our interviewees identified three potential problems which arise when such an approach is put into practice: The terms 'moderate' and 'extremist' are at times defined in practice by the degree to which Muslims support or oppose central government or local authority policies. The general atmosphere promoted by *Prevent* is one in which to make criticisms is to risk losing funding and face isolation as an extremist, while those organisations which echo the government's own political line are rewarded with large sums of public money. What this suggests is that *Prevent* is being used to cultivate politically loyal community leaders rather than support communities in leading a drive against terrorism. Organisations which have refused to work on *Prevent* projects, been critical of it, or withdrawn from it because of concerns over the issues it raises, have themselves been branded as extremists.

The category of 'moderate Muslims' is at times defined theologically, leading to the potential danger of government sponsorship for its preferred religious trends. Extremism is seen by the government as a 'twisted reading' or misreading of Islam that justifies terrorism. To counter this extremism, the *Prevent* programme seeks to identify and empower moderate Muslims who can offer an alternative reading of Islam. For example, the government is backing roadshows of mainstream Islamic scholarship to tour Britain to "counter extremist propaganda" and "denounce it as un-Islamic".

*Prevent* funding has been widely used to incorporate 'mainstream mosques' into the orbit of local authority funding, professionalising them and making them partners in the wider *Prevent* programme.

Most local authorities funded to do *Prevent* work by the DCLG have included some kind of engagement with mosques as part of their programme. In particular, 'moderate' mosques are being encouraged to engage with young people and win them over, an area in which they are seen as weaker than extremists at present. In Walsall, for example, the *Prevent* action plan includes training for Imams "to iden-

## The danger is that the distinction between 'moderate' and 'extremist' is flexible enough to be exploited by government to marginalize those who are critical of its policies

Baghdad, Iraq, 02 October 2005: British Army Rangers sunbathing at the Liberty Pool. Once only frequented by Iraq's Ba'athist elite, the luxury swimming pool and gym now fills with troops. Their body armour, helmets and weapons all within easy reach, they either soak up the sun or compete with each other in diving competitions. After a daily briefing the troops have access to the Mosquito and Camel Bar, where they watch TV or play pool and, in accordance with the 'two-can rule', are allowed to drink two beers per night.

"The *Contest* 2 agenda instructs people what is right or wrong in a more directive way. It tells young people 'you will not disagree', 'you will support British troops', that sort of thing."

tify individuals who show signs of misinterpreting the Quran". In Bradford, the Council of Mosques has been supported by *Prevent* funding of £80,000 from the DCLG's community leadership fund in 2008/09 to develop a teaching resource for madrassahs known as Nasiha. Much of the resource is an impressive attempt to introduce key religious concepts. There is a perception, however, that, on occasion, the resource might appear too eager to interpret the original Islamic sources as having meanings useful to the *Prevent* programme. For example, verses are interpreted as meaning that "the root cause of extremism, racism and bullying is hatred—and all three can destroy a community... Hatred can also lead to arrogance and anti-Western sentiments—again this is not what Islam teaches". Another verse is interpreted as meaning: "We have to communicate with our local authorities and get involved in electing suitable leaders for our religion".

The perception that the government is sponsoring Muslim organisations on the basis of theological criteria—for example, holding Sufis to be more favourable than Salafis [an orientation of Islam that seeks literal emulation of the early Muslim community and a literal interpretation of the Koran and Hadith]—runs counter to the secular separation of Church and state, even though such a separation is itself upheld as a marker of moderation which Muslims should aspire to. As Asma Jahangir, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, pointed out in her 2008 report on the UK, "it is not the Government's role to look for the 'true voices of Islam' or of any other religion of belief. Since religions or communities of belief are not homogenous entities it seems advisable to acknowledge and take into account the diversity of voices... The contents of a religion or belief should be defined by the worshippers themselves."

There is also a risk of discovering extremists where none exist, if an interpretative framework based on the simple binary of 'moderate' and 'extremist' is imposed on the complex and dynamic picture of Muslim religious life. For example, since the 1990s, a major trend among young Muslims has been identification with the global ummah as a third way alternative to either assimilating into what many perceive to be a hostile society or following their parents' religio-cultural

## The terrain on which this "battle of ideas" is to be fought is the attitudes and opinions of mainstream Muslims in Britain

traditions, which are bound up with South Asian languages, poetry and 'folk' practices such as reverence for holy men or pirs. The emphasis is thus on purifying oneself from these cultural accretions which are seen as contaminating the Islamic message. This 'return' to the original Islamic texts and a global version of Islam is often seen as a Salafist precursor to extremism although it is more likely to lead to new kinds of positive engagement with British society.

The basis for this theological and cultural approach to preventing violent extremism is twofold. First, there is the idea that terrorist radicalisation is rooted in religio-cultural rejection of Western modernity. Second, is the idea that such rejection needs to be combated by a government-led 'battle of ideas'.

The government sees the emergence of an inter-linked global insurgency as the real threat represented by Al-Qaida: "At various moments Al-Qaida and its associates have made the transition from terrorism to insurgency, notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. As insurgencies they have posed different and a wider threat to the UK and its interests than their forebears."

The terrain on which this 'battle of ideas' is to be fought is thus the attitudes and opinions of mainstream Muslims in Britain. The possibility of anti-Western extremists winning over mainstream Muslims to their cause comes to be seen as

a strategic challenge to British national security. The danger here is that British Muslims become, in the imagination of the counter-terrorist system, no longer citizens to whom the state is accountable but potential recruits to a global counter-insurgency that is threatening the state's prospects of prevailing in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. This international dimension means that the attention focused on this extremism is of a completely different kind to that focused on, say, right wing extremism, which is taken to be no more than a public order threat. What emerges is a determination that the problem can only be fully addressed if Muslims take it upon themselves to do more, to actively mobilize against the extremists, and that therefore more pressure should be brought to bear upon Muslims in general and their community organisations. ◼

*This is an edited extract from* Spooked! How not to Prevent Violent Extremism *by Arun Kundnani (Institute of Race Relations, London, October 2009). A full copy of the report can be downloaded for free at http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/spooked.pdf We are grateful to the author and the Institute for Race Relations for permission to reprint this edited excerpt.*

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# PAKISTAN WITHOUT BORDERS

**B**order wars of a textbook kind fought outside civilian areas for the most part and full of instances of old-fashioned honour and respect among enemy soldiers, these conflicts are a far cry from the brutal operations conducted in urban areas that mark modern warfare in the world beyond. This kind of unregulated violence is in South Asia characteristic of domestic strife, whether among civilians or between them and the state, and has been so since colonial times. Even when instigated from abroad, therefore, such violence fits into or mimics internal forms of conflict, resulting in the rhetoric of a citizenship betrayed from within rather than in the language of geopolitical calculation. In this sense even Pakistan-sponsored terrorism comes to be conceived as fundamentally domestic in nature, not only because of any support it might enjoy among Indian Muslims, but also by reason of the long and intimate history of shared relations that it invokes.

When India blames Pakistan for terrorist attacks it is partly to prevent Indian Muslims from being victimized and so to clamp down on civil strife. And when Pakistan blames India's domestic enemies for the same attacks it is precisely to intensify internal conflict and evade responsibility for terrorism. The role played by civil strife is therefore crucial in accounting for the behaviour of both countries beyond the geopolitical fantasies and war scenarios so beloved of the global press. Pakistan tends to be situated within one of two geopolitical landscapes by scholars, journalists and policymakers alike. In the first it is seen as a South Asian country whose politics is directed chiefly by a history of confrontation with India, which determines Pakistan's relations with everyone from China to the United States. And in the second it is viewed as a Muslim country whose relations with both allies and

While the international media routinely begins analysis of regional politics in South Asia by referring to the history of warfare between India and Pakistan —now inevitably described as "nuclear-armed rivals" —their wars have in fact all been models of restraint.

*Written by* Faisal Devji
*Photograph by* Warrick Page

enemies are informed by Islamic solidarities that have become increasingly internationalized. In its South Asian landscape Pakistani politics is defined by reasons of state, while its politics as a Muslim country is informed by popular opinion. It is impossible to put together a "big picture" of the country's political life by combining these incommensurable visions. I would like to suggest instead that Pakistan should be seen not as a country situated in some geopolitical space, but as a borderland created by the overlapping jurisdictions of a number of such spaces.

We need only reflect upon the Pakistani army's master doctrine of "strategic depth" to realize how its own military strategy deprives the country of geopolitical integrity. According to this doctrine the country's geography can only sustain a narrow corridor of infrastructure, whether civilian or military, that is strung out along the Indus and its tributaries, and whose vulnerability to attack necessitates the drawing of Pakistan's strategic borders outside its political ones. What is important about this doctrine is not its truth or falsehood, nor even its ability to explain Pakistani actions in India and Afghanistan, but rather the fact that it divests the country of all integrity by rendering its already porous borders strategically irrelevant. Whatever social or economic unity it might possess, therefore, Pakistan does not exist as a country from the military

point of view, which thus resolves it precisely into a borderland.

And in fact it is Pakistan rather than the old "buffer-zone" of Afghanistan that has served as the borderland of conflicts across the region as well as the globe. Whereas Afghanistan had in the past constituted a borderland for the imperial rivalry of the Mughals and Safavids or the "great game" of the British and Russians, Pakistan has in our own times formed a political borderland between the Americans and the Soviets or the Indians and the Chinese. But the country has not simply become the site of regional or global conflict as a proxy state. Having significantly outpaced its old enemy economically and politically, for instance, India is now in the curious position of treating Pakistan as a problem internal to its rapidly expanding sphere of influence. This was made evident once the Asian giant had cemented alliances of one sort or another with all its smaller rival's neighbours, thus encapsulating Pakistan within what are in effect the economic and military borders of British India.

However all of this represents nothing more than the paradoxical fulfilment of Pakistan's doctrine of strategic depth, whose politics of supporting militancy in Kashmir and other parts of India had long ago made the country into an internal problem for its larger neighbour. In this sense Pakistan presents for India almost the same kind of problem as semi-autono-

mous tribal areas like Waziristan do for
the Islamic Republic, with both countries
interested in preserving these enclaves and
containing their fractious politics. But
then much of what is today Pakistan had
existed precisely as this sort of enclave
within British India, a status to which it
arguably returned after the violent separa-
tion of Bangladesh in 1971, following which
Indian policy was dedicated to containing
its enemy and even keeping it in place
rather than risking the possibility of
Pakistan's remaining portion dissolving
into anarchy.

Even when Pakistan serves as a proxy
for some other state or supplies the site for
a war waged by outside forces on its terri-
tory, a double role it has played in two glo-
bal conflicts already, as an American ally
during the Cold War and now in the War
on Terror, it does so in an unusual way.
After an Islamic republic was established
in Iran, for example, Pakistan quickly
became an important ideological battle-
field between the forces of Shiite revolu-
tion sponsored by Iran and those of the
Sunni counter-revolution funded by Saudi
Arabia. With the Iran-Iraq war another
front was added to this battle that saw the
emergence of sectarian militias and suicide
bombings in Pakistan, from where such
forms were introduced to the Middle East.
Pakistan became the setting for sectarian
struggle because it is the most important
Sunni country in the world, with a large
population at home and abroad, a skilled
workforce, industrial capacity and a
sophisticated elite, all of which made it
into a significant site of Islamic ideological
production.

Yet Pakistan, together with India, is
also home to the only important Shiite
elite outside Iran, one that is instrumental
in funding sectarian causes worldwide. So
it is not surprising that Pakistan should
have become the model of sectarian mili-
tancy throughout the Muslim world.

Indeed this struggle, sponsored by states like Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan itself, can even be said to have given substance to both the recent wars in Afghanistan, whatever the Russians or Americans thought was happening there. Unlike Afghanistan, however, Pakistan has never been a mere proxy in such conflicts, since it is by no means weak in military or even economic terms, until recently enjoying a growth rate of eight percent despite its continuing political crisis. In fact Pakistan has been embroiled in these conflicts precisely because of its strengths, which include a professional army that has since colonial times been used around the region as a mercenary force, in our days rented out to countries like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait as much as it is to the United States.

Whether or not they are supported by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence or by its army for strictly geopolitical reasons, militant outfits like the Jaish-e Muhammad or Lashkar-e Taiba possess ideologies that diverge from that underwriting the Islamic Republic. The latter group, for example, claims to want a subcontinent fragmented into Hindu, Muslim and Sikh states more or less as these existed in colonial days. Not the Mughal Empire, in other words, but the princely states of the British past are what constitute the Lashkar's model, though of course regions like Kashmir are reserved for Muslim rule rather than seen as the inheritance of their erstwhile Hindu maharajas. Resembling in some ways the wildest imaginings of Pakistan during the last days of the Raj, or some of the more balkanized British plans for an independent South Asia, the Lashkar-e Taiba's utopia not only harks back to a past shared by Hindus and Muslims, it also intertwines these communities in the most intimate ways. If anything this intimacy signals the failure of the Muslim League's attempt to divorce the two by insisting upon the par-

tition British India in 1947. And in fact the Lashkar's geopolitics can be seen as deriving less from the League than from anti-Pakistan movements among the Muslims of British India, which imagined the political co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in a variety of interconnected ways.

Whatever its genealogy, however, the Lashkar's utopia with its nostalgia for the colonial past is worlds removed from the Islamic emirates and universal caliphates that serve as models among many of its peers. Can this curious vision of the future be a force that mobilizes young men to sacrifice their lives in cities like Mumbai? Or it is simply the sectarian narrative of a Shiite or Hindu threat that works to inspire these militants bent upon righting historical wrongs? Perhaps the Lashkar-e Taiba only achieves meaning as a constituent element of Indian as well as Pakistani societies, without relying upon the geopolitical language of international borders and interests. In other words it is only by ignoring or erasing these boundaries that the Lashkar can operate, which it in fact does by deploying a rhetoric of familiarity with the enemy, often going so far as to plan its sorties in Kashmir together with the Indian troops stationed there, each side staying out of the other's way and claiming victory in the operations that follow. Similar are the relations of corruption that the Lashkar's operatives enjoy with their ostensible enemies, which include purchasing weapons from the Indian military across the border in Kashmir, or smuggling them with the connivance of Indian customs and police officials into Mumbai by sea.

Although the Indian government has expended great efforts in describing the Mumbai attacks in geopolitical terms, as part of its traditional enmity with Pakistan, we have seen that this explanation makes little sense, even if we attribute the strike to some faction within Pakistan's military

or secret service that operates outside state control. Such an explanatory framework in fact deprives the attacks of geopolitical weight by reducing them to mere throws of the dice, meant either to goad India into a pre-scripted response or allow Pakistan to achieve some temporary advantage, such as diverting its armed forces, together with the world's attention, from its border with Afghanistan to the one it shares with India. All of the geopolitical explanations proffered after the Mumbai strikes in November last year have been of this type, which is to say high-risk conspiracies meant to achieve uncertain and short-term ends. None of them can therefore claim the status of political analysis, dispensing as they do with strategic issues to focus on tactics alone. But explanations that would attribute the strike to global forms of Islamic militancy are equally unsatisfactory, as they are unable to account for any of its particularities, which are seen to be entirely opportunistic and therefore quite random. Perhaps the time has come for us to recognize that the two forms of terrorism I have been describing no longer belong to the political traditions of this region. On the one hand there is the Lashkar-e Taiba, for which the India-Pakistan border has become inconsequential, not least because its bi-national politics has been distorted by the Afghan war's gravitational pull. The Kashmir issue has therefore been subordinated to a wider struggle, while becoming at the same time marginalized within the arena of Hindu-Muslim strife elsewhere in India. ◼

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*Written by* Seyed Sadreddin Safavi

# CULTURAL AND RELATIONSHIP 'IRFAN SUFISM ITS TO

The essence of Islam is 'Irfan or Sufism, which is the path of spiritual wayfaring towards Allah for the purpose of attaining union with Him, reaching perfection through annihilation (Fana) in the Divine attributes, acts and essence and attaining subsistence (Baqa') in Allah. 'Irfan is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition. The socio-cultural manifestation of Sufism occurred at the very beginning of Islamic history and is best portrayed by Prophet Muhammad, his successor Ali and the Ashab Al-Suffah, who were companions of the Prophet. They lived in the mosque of the Prophet in Medina and had no worldly possessions. In times of war, they fought in defence and preservation of Islam, and at other times they engaged in worship, dialogue with Allah and contemplation. The spiritual aspects of Islam were explained and presented by Imam Ali in his conduct, character and speech, some of which are mentioned in the Nahjul Balaghah, and his Sermon of Muttaqin is the manifesto of mystics. The Zabur of the Ahlul Bayt, which is the Sahifa Sajjadiyah of Imam Zein al-Abidin, is also one of the most important representations of the essence of the Islamic tradition of spirituality, known as 'Irfan.

The continuation of the manifestation of Sufism as a culture of criticism and resistance against oppression and the distortion and abuse of Islam, and as the institution for the teaching and propagation of the reality of Islam, occurred after the martyrdom of Imam Ali and the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty. This dynasty, which in essence moved away from Islam and established an immoral and unjust socio-political system, was in sharp contrast to the Islamic system and values, but in appearance wore the shroud of Islam in order to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the masses, and set the precedent that was followed by future dynasties which ruled Muslim communities.

The social movement of 'Irfan started to form as a means of protest, criticism and resistance against the abuse of religion by the government and the extreme distancing of the official institutions of power, which spoke of religion and taught a false image of Islam. This movement strove to spread and preserve the truth of Islam, which was ethics, spirituality, love of Allah and the people, justice, equality and the lack of attachment to the material world.

This movement is best symbolised in the Hussaini revolution. On the one hand there was the caliph and the materialism and the distorted version of Islam that he represented, and on the other hand the Sufis with their ascetic behaviour; the mystics wore simple and cheap attire, ate very little, either did not have a house or lived in very cheap and simple houses, and continually opposed the established system and its false materialist and superficial version of Islam.

This demonstrated the contrast between true Islam as represented by the Sufis who were part of the masses, and the Islam of the caliphate and government. Gradually the Sufis became known and respected in society and ruled the people's hearts, while the caliph ruled their bodies. Perfect examples of such Sufi figures are Hassan Basri and Sufian Suri. As the Sufis criticised the dark conditions of society and materialism's reign over it, which stood in sharp contrast to the ideals of Islam, and criticised the caliphs with their speech and conduct, the caliphs in turn confronted the Sufis, employed a number of religious authorities who stressed on the appearance of religion and justified the conduct of the government and the status-quo. Gradually, huge conflicts arose between the government, supported by representatives of the literalists, which included some of the prominent theologians and jurists of the time, and the teachers of the Truth and the Sufis. This resulted in the martyrdom of some of the most important characters of Sufism, such as Manthural-Hallaj and 'Ayn al-Qudhat Hamadani.

After the Mongol invasion, different resistance movements were formed under the leadership of Sufis. One of the most significant of these movements was the Hurufiyyah movement, led by Sheikh Fadhlullah Na'imi and his student Imaduddin Nasimi, who was killed in a horrific manner by the Teimurids. The most important social movement of Sufism was the Safavid movement under the leadership of Sheikh Safieddin Aradebili. The Safavids, who were originally a Sufi order engaged in the propagation of Islam and 'Irfan. After seeing the need for active resistance against the oppression of landowners against the poor, they initiated military training for the Sufis in the Khaniqah so that they could defend the poor against the landowners. This movement grew in strength with popular sup-port to the extent that they were successful in establishing the Safavid dynasty, and is of particular importance for highlighting the social activism inherent to Sufism and the deep connection between Sufism, social resistance, politics and power.

The socio-cultural manifestation of Sufism has continued into the 20th and 21st century, an example of which is Sheikh Abdul Qader Jazaeri, the leader of the resistance of Algiers, who was a mystic and a great commentator of the Futuhat of Ibn Arabi, in addition to Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, who was also a mystic.

Cultural Sufism is the organised movements of spiritual groups who have historically organised themselves in Sufi orders, Khaniqahs, Zawiyyahs, Hussainiahs and Zurkhanahs, such as the Ni'matullahiyyah, Safiaviyyah, Khaksariyyah, Shazilliyyah and Dhahabiyyah Sufi orders.

These groups have a unique culture and code of etiquette based on Islamic spiritual teachings. Cultural Sufism is manifest in Islamic spiritual poetry and music, such as the Mathnawi of Rumi, the Sama' of the Mowlawiyyah mystics in Syria and Turkey, the great Islamic architecture and arts, particularly Islamic calligraphy, and the architecture and decoration of mosques and the emphasis of these groups on i'tikafat (spiritual retreat), arba'in, dhikr (invocation and remembrance of Allah) and contemplation. The socio-political aim of Sufism is the establishment of a just society through the propagation of Divine knowledge and wisdom, noble moral values and the movement of society on the path towards Allah.

Today, a great spiritual void exists in human society, which has led to severe social problems such as the breakdown of the institution of family, the loss of morality and countless wars and acts of injustice and aggression on the global stage. The relationship between members of different communities and societies, between nations with their governments, and governments with each other, i.e. international relations, is on the basis of power and not justice, and as such, there is constant conflict and a lack of durable peace. This is a multi-factorial problem; some of the primary factors in this process are the alienation of the human being, the spiritual void in society, a lack of dialogue and acceptance of difference, materialism and the severe corrosion of morality.

'Irfan or Sufism offers a solution to this problem. In the social sphere, 'Irfan aims to raise and nourish a human being who has attained the majestic and beautiful attributes of Allah, and manifests his love and servitude for Allah through loving and serving the human society as a collective, regardless of religion, gender, race or nationality. A mystic is a human being who attains perfection through annihilation in the Divine attributes, acts and essence, and as such, portrays the Divine attributes, most importantly the attributes of mercy and compassion, justice and testifying to, and preserving and upholding, the Truth in his or her social behaviour.

Therefore, the project of 'Irfan in the social sphere is the creation of a society based on the foundation of the Islamic social system which relies on the six principles of unity, justice, equality, dialogue, and enjoining good and forbidding evil. The individuals who form this society act with compassion and justice towards each other, share each other's responsibilities and burdens, use consultation as a means of making decisions, accept difference and engage in dialogue, and strive to eradicate poverty and ameliorate its conditions through charitable acts . Such a society is established through the creation of mystics who act as social reformers, teach the Divine knowledge (ma'rifah) and wisdom (hikmah) and guide society on the path of the Greater Jihad, which is the jihad against the whims and desires of the nafs (soul). This project is an organic and peaceful process which, instead of using force in order to silence difference and opposition, uses compassion and dialogue.

Islam is misunderstood and distorted, not only in the West but also by many so-called "Islamic" groups and movements which abuse Islam and distort its teachings in order to obtain power or maintain it, and to justify their violent crimes and acts of injustice which are inherently against Islam. An evident example of this is what is referred to as "Islamic extremism", which in the name of Islam massacres innocent civilians who many a time are Muslims, or establish governments which govern through the use of force and oppression.

The solution to this problem is not the de-politicisation of Islam as proposed in Western academic and government circles, or the move towards neo-Sufism, which is devoid of the essence of Islam. Rather, we must return to true Islam and gain a syn-optic understanding of it—it places equal emphasis on Islamic Fiqh or Shari'ah which is the outward aspect of Islam, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic mysticism or Sufism/'Irfan which is the essence and inner aspect of Islam.

'Irfan plays the central role in the socio-political program of Islam, as it is through the training of mystics who are on the journey towards Allah and have shed their material desires and gained the Divine attributes, and as such, are not corrupted by material desires and power, that society can be reformed and justice established. Therefore, 'Irfan is essential for politicians and all those involved in socio-political activities, be they academics or resistance fighters, for it ensures that they are not corrupted by power, nor do they abuse it , nor do they use oppression and injustice in order to maintain their power. Through spiritual training, as set out in 'Irfan, they come to see their purpose as serving society and assisting in its growth and development, rather than ruling society and using different means of coercion and oppression in order to retain power.

One of the principles of 'Irfan is "unity within diversity and diversity within unity" which, in the social sphere, means the acceptance of difference within society. The acceptance and treasuring of difference results in the initiation of the much needed process of dialogue, which is currently lacking in nearly every sphere of human society, particularly in its political sphere. The aim of Islamic movements working in multicultural and multi-faith societies such as Lebanon in the Middle East or Western countries, cannot be the establishment of an Islamic government which imposes its laws on the society; rather, the aim should be accepting difference, re-introducing spirituality, and striving for the establishment of the aforementioned principles of unity, justice, equality, dialogue, and enjoining good and forbidding evil. ■

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The Islamic Revolution in Iran has come to be defined for many by the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih (the Jurist's Guardianship), instituted by Imam Khomeini—May Allah Sanctify His Soul (MASHS).

*Written by* Sheikh Chafiq Jeradeh

**W**ilayat al-Faqih represents an Islamic concept that is based on the values of the Sufi-Irfan idea that it is possible for humans to ascend through a thorough knowledge of themselves to the state of a 'Perfect Human Being'. Such a person is sometimes referred to as the 'Pole' or 'the Pole of the Poles'. In the Sufi-Irfan concept, this state of being carries clear contractual obligations—including political obligations for any human on this path. It also implies that such leadership also requires a strong understanding of law and the literal application of Islam in the day-to-day life of individuals and of Islamic societies. Beyond this juridical understanding, a leader has to possess the ability to manage and organise the elements of society—that is, he must be able to act 'politically', following the lead provided by Mohammed's (pbuh) and his Household's method of managing the early Muslim communities.

What is remarkable about the Wilayat al-Faqih, and the act of revolution that gave rise to the Islamic State of Iran, was the interaction between the development of the concept of Wilayat al-Fiqih within the context of the reality of revolutionary action. As political reality impinged, and as the revolution imposed new challenges, these events reinforced and opened further scope for the concept to grow and to exhibit new dimensions.

The more the concept expanded and added substance, so it created a new atmosphere amongst Iranians generally. Furthermore this leadership concept opened new horizons for dealing with the external international order, as well as in the military and scientific spheres via its bold declaration to achieve a nuclear fuel cycle. This latter ambition was placed within a moral and religious stance which forbids nuclear weaponisation—in contrast with the peaceful use of energy derived from nuclear fuel.

Thus I believe that it is plain both that the Wilayat al-Faqih concept is susceptible to further evolution and certainly is not immutable; it has not assumed its final shape—as it lies at the intersection of the religious structure intended to manage the day-to-day reality of existence with the desire to live in harmony with the divine values.

Therefore both the substance and the detail of Wilayat al-Faqih are mutable, and should reflect the requirements appropriate to both time and place. It was this need to place the Wilayat al-Faqih in its correct setting that explains why the concept altered and developed during the late Imam Khomeini's (MASHS) lifetime. Between the phases of preparing the revolution; the revolutionary phase and the rise of the state; the imposed war phase; and the phase of drafting the constitution, the concept evolved under the pressure of these events. If this transformation was not always very evident during Imam Khomeini's (MASHS) life, this is largely due to the fact that this period spanned a period dominated by extraordinary change and was overshadowed by the towering figure of the founder.

Nevertheless, after the demise of the Imam (MASHS) and Imam Khameini assuming office, the Imam's methodolgy, i.e. as Wali Faqih, was impacted by three major debates:

Firstly, until now the tension between the underlying religious principles and contemporary structures of statehood and the international order have not been satisfactorily resolved. The relationship between Islamic values that demand direct involvement with political and social affairs, and the prevailing global order influenced by contemporary mores and ideas, methodology, and institutions, places it [Iran] at each and every juncture in face of a debate on the values of Islam versus the values of the wider world (which have been created by so-called 'modernity').

Although similar dilemmas face all Islamic movements, this potential conflict takes, in Iran, a more serious form, owing to it being a doctrinal state that has surpassed the limitations of being a movement, rather than a state. Iran also—perhaps uniquely—possesses the virtue of having the option to find the balance between these opposing currents.

These tensions however are evident today in Iran: They have given rise to a strand of thinking within society that seeks to place doctrinal religion within a secular framework—this, in addition to their desire to establish the political structures on a similar secular basis. This has caused the religious parties to react in two ways: it has led some to wall themselves in behind the Wilayat al-Faqih formula and to reject any new thinking about this concept arising in the Iranian intellectual or political arena. It has also led to a wider discussion regarding the relationship between Islam and Wilayat al-Faqih. The object of this discussion is centred on how to Islamise contemporary institutional systems of governance, whilst another strand is moving in the opposite direction: It looks at how to revise the concept (Wilayat al-Faqih) better to reflect contemporary reality, and its needs.

This is the real dilemma facing the present al-Wali al-Faqih (the Guardian Jurist, i.e. Imam Khamenei) and the institutions affiliated with him.

Secondly, during Imam Khamenei's rule some circles began to discuss the following issues:

One. Does the concept of Wilayat presuppose a tradition of (cognitive) knowledge of its own, which in itself enables the Wali (Supreme Leader) to lead and to manage the actuality? Or, does it require some additionally acquired expertise in governance, as well as the special vision, which only spiritual attainment can provide?

Two. Does Wilayat al-Faqih have one form, and one form only - the one presented by late Imam Khomeini, or there are other possible forms that Imam Khamenei can reveal?

Three. Finally, does the concept rest on a basis of popular acceptance and commitment within the ranks of the Iranian elites? Or does its basis lie in the emotional circumstance of revolution? This is an important point that needs to be clarified—for the answer to this question will spell out for us the possibilities for dissension between Iranian elites and the popular will.

Thirdly, there has been in Iran an ancient debate that is perennially renewed: the issue is what should govern Iranian policy—the logic of interest, or the logic of ideology? Does Iran's interest lie within Iran internally, or does the Iranian interest intersect with other peoples who uphold the same revolutionary Islamic values?

A debate about such issues may look nothing out of the normal at first glance; but, taking into account the doctrinal nature of the state, and the cultural mood of the people, each of these issues and the debate surrounding them, has an impact and consequences whose potential scope are difficult to predict. Time and experience will be the judge, when it comes to observing how successfully such debates can be resolved. ■

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# THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

# — THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

> The concept… created a new atmosphere amongst Iranians generally

# RECOGNIZING RESISTANCE: LESSONS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND FOR PALESTINE AND ISRAEL

"I formed the conviction that there is no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended. Conflicts are created, conducted, and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings. I saw it happen in Northern Ireland, although, admittedly, it took a very long time. I believe deeply that with committed, persevering, and patient diplomacy, it can happen in the Middle East."

George Mitchell, Obama Administration
Middle East Envoy, 22 January 2009

*Written by* Ali Abunimah

During Israel's December 2008/January 2009 invasion of the Gaza Strip which killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, the vast majority civilians, veteran Irish journalist Patrick Cockburn reported that Israeli society reminded him "more than ever of the unionists in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s." Like Israelis, he wrote, unionists were a community "with a highly developed siege mentality which led them always to see themselves as victims even when they were killing other people. There were no regrets or even knowledge of what they inflicted on others and therefore any retaliation by the other side appeared as unprovoked aggression inspired by unreasoning hate."

Today, more than a decade after the 1998 Belfast Agreement, Irish nationalists, who are mostly Catholic, share power with mostly Protestant pro-British unionists, in what is in effect a bi-national state in Northern Ireland. The power-sharing executive, led jointly by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein, would until recently have been viewed as being as unlikely as a joint Likud/Hamas-led executive in a single Palestinian-Israeli state.

Not all of Northern Ireland's problems have been solved; the agreement did not definitively settle the status of Northern Ireland, but set out democratic rules for changing its status and governing it in the meantime. Yet, a generation of children, now teenagers, has no memory of the pervasive violence that traumatized their society for decades. That alone is no small achievement.

Does this experience hold lessons for Palestine/Israel? Both conflicts have long-recognized parallels and both have at times been described as "intractable" and both are the legacies of settler-colonial interventions which in each case created two mutually exclusive claims to sovereignty and self-determination underpinned by two diametrically opposed narratives, and a material reality of one community monopolizing state power, resources and symbols to dominate and denigrate the other. The tap root of the modern conflict in Ireland was the 17th century Plantation of Ulster—the systematic colonization of the north east part of the island. The English crown granted land to English and Scottish Protestant settlers who forcibly displaced native Catholics in large numbers.

The 1921 British partition of Ireland created Northern Ireland, a semi-autonomous state run by and for the settler-descended unionist community which monopolized political and economic power. British forces and unionist militias violently suppressed nationalist resistance to partition. In the words of Northern Ireland's first prime minister, the state's seat of government at Stormont Castle was a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people."

From the late 19th Century, Palestine was the target of Zionist settler-colonialism whose openly declared purpose was to transform Palestine into a Jewish "national home." From the outset, the Zionist movement understood that this could not be achieved without the involuntary removal of the native Arab population. The partition of Palestine was accompanied by the expulsion and flight of 750,000 Palestinians in the months preceding and following the declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948 as the British prepared to withdraw.

These partitions generated enduring resistance—expressed as indigenous nationalism—among a significant part of the population. Lacking sufficient consent and legitimacy, Israel and Northern Ireland could only be sustained with massive and escalating use of state violence.

In Northern Ireland, a peaceful nationalist movement for civil rights starting in the late 1960s was met with violence by the Northern Ireland state. This inaugurated the 30-year low-level civil war known as 'The Troubles' in which more than 3,500 people were killed and 50,000 injured—nearly two percent of the Northern Ireland population. The British sent in the army which quickly began to act and be seen by nationalists as an occupying force. A reconstituted Irish Republican Army (IRA) resumed armed struggle, initially in defense of Catholic communities, but later went on the offensive against the police, army, and unionist militias (known as 'loyalists'). The IRA and other armed groups also carried out bomb attacks and political assassinations. British tactics included internment, curfews, assassinations and extrajudicial executions in collusion with loyalist militias that killed hundreds of Catholics in sectarian attacks.

Although nationalists sought to end partition, the Belfast Agreement preserves an existing 'two-state solution' in Ireland unless and until people north and south choose to alter it by democratic means. Nationalists were able to accept this compromise in part because it required Northern Ireland—for as long as it exists—to transform itself from a unionist-run and sectarian Protestant state into an inclusive democracy.

It would have been impossible to reach this point in Northern Ireland without the slow but fundamental change in British and unionist attitudes towards dealing with the IRA and Sinn Fein, the nationalist party close to the IRA. The British vilified both groups as "terrorists" and shunned them for decades. Sinn Fein had a considerable electoral mandate from nationalists, but Britain would not deal with them unless they accepted its preconditions.

Here the obvious parallel is with the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas which Israel and its Western supporters have refused to recognize even though the Islamist group won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006. Instead, the US and European Union threw their financial, military and political backing to Fatah – which lost the election – and its leader Mahmoud Abbas. The 'Quartet' of the US, EU, Russia and the UN Secretary-General demanded that Hamas commit "to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations." These conditions are a reprise of the long-standing British ban on contacts with Sinn Fein (though in fact there were secret contacts).

The British categorically rejected nationalist demands for a united Ireland, but in 1992 conceded that this could be the outcome of a democratic political process—an important concession. The British government maintained, however, that there would never be political talks with Sinn Fein until the IRA abandoned violence. American intervention helped soften this position, most controversially, in 1994 when President Bill Clinton—against strenuous British protests—issued a visa to Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams. George Mitchell, one of several senators supporting the move, argued that visiting the US would "enhance Adams' stature" and "enable him to persuade the IRA to declare a cease-fire, and permit Sinn Fein to enter into inclusive political negotiations."

Once the IRA declared a ceasefire in 1994, the British government and unionists still insisted on "prior decommissioning" of IRA weapons. As chair of a three-man international committee, Mitchell crafted a compromise where all parties to negotiations had to pledge nonviolence, and decommissioning was to be carried out in "parallel" with negotiations. Later, when implementing the Belfast Agreement, IRA decommissioning with was done in parallel with British Army withdrawals, "security normalization" and the dismantling of military installations in nationalist areas.

Intriguingly, Mitchell proposed something similar in his 2001 report, at the behest of President Clinton, into the causes of the second Intifada which began in 2000. The *Mitchell Report* recommended Israel and Palestinians "should immediately implement an unconditional cessation of violence" as a prelude to negotiations. While Palestinians were urged to act against "terrorists," Israel was expected simultaneously to end its own violence including the lethal use of force against civilians, "that security forces and settlers refrain from the destruction of homes and roads, as well as trees and other agricultural property in Palestinian areas," and that Israel "freeze all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of existing settlements." Thus, Mitchell recognized Israeli violence, including settlement expansion, as constitutive of the conflict.

By offering Israel a long-term ceasefire or hudna, Hamas leaders have already demonstrated their acceptance of a Mitchell Principles-like approach and explicitly cited the IRA ceasefire as a model. The US and EU, however, continued to view Palestinian violence as purely aggressive, senseless "terrorism," while often unprovoked and astronomically greater Israeli violence—including alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity—are viewed as legitimate if occasionally "excessive" forms of "self-defense". Unlike in Northern Ireland, Israel's Western supporters have never supported a reciprocal ceasefire.

After negotiations began, the British still focused on securing agreement and then power-sharing between unionist and nationalist "moderates" in the hope that this would undermine support for the "extremist" Sinn Fein and DUP. British chief negotiator Jonathan Powell later conceded that this strategy of "building out from the center" failed and in the end "it is only the extremes who can build a durable peace because there is no one left to outflank them." Including the "extremes" does not predetermine that they would be the ones to achieve peace in Palestine/Israel, but only that efforts excluding them guarantees failure.

Although many factors contributed to the achievement of a peace agreement with broad public support in Northern Ireland, undoubtedly the British recognition of Sinn Fein, and the abandonment of one-sided preconditions were prerequisites for a successful outcome.

The relevance of this experience has been recognized by Hamas leaders. Ahmed Yousef, an advisor to Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas Prime Minister elected in 2006 wrote:

"Irish Republicans continue to aspire to a united Ireland free of British rule, but rely upon peaceful methods. Had the IRA been forced to renounce its vision of reuniting Ireland before negotiations could occur, peace would never have prevailed. Why should more be demanded of the Palestinians, particularly when the spirit of our people will never permit it?"

Hamas leaders, and other Palestinians, have refused to recognize Israel as a condition for entering a peace process, not least because PLO recognition of Israel as part of the 1993 Oslo Accords led to no reciprocal Israeli recognition or changes in behavior. Recognition of Israel as a decolonized, nonracial state affording equal rights to all citizens and Palestinian refugees could conceivably be an outcome of negotiations in which Palestinians felt their rights were fully restored.

From its first day in office the Obama administration repeatedly reaffirmed the Quartet preconditions for dealing with Hamas, ignoring significant overtures from the movement, and has continued the disastrous Bush administration policy of providing training and weapons to anti-Hamas militias loyal to Abbas. Mitchell's attempt to secure an Israeli settlement freeze was fatally undermined when the Obama administration failed to back him in the face of Israeli intransigence. The Obama administration and its allies ignored virtually all the lessons from Mitchell's valuable experience in Belfast and have thus forfeited for the foreseeable future the opportunity to set the stage for an inclusive political process that would stand a chance of ending a century of injustice and bloodshed. ■

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# ARMED STRUGGLE AND POLITICAL RESISTANCE:

# LESSONS FROM IRELAND'S AND SOUTH AFRICAN RESISTANCE

IRA fire a volley of shots at Kieran Doherty's funeral, August 1981

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Commentators on the Palestine/Israel conflict routinely draw parallels between the crisis and the experiences of South Africa under Apartheid and the case of Northern Ireland. While similarities do exist, it is in fact the differences that shed light on the current impasse with peace negotiations in the region.

*Written by* Ismail Patel

**M**any have focused attention on the evolution of resistance groups like the IRA and the Umkhoto we Sizwe (the ANC's military wing) from the resistance 'militia' to the political arena which helped fortify a lasting peace. However, in both of these scenarios, their negotiating partners played a key role in the success of this metamorphism. Both Britain and the leadership in Apartheid South Africa called their opponents 'terrorists' for many years, before recognising that they were essential negotiating partners and acceding them this role in genuine pursuit of a real peace.

Ending the colonization and occupation of one people over another involves a multitude of complex factors which challenge any move away from the status quo. Most significantly, one group is required to relinquish usurped privileges and economic, social and political advantages. For the opposition, the Northern Ireland and South African examples demonstrate the need for adherence by the resistance groups to their central goal of freedom by converting the occupation/status quo from an asset into a burden for their opponents. All other factors leading to peace, including international consensus and support, followed in both cases.

The IRA never abandoned their call for a united Ireland and even today this aspiration remains intact although political realities have led them to reconfigure it in more pragmatic terms, rather than to abandon the aspiration. The African National Congress (ANC) at no stage compromised on the 'one man one vote' principle despite attempts by the apartheid regime to enforce a partitioned South Africa.

However, the most significant factor in both of these cases was on the military front. The IRA began its campaign for a free Ireland by calling for strikes and non co-operative actions following the Second World War, but to no avail. In the second phase of struggle—post-1969—the IRA escalated their actions and began military engagement. This started with targeting British officials and buildings within Northern Ireland, which the British government managed to contain for several decades using its own military power. However, when the attacks arrived in mainland England, there was a gradual shift in the political pendulum and within a decade the means for conflict resolution had transformed from military containment to political resolutions.

The IRA bombings within mainland England were significant and remain etched in the memories of the public in England. With the first significant attack in 1974 on the M62 motorway, the IRA began a new chapter which was first met with resolute defiance by the government followed by the imposition of draconian legislation resulting in wholesale subjugation of the Irish (predominantly Catholics). However, the IRA continued unabated.

Despite the increased rhetoric and subjugation of Irish Catholics, the IRA persisted. They began to operate in small 'cells' of two's and three's making capture

more difficult, and they became bolder in their attacks. The bombing of cities and economic targets followed. The IRA called for a number of unilateral cease fires in the hope of initiating peace talks but to no avail.

The Birmingham pub bombing of 1984 was followed by the Brighton bombing of the Conservative Party conference, where Margaret Thatcher, the then Prime Minister, escaped unharmed. This attack on the highest echelons of British politics, interspersed with calls to the police about potential bombs, most of the time hoaxes, brought with it a pandemonium that resulted in entire transport networks and at times whole cities being brought to a standstill.

The British government at this stage was adamant in its pronouncement to never engage with those who use the gun and in no uncertain terms dismissed the IRA—and Sinn Fein who were linked to them - as terrorists. The poignant reality though was that the IRA on the other hand were using the gun where all else had failed, and it was left as the only means of resistance available to them.

Ceasefires were declared and broken, and what ceasefires failed to reap, resumed military action accomplished. In 1996, the IRA ended its ceasefire with a massive bomb at London's Canary Wharf, killing two men and causing at least £85m of damage. The decision to target London at that stage was not accidental but was chosen by design as the IRA knew that this would have a far greater impact on the British government.

As envisaged, back door negotiations ensued while the government continued to publicly cite its refusal to engage. In early 1997, another ceasefire was adopted. Before the year was out, for the first time in seventy-six years, a British Prime Minister sat face-to-face with the leader of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams. Significantly, at this stage, the IRA still had all of its weapons and continued to demand a united Ireland. It was only once fair terms for peace were established that the process of disarmament began, and even then, no guns were ever actually handed over.

The ANC adopted a similar path to the IRA in achieving recognition for its struggles, and achieving respect and legitimacy. Some fifty years after its formation, in 1961 the ANC came to the conclusion that a non-violent movement was not going to reap dividend and proclaimed, "The time

comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom…".

What followed was a period of sustained attacks for twenty-nine years on targets of economic and social significance in South Africa. A number of civilians were killed in these attacks, but the attacks continued. By 1989, the ANC reached increasing levels of sophistication and were emboldened enough to attack a South African Air Force secret radar installation at Klippan in the Western Transvaal causing extensive damage and undisclosed casualties. The impact of the military resistance of the ANC cannot be underestimated as a force which facilitated an end to the apartheid regime's racist control.

The current Palestinian resistance movement mirrors the beginnings of both the ANC and the IRA. In the early years they sanctioned strikes and non-co-operative actions which in the end harmed them more than their opponents. The military resistance of the first Intifada forced Israel to recognise the existence of the Palestinian people and their leadership. However, the similarity ends there. The Palestinian leadership over the years has become enslaved by the language, ideas and vision of the colonizer. Fatah, the first organisation to confront the Israelis, began by calling for a free Palestine but changed its stance to a two state position and now is essentially prepared to accept any viable entity that is offered to them. On the military level, Fatah has gone through the full 360 degrees, now considering military resistance as a legal option but not a means for liberation. The acceptance of the most objectionable ideas reflects the state of mind of Palestinians, and no where is this reflected more clearly than in the case of Jerusalem. When Israel unilaterally and illegally annexed Jerusalem, it expanded its borders into the West Bank. Palestinians followed suit and began to refer to the expanded area deep into the West Bank as Jerusalem as well.

Hamas, like the ANC and IRA, is pursuing liberation using both military and political fronts. Just like the ANC and IRA, it believes that military action is both justifiable and effective. However, Hamas' military resistance remains wedged where the IRA was in the 1960s.

# The Palestinian leadership over the years has become enslaved by… the colonizer

The Qassam rockets fired by Hamas have provided Israel with a greater PR coup than any other 'security' concern. While the vast majority of Israelis are occupied with their European lifestyles, the imprisonment of the whole Palestinian population—including 1.5 million people stewing in the cesspit that is the Gaza Strip—might as well be a million miles away. Since repercussions of Palestinian grievances do not hurt or significantly affect the ordinary Israeli—like the British pre-1969 and white South Africans pre the 1960s—the Israeli government is happy to continue containing them with brutal military force in the occupied territories.

It remains to be seen if Israel follows in the way of South Africa and Britain which both came to the negotiation table unconditionally after a heavy price had been exacted from their citizens—or will Israel heed the lesson of history and end their intransigence of dictating who, where and what to discuss. Imprisoning people does nothing but spur them on to break free—a fact witnessed repeatedly throughout history. In the conflict in Palestine/Israel, bloodshed has largely effected Palestinians. But Israelis must ask themselves how much longer this can continue, and whether they will forge a peace based on mutual recognition rather than waiting to be forced by a threat to their peaceful existence. ◼

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***Prevent* has come to be perceived as an integral part of an authoritarian counter-terrorist system that violates the human rights of Muslims**

Arun Kundnani's *Spoooked! How not to Prevent Violent Extremism,*
*page 04*