

# COMBATTING TERRORISM IN BRITAIN: GÜLEN'S IDEAS

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## Abstract

Western policies are focused on fighting terrorist groups rather than terrorist ideology and its roots causes. This paper tries to identify those root causes and the means of eradicating terrorist ideology.

A common misunderstanding is that Islam is prone to violence and extremism, if not itself the cause of terrorism. This misconception is based on ignorance of the many Muslim groups and faith-based movements that work towards peace and better relations in the world because of Islam, not despite it. The Gülen movement is one of the most successful and famous of those faith-based movements. Policy-makers need to become familiar with such movements, their motivations, methods and arguments. The extremist/terrorist ideology must be rebutted; however, of the many interpretations of Islam circulating in the world the most radical ones dominate the media and therefore the attention of younger Muslims. Media and policy-makers have not paid enough attention to the authentic interpretations of Islam embraced by the majority – the interpretations of mainstream Muslim thinkers like Fethullah Gülen. Gülen's teachings and principles and the movement's activities and projects can help inform and shape state policies. This paper explains how the views of thinkers like Gülen can be translated into policy terms to defeat terrorism.

## Introduction

Terrorism has spread like an epidemic disease in the world and is particularly targeting the Western world in which Britain, the USA as well as Europe have suffered terrorist attacks. Obviously, when any country is attacked, it has the right to defend itself. The question is: how should one engage in counter attack? If one begins to think seriously about this then one needs to have additional information about whom one should attack and the nature of the attack? If one were fighting a conventional war on a battlefield, it would be a fight between one army against another. But if terrorist attacks have taken place within the country, it is outside the pail of conventional attack for they are not in a battlefield. One not only has to identify the attackers but to think how did they emerge in the first place and will they emerge in the future or was it a one-off attack? In other words, terrorist attacks in various Western countries have become a very complex subject and often the response may not be effective.

In Britain the terrorist attacks on the underground trains on July 7, 2005 shocked the nation and have raised serious questions. The nation was shocked because the bombers were mainly British born young men of Muslim background. After 9/11 attacks on the USA, the British government was aware that Britain would be targeted. But the assumption was that they would come from abroad and they could then be easily detected and caught. This assumption was proved wrong for they were British born Muslims (BBMs) or raised from early childhood in Britain by their migrant parents.

For the British government, the question was no longer would more attacks follow, given that extremist ideology had appeared to permeate British communities, but when, where and how. The BBMs factor had certainly complicated matters.

Whatever the concern now, the most important task in hand was to devise a workable and useful strategy of engagement and approach. Needless to say, a flawed strategy would only work to the terrorists' advantage, providing them with room and time to continue spreading their ideology.

The contention of this paper is that terrorism has to be combated by Islam as an instrument of counter-terrorism because terrorists are using it for legitimizing their actions. Islamic fundamentalists with their interpretations have equated Islam with terrorism making it a religion which has no moral or ethical codes and allows one to kill innocent people including Muslims (bombing them inside and outside mosques and other places) and non-Muslims (killing them in trains, buses and other places). Since Islam has been reduced to the ideology of terrorism---every Muslim who believes in Islam is or will be perceived as potential terrorists in the future. Islam therefore then has to be re-understood but the question then is, which Islam? This paper attempts to provide an answer to that question. Britain has a large Muslim population and that is the reason that the authorities have to seriously consider this strategy. Radical fundamentalist views circulating in Britain have to be discredited and eradicated. If they are not then the prevention of terrorism will be the only strategy for the British government of terrorism. The answer that will be provided in this paper will be for the eradication of terrorism, it will be an essential supplement and only then will prevention strategies will result in success.

The British government had engaged itself in dealing with Islam by thinking of changing the nature of Islamic Studies in the universities; initiation of a Commission for Integration and Cohesion; or evening supporting some new Muslim organizations like the British Muslim Forum etc. None of these policies have so far succeeded which will be discussed later... It is

essential to first survey the preventive strategies.

## The Preventive Approach

The Preventive approach is the most spontaneous one by any country in which a terrorist attack has taken place. Britain's preventive approach post-7/7 had many important aspects. First, it had to make all kinds of laws to prevent terrorism. Secondly, it had to increase detection measures. Thirdly, it had to devise measures to contain attacks by terrorists with force. All this operated under the umbrella of Counter-Terrorism strategies. Since 2003, one of the British government's strategy (known as CONTEST) key aims was to "reduce the risk from internationalism terrorism so that people can go about their business freely and with confidence."<sup>1</sup> The counter terrorism strategy had four principle strands which were: Prevent, Pursuit, Protect and Prepare. This was the major strategy of operations to safeguard the lives of the people. Another very important tactic was surveillance for "it was an indispensable way of gathering intelligence against terrorists" (Home Office network) Surveillance tactics therefore meant that legislation was another strategy for preventing terrorism. The "legislative framework" was for "preventing and pursuing terrorist and those who support terrorist organizations."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, for preventing terrorism the legislation laws were made under the following acts which were:

- i.** The Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT);
- ii.** The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA);
- iii.** Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005;
- iv.** The Terrorism Act 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Responding to terrorist incidents was done at both national and regional levels. In terrorism decisions the Home Secretary was involved since he was

responsible for counter terrorism across England, Wales and Scotland". On the regional level, the local authorities and the local governments were involved. The 'Regional Resilience Teams' supported the 'Formation of Regional Resilience Forums which are made up of central government agencies, the armed forces, the emergency services and local authorities and provide a multi-agency strategic direction to civil protection planning at a regional level.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these processes a number of important bodies were established by the government and its agencies. The Prime Ministers office had its Cabinet Office Contingencies Secretariat (COBRA) which was the emergency coordinating committee comprising the "Ministerial Committees on Defence and Overseas Policy, the Ministerial Committee on Intelligence Services, the Joint Intelligence Committee, MI6, GCHQ, MI5, New Scotland Yard and many other elements".<sup>5</sup>

Gregory and Wilkinson also observed that

the UK.... had in place an impressive national structure of coordination to deal with terrorism"

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1 [http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about the strategy](http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about%20the%20strategy)

2 [http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about the strategy](http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about%20the%20strategy)

3 [http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about the strategy](http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about%20the%20strategy)

4 [http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about the strategy](http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counterterrorism-strategy/about%20the%20strategy)

5 Frank Gregory and Paul Wilkinson, Riding Pillion for Tackling Terrorism is a high risk policy. London: Chatham House. ISP/NSC Briefing Paper 05/01. p. 3.

but on the Prevention, Pursuit and Protection and Preparations, they commented that “these broad principles seem eminently sensible but its implementation is problematic in particular areas. A key problem with regard to implementing ‘Prevention’ and ‘Pursuit’ is that the UK government has been conducting counter terrorism policy ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the US, not in the sense of being an equal decision-maker, but rather as pillion passenger compelled to leave the steering to the ally in the driving seat.... achieving the goals of protection and preparedness in the UK is also not an easy task.”<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that the counter terrorism strategy was a difficult task and all these preventive measures were necessary. This will not succeed unless Muslims are made the ‘pillion passenger’ with its first ally (the British Government).

It seemed that most of these counter-terrorism strategies were based on the past experience of the authorities with the IRA which had haunted Britain for many years. But radical Muslim fundamentalism was a very different kind of terrorism for it had religious and not nationalist legitimations. Even the tactic of terrorism used was different from the IRA which had not produced suicide bombers. Recently the agreements between the IRA and the Protestants were made but that was not easy with the Muslim Fundamentalist groups. As Gregory and Wilkinson commented

Al-Qaeda, which is best described as a movement or a network of networks and affiliates with a presence in at least 60 countries, confronts the US and its allies and the whole international system with the most dangerous form of terrorist threat ever posed by non-state actors. Unlike the most traditional terrorists groups formed in the 1970s and 1980s, Al-Qaeda explicitly promotes mass killing, and the 9/11 attacks together with their major assaults in Kenya, Bali, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco to carrying out deadly and determined attacks wherever and whenever the opportunity arises. The UK is at particular risk because it is the strongest ally of the United States, and has deployed armed forces in the military campaigns to topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and in Iraq; and its intelligence services have also been accused of aiding the CIA for using British airports to take its prisoners to Guantanamo Bay. All this negatively reflects the images of Britain.

Moreover, it is well known that radical extremists have been recruited and deployed within the UK’s borders and that in an open society such as the UK it is notoriously difficult to prevent it for no-warning comes from suicide attacks, which is the characteristic modus operandi of Al-Qaeda. The attacks on the transport system in London on 7 July 2005 gives an example of the nature of the threat from international terrorism that the UK authorities have been concerned about since 9/11. Furthermore, it is also known that the Al-Qaeda network has been actively seeking the materials and expertise to acquire chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weaponry, and they may sometimes succeed in acquiring it.<sup>7</sup>

One can see how complex the new kind of terrorism threatening Britain is. Dealing with this new kind of terrorism by force would be ineffective. For example, after 9/11 the US declared its War on Terrorism on Afghanistan. It succeeded in its ‘regime change’ policy as Mullah Omar was removed. All of them, Mullah Omar, Bin Laden and other terrorists went into hiding. The US collaborated with Pakistan and a number of terrorists were arrested or killed or deported for trials to the USA. This approach of the US War on Terrorism, if evaluated from 9/11 till 2007, has still not demolished the Al-Qaeda and while President Bush and Prime Minister Blair are going out of their offices, Bin Laden, Mullah Omar and Ayman Zawahiri are still in hiding and running the terrorist groups and becoming more dangerous. In fact, the so-called terrorism ‘experts’ seem to be ignorant of the fact that the more sophisticated the

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6 Ibid., p. 3.

7 Ibid., p. 2

‘preventative’ measures become, the more ‘sophisticated’ terrorists tactics are becoming to cope and bypass these measures .

When the authorities finally became aware of the need to engage with the Muslim community in Britain, Blair raised 12 points to combat radicalism which in the words of Johnston were:

- i.** New grounds for deporting undesirables, closing bookshops, negotiating memorandums of understanding with countries to take deportees. ....
- ii.** To create offence of condoning or glorifying terrorism here or abroad...
- iii.** To refuse asylum automatically to anyone who has participated in terrorism anywhere...
- iv.** To consult on powers to strip citizenship and make procedures simpler and more effective...
- v.** Maximum time limit of future extradition cases involving terror suspects...
- vi.** To examine court procedures to allow pre-trial process; to consider allowing detention to terrorist suspects before charging to be significantly extended...
- vii.** To extend the use of control orders for those who are British nationals and cannot be deported...
- viii.** To expand court capacity to deal with control orders and other related issues...
- ix.** To proscribe Hizb-ut-Tahrir and successor organization al-Muhajiroun and to examine grounds for proscription to widen them...
- x.** Set new threshold for citizenship; to establish with the Muslim community a commission on integration...
- xi.** New powers to close mosques...
- xii.** Securing borders, new visa controls and biometric visas.<sup>8</sup>

An assessment of the 12 point strategy was that “little has come out of it.”<sup>9</sup> Blair has also set up a “Muslim task force” and a Labour party peer Lord Ahmed commented that it had achieved “virtually nothing.”<sup>10</sup> While all of Blair’s policies to combat terrorism have failed the new British government under the Prime Minister Gordon Brown seems to be ‘putting more emphasis on winning the battle of ideas while also being tough on security’. A cabinet source explained that

Gordon Brown believes that this is an ideological war akin to the Cold war. He has directed ministers to come up with ideas by which we can engage minority groups better and make them feel more part of the UK. A senior government source said ‘we can’t win the battle of hearts and minds from Whitehall: it can be won only in local community but we can provide more support and strategic leadership.’<sup>11</sup>

The new government’s thinking is correct for its policies can be effective provided the new approach effectively engages in the ‘ideological war’ which was briefly discussed in the introduction.

The present government of Gordon Brown will be creating a border force, checking all passengers coming into Britain or travelling abroad electronically---but the July 7 bombers were mainly British born from within the country—so will all Muslims be checked daily through

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8 Philip Johnston, So whatever happened to Blair’s anti-terror strategy? The Daily Telegraph. July 3, 2007. p. 6

9 Gader, D., The Battle for Hearts and Minds, The Sunday Times, July 8, 2007, p. 14

10 Ibid., p. 14.

11 Ibid., p. 14.

electronics in their daily lives? That will not succeed. What will succeed is the ‘ideological’ and not ‘electronic’ war and that will be the eradivative strategy of combating terrorism because it has to be a battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims in Britain.

## The Eradivative Approach

The eradivative approach has to engage with the Muslim community. The Blair government was also engaged with the Muslim community but its policies failed for it lacked insights into the Muslim community. According to Sayeda Warsi, the Shadow Community minister “the government failed” because “it didn’t engage wider and deeper to develop a true understanding of the Muslim community choosing instead to listen to self-appointed leaders” which were considered ‘the usual suspects’ such as members of the Muslim Council of Britain”.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, according to “Hassan Butt, a former Jihadi, ‘most Muslim institutions in Britain just don’t want to talk about theology’. They refuse to broach the difficult and often complex truth that Islam can be interpreted as condoning violence against the unbeliever.... scholars must go back to the books and come forward with a refreshed set of rules and revised understanding of the rights and responsibilities of Muslims.”<sup>13</sup> These observations are insightful and have to be taken seriously.

The new British government may still find it difficult to understand how to devise the eradivative approach. If they follow the ‘usual suspects’ mentioned by the Sayeda Warsi, the policies will fail. The reason why Blair’s government’s communication with the ‘usual suspects’ failed is that they came under criticism for they belonged to some of the specific Islamic sects. The government has never thought about which sects they are dealing with. Islam like any other religion also has sects and some, not all, people of the sect have become radicalised so one needs to understand the sectarian politics.

Muslims have to be differentiated from each other on the basis of the sects they belong to. Although Islam is a monolithic faith and the Muslims are trying to reconstruct the doctrine of Ummah (Community of Islam) but the existence of sects has divided Muslims into groups such as Sunnis and Shiites as two major sects. Each of the two is divided further into minor sects. To understand Islam then one has classify it into two kinds of divisions emerging from all the sects as Enlightened Islam and Conservative Islam. The foundation of Enlightened Islam was the love of God. Muslims followed the Sunnah (Practice) of the Prophet and tried to cultivate the depth of love for God and His Prophet. The reason why the label of Enlightenment Islam has been used is because one of the most important attributes of God mentioned in the Qur’an was to perceive Him as Light (Nur) and if any Muslims had cultivated depth of love for God in their hearts, the nearer they were to God, the more chance they had of becoming enlightened from God’s Nur. This kind of enlightenment expressed itself through their talents and creativity of Muslims which was the instrumental factor for the emergence of the Islamic civilization known as the ‘Golden age’ of medieval Muslim history.

The inspirational thinking from enlightenment was the gift from God to His believers and the Muslim made original contributions in the field of sciences, philosophy, arts and literature etc. If one reads the Masnawi of Jaleddin Rumi, one will realise that it was his depth of love of God which inspired the masterpiece. But during the course of history a number of reactionary sects emerged like Wahhabism in the 18th century which damned Enlightened

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

Islam and did not accept any reverence for the Prophet and just gave literal interpretations of Qur'an. A number of other sects which followed the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabian origin were Salafism from Egypt and Deobandism from South Asia etc. What needs to be understood is that all these sects dominate the contemporary Muslim world and are part of radical conservative Islam.

In their locations in various parts of the Muslim world Conservative Islam started its struggle with the contextual factors of politics which it did not accept and developed sub-sectarian versions of Islam which emerged as Islamic fundamentalism. Their struggle was to convert the nation-states into Islamic states and the use of violence became its tactics for eliminating its enemies. One may be confused as to what were the sub-sectarian interpretations of the sects. These sub-sectarian interpretations used Islam to fulfil their ambitions of Fundamentalist leaders and their movements to obtain power. In order to achieve power it engaged in extremist tactics of terror. Three names can be given as examples of those who distorted their sects' through their sub-sectarian interpretations as, Bin-Laden, a Wahhabi who distorted his sect's concepts; Ayman Zawahiri, who did the same from his sect of Salafism and Mullah Omar who also did the same from his sect of Deobandism---all of them creating a base (Al-Qaeda) for declaring war on the West and killing innocent persons including Muslims anywhere in the world through terrorist tactics. All this falls under the category of Fundamentalist Islam which emerged from Conservative Islam. The Muslim community in Britain comprises of people belonging to both Enlightened and Conservative Islam and understanding this sectarian politics is important if the authorities want to combat terrorism in Britain. What needs to be made clear is that combating terrorism is not combating any sect but their sub-sectarian distortions which have produced illusionary and delusionary interpretations to attract recruits for terrorism.

Fundamentalist Islam considers the West as the land of the *kuffar* (infidels) and the whole country to be *dar al harb* (land of war). An important point to be understood here again is that not all the people belonging to the Conservative sects are terrorist but only those who have turned towards Fundamentalist Islam and they could then become potential terrorists and vulnerable to blindly accepting the sub-sectarian persuasions and recruitments from Al-Qaeda or other groups. How does this kind of conversions take place is beyond the purview of this paper but suffice to say that most of the terrorists produced in Britain have all come from Fundamentalist Islam irrespective of whichever sect they belonged. This is where the British government faces the problem of detecting terrorism for it is an internal problem among the Muslim community. The Intelligence agencies cannot be blamed for failure in detecting terrorists for such kind of detection is even difficult for the Muslims from their communities.

The choice which the new British government has is to decide which Muslim group they should work with. If they decide to work with the people from the Enlightened Islam unlike the last government who worked with Muslims from Conservative Islam they would have a better strategy for combating terrorism. There is no doubt that the views of Enlightened Islam would be the best if eradication of terrorism in Britain is the objective through 'ideological war'. But the British government may have reservations in pursuing an ideological war openly for the Wahhabi state of Saudi Arabia will disagree. The last government had to shelve the BAE investigation of bribery on the basis of its being a threat to national security---which meant that it would not please Saudi Arabia. In its war on terrorism it will have to decide how far its battle of ideas will have to go to. This is a problem of the British government and not the Muslim community.

On the other hand, people from radical conservative Islam are not terrorists but when the sub-sectarian versions of their sects from abroad enter into the minds of the BBMs and make them think of taking terrorist actions then they will have to discredit it which is not being done. This process of discreditation has to start to prevent such sub-sectarian ideas preventing the minds of the BBMs and to be effective the whole Muslim community will have to be made aware of how to combat terrorism by discovering its sources from within communities settled in various cities of Britain. This is a battle of ideas and such sub-sectarian groups are circulating in the world and are building their bridges to penetrate British society to fulfil their objective of global terrorism. It is the contention of this paper that Enlightened Islam will help eradicate terrorism through winning the minds and hearts of lay Muslims.

## **The Islamic Solution**

The radical fundamentalists cannot convince the followers of Enlightened Islam that terrorism is the right strategy for it is considered correctly to be outside the pail of Islam itself. So the authorities have to officially think of how to engage with Islam to project its authentic world-view. The world-view of Islam can be best projected through Muslim faith-based leaders, scholars and opinion-makers, such as Fethullah Gülen.

All Muslims may know the name of the radical fundamentalist thinkers—all of whom are either dead or being hunted like Bin Laden and Ayman Zawahiri--- but if they were asked to give the name of one Islamic thinker of Enlightened Islam in the contemporary world, they would struggle. This is the challenge facing the Muslim community, the British government and terrorism experts: how can authentic Islam (Enlightened) overcome inauthentic Islam (Radical Fundamentalism). Inauthentic Islam can never be eradicated unless a new strategy emerges to combat inauthentic interpretations with authentic interpretations and it will have more credibility through the writings of a contemporary Islamic scholar and thinker like Mr. Fethullah Gülen.

Mr. Fethullah Gülen is from Turkey but his nationality does not matter for his world view of Islam is the authentic Islamic interpretation to discredit and combat terrorism. The Fundamentalists have begun to regard Islam only as a political instrument and not spiritual and many studies on Islam label it as ‘Political Islam’ as if nothing else from the faith emerges. This is a false assumption for as Yilmaz has observed “Islam, for Gülen, is not a political project to be implemented. It is a repository of discourse and practice for the evaluation of a just and ethical society.”<sup>14</sup> He reiterates that Islam as a religion should not be reduced to being a political party identity. He is very critical of the ‘instrumentalisation’ of religion in politics:

When those who have adopted Islam as a political ideology rather than a religion in its true sense and function, review their activities and attitudes they claim to be based on Islam, especially political ones, will discover that they are usually moved by personal or national anger, hostility, and other similar motives... A Muslim’s beginning point must have an Islamic basis. In the present situation, Muslims cannot act out of ideological or political partisanship and then dress this partisanship in Islamic garb, or represent mere desires in the form of ideas. If we can overcome this tendency, Islam’s true image will become known.<sup>15</sup>

Gülen’s views have little to do with seeking political power or even traditional Islam but

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14 Yilmaz (2003), p. 225.

15 <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/1336/13/>

rather have more in common with Max Weber's ideas about "worldly asceticism." It is based on a paradox because it includes a critical rejection of the world while simultaneously calling for involvement in the world in rationally structured activities. These activities include the building of schools instead of mosques, investing in secular education instead of religious instruction, encouraging economic enterprises and requiring them to invest in education, encouraging educational and economic enterprises to support each other, promoting individual and collective self-criticism, and supporting critically minded planning for future projects.<sup>16</sup>

Islam is a faith which follows the middle path and not extremists paths which the Fundamentalists are following. For Gülen "Islam, being the 'middle way' of absolute balance---balance between materialism and spiritualism, between rationalism and mysticism, between worldliness and excessive asceticism, between the world and the next--- and inclusive ways of all the previous prophets makes a choice according to the situation."<sup>17</sup> The Fundamentalists are either ignorant or deliberately ignore that Islam is a religion of middle way. This is the world-view of Islam which needs to be taught.

The writings of radical fundamentalists are polemical and they do not even know how to engage in discourse or believe in *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) whereas "Gülen's perception of Islam is not based on an abstract model that excludes reinterpretation and thus other interpretations, but it is open to experiences—to the cultural accumulation of this world. Gülen believes that there is a need for *ijtihad* in our age. He says that he respects the scholars of the past but also believes that *ijtihad* is a necessity because to freeze *ijtihad* means to imprison Islam in a given time and space."<sup>18</sup> He puts that:

Taking the Qur'an and Sunna as our main sources and respecting the great people of the past, in the consciousness that we are all children of time, we must question the past and present. I am looking for labourers of thought and researchers to establish the necessary balance between the constant and changing aspects of Islam and, considering such juridical rules as abrogation, particularization, generalization, and restriction, who can present Islam to the modern understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Muslims have lost their civilization because there is not *ijtihad* but reliance on *taqlid*. In modern times, one of the areas that motivates *ijtihad* is the situation of Muslims in non-Muslim polities. The juristic discourse with regard to such issues as whether Muslims may reside in a non-Muslim polity and under what circumstances, the relationships of these Muslims to Dar al-Islam, and the ethical and legal duties that these Muslims owe both to Muslim law and to their host non-Muslim polity (*dar al-harb*) have been debated since the eighth century.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Yilmaz explains Gülen's frequently used term *dar al-hizmet* (country of service to humanity) is a new co-existential concept, reflecting his vision:

If one's intention is to serve Islam by presenting a good example, then one can stay wherever one desires, says Abdullah Aymaz, former editor in chief of the daily Zaman and Gülen's close friend and colleague for more than thirty years. Gülen stresses that wherever a Muslim is, even outside a Muslim polity, he or she has to obey the *lex loci*, to respect others' rights and to be just, and has to

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16 Elisabeth Ozdalgı, 'Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting: Fethullah Gülen's Inspired Piety and Activism,' *Critique*, 17 (2000): 84–104.

17 Quoted in Ahmet Kuru, Fethullah Gülen's Search for a Middle Way between Modernity and Muslim tradition in M Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (ed) *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. 2003. p. 117.

18 Yilmaz (2003), p. 221.

19 Unal and Williams 2005: 53.

20 Yilmaz 2003: 234-235.

disregard discussions of dar al-harb and dar al-Islam. In Gülen's understanding, Ummah is more of a transnational socio-cultural entity, not a politico-legal one. He hopes that this socio-cultural entity will be instrumental in bringing general universal peace. He formulates a project of cooperation between Islam and the West to reach this desired, almost utopian, universal peace.<sup>21</sup>

Gülen's whole life has been full of teaching, preaching and writing books on Islam in spite of the fact that he comes from a country which follows the path of secularization.

Millions inspired by Gülen put his discourse into practice all over the world. The greatest advantage in the prospect of achieving this is that Gülen has an alim background. It is true that he is an influential leader but he is first of all an expert of Islamic theology (*kalam*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), science of *hadith* (*usul-u hadith*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).<sup>22</sup>

Gülen has followed the tasawwuf tradition of Enlightenment Islam and also tried to "address the spiritual needs of the people, to educate the masses and to provide stability in times of turmoil."<sup>23</sup> The Fundamentalists all react to modernity and have produced reactionary thinkers against the West. They fear that Modernity with its westernization and secularization may penetrate the Muslim world. But what they do not think is that it will penetrate their worlds only if they have not alternatives and since they have no solutions from Fundamentalism to fulfil the vacuums, it is not surprising why Western modernization is entering the Muslim world. With all the Fundamentalist show raging in the Muslim world they have not produced an Islamic civilization. According to Piricky,

Muslim responses to the challenges of our post-modern age are often described in terms of various fundamentalism: The widespread Western view of Islam as a religion conducive to mass anti-Western mobilization is nevertheless one-dimensional, ahistorical and unjust...outside the fundamentalist orientation an Islamic modernism also exists."<sup>24</sup> Islamic modernism has to give the Islamic touch which Gülen has given which makes thinkers like him as being the most important for the Muslim world to develop itself. Thinkers like Gülen "present Islam not as dogmatic religion but as a system which is able to cope with the changes in society and challenges of our new era."<sup>25</sup>

Through his sermons, teachings, books and activities, Gülen has inspired a whole generation in Turkey and abroad. For the peaceful world of the future, Gülen encourages his admirers to establish educational institutions in and outside of Turkey. Gülen's sympathisers are active participants in their society and perform public service by establishing schools and hospitals. Rumi's spirit of love, compassion, tolerance, acceptance of the other, socio-cultural activism and education as the most important method of social innovation to tackle ignorance and improve dialogue lives in the thought of Gülen<sup>26</sup>:

... if we exclude certain periods and individuals, the Turks' interpretation of what Islam allows to be interpreted is correct and positive. If we can spread globally the Islamic understanding of such heroes of love as Niyazi-i Misri, Yunus Emre, and Rumi, if we can extend their messages of love, dialogue, and tolerance to those thirsty for this message, everyone will run toward the embrace of

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21 Yilmaz 2003: 234-235.

22 Yilmaz, 2007, Social Innovation.

23 Bulent Aras and Omer Caha, Fethullah Gülen and his Liberal Turkish Islam. MERIA: Middle East Review of International Affairs. Vol. 4. No. 4. 2000. p. 10.

24 Gabriel Piricky, Some observations on New Identities in Modernist interpretations of Islam in Contemporary Turkey: Fethullah Glen Cemaati. Asian and African Studies. Vol. 8. No 1. 1999, p. 83.

25 Piricky, p. 86

26 Yilmaz, 2007, Social Innovation.

love, peace, and tolerance that we represent.<sup>27</sup> Those who perceive religion as being contradictory to science and reason are the afflicted; they are unaware of the spirit of both religion and reason. Moreover, it is absolutely fraudulent to hold religion responsible for clashes between different sections of society. Conflicts between peoples and groups of people arise from ignorance, from ambition for personal advantage and profit, or from the vested interests of particular groups, parties, or classes. Religion neither approves nor condones such qualities and ambitions.<sup>28</sup> In a world becoming more and more globalised, we are trying to get to know those who will be our future neighbours.... One of the most important factors here is to eliminate factors that separate people... such as discrimination based on colour, race, belief, and ethnicity.... Education can uproot these evils. ... We are trying our best to do this.<sup>29</sup>

The community's enthusiasm for establishing secular schools in both the Muslim and non-Muslim world, specifically schools serving people of all faiths and nationalities, is unprecedented among almost all faith-based groups and movements, thus, socially innovative.<sup>30</sup> The movement's schools are non-denominational and follow the national curriculum of the country in which they are based. Many scholars have observed that the Gülen schools endeavour to combine excellence in teaching with the instruction of good morals.<sup>31</sup>

The Gülen movement is presenting a renewed Rumi practice of that emphasise love, mutual respect, understanding, socio-cultural activism, education, social innovation, peaceful coexistence, dialogue and cooperation with all for a cohesive society.<sup>32</sup> With the help of the schools in about 100 countries in North, East, West and South, all over the world, many people, not only Muslims, are getting a good and quality education in a multicultural, multi-faith environment with English primary language of instruction so that in future they will continue to be open to dialogue and they will hopefully attain good socio-economic status within their societies.<sup>33</sup>

Gülen also pioneered in the establishment of the Journalists and Writers Foundation in 1994, the activities of which to promote dialogue and tolerance among all strata of the society receive warm welcome from almost all walks of life. Fethullah Gülen is the Honorary President of the Foundation. The Foundation also works as a think-tank in related issues. The movement tries to bring all scholars and intellectuals regardless of their ethnic, ideological, religious and cultural backgrounds. The Journalists and Writers Foundation also works as a think-tank in related issues. The Abant Platform is a result of the attempt at finding solutions to Turkey's problems by bringing together scholars and intellectuals of all colours. This platform is the first of its kind in near Turkish history where intellectuals could agree to disagree on sensitive issues as laicism, secularism, religion, and reason relations. The Abant Platform is a result of the attempt at finding solutions to Turkey's and world's problems by bringing together scholars and intellectuals of all colours. The Foundation organizes Abant Conventions annually. In

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27 Gülen, *Love and Essence of Human Being*, p. 29.

28 <http://en.fGülen.com/content/view/1958/12/>

29 Ünal and Williams 2000: 329–331.

30 Yilmaz, 2007, *Social Innovation*.

31 Mandaville states that “in the case of Turkey's Gülen movement... we find elements of Sufi spirituality fused with socio-economic liberalism in a highly successful transnational educational project. Dozens of Gülen-sponsored schools, emphasizing a modernist curriculum against a backdrop of ‘non-invasive’ Islamic morality, now operate throughout much of the Balkans and Central Asia”, Peter Mandaville (2003) “What does progressive Islam look like?”. *Isim Newsletter*. Leiden: ISIM. 33-34. p.34.

32 Yilmaz, 2007, *Social Innovation*.

33 Yilmaz, 2007, *Social Innovation*.

2007, the Abant Convention's theme was Alevies in Turkey.<sup>34</sup>

Interfaith dialogue all over the world is on the agenda of the movement. In the countries where they reside utilizing the concept of dar al-hizmet (country of service to humanity), they either establish interfaith organizations, associations and societies or they are in close contact with the men of faith. Thus, for instance, Turkish businessmen in Korea take the Buddhist priests to Turkey to visit historical places where believers of different faiths had lived peacefully. Or, in Thailand, administrators of Fatih College regularly visit Buddhist authorities and priests and report to them the progress of the Thai pupils. In Russia, Romania, Georgia, South Africa, Senegal and so on the theme is the same. They all believe that interfaith and intercultural dialogue is a must to reach a general universal peace (*sulh-u umumi*) and that the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points.<sup>35</sup>

These developments also have led to the establishment of new institutions like the Dialogue Society established in 1998 in London. Through these charities, these volunteers initiate and engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue with people of different faiths, backgrounds, and cultures. They have been organising events to commemorate Rumi or by hosting whirling dervishes events. Only in the United Kingdom, the Dialogue Society organizes several whirling dervishes programmes each year in perhaps ten different cities of the country, including but not limited to the famous Wembley Arena, Oxford University's Ashmolean Theatre and Hackney Empire.<sup>36</sup>

Gülen strongly emphasizes that acts of violence against innocent civilians including women and children are inhumane. He categorically and without any reservation condemns killing of innocent civilians, elderly, women and children. The following is an excerpt from his condemnation message which was published in Washington Post and New York Times right after the tragedy of 9/11:

Any terrorist activity, no matter who it is committed by and for whatever purpose, is the greatest blow against peace, democracy and humanity. For this reason, terrorist activities can by no means be approved of. Terror cannot be a means for independence, nor a legitimate route to salvation. The recent terrorist activity, which is by far the most bloody and catastrophic to date, is a sabotage against not only the United States of America but also against world peace and the universal democratic and humanistic values. The perpetrators of this act cannot be but the most brutal of all.

Terrorism cannot be a means for any Islamic goal, and a terrorist cannot be a Muslim, nor can a true Muslim be a terrorist. Islam orders peace and a true Muslim can only be a symbol of peace and the maintenance of basic human rights. Islam preaches that if there are ten people on board a vessel of whom one is innocent and nine guilty of a criminal act, then the ship may not be sunk in view of punishing the guilty for there is amongst them one innocent. Any right, whatever it's nature, is respected in Islam and it cannot be violated. The right of an individual cannot be violated in the interest of the community. The Qur'an, Islam's sacred Book, declares that one who takes a life unjustly is as if he/she took the lives of all humankind, and that one who saves a life is as if he/she saved the lives of all. In the words of our Prophet, a Muslim is one from who comes no harm, neither from his/her tongue nor hand.

I strongly condemn the recent terrorist attack on the United States. It is worthy of nothing but condemnation and hatred, and all in the world must condemn it.

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34 Yilmaz, 2007, Social Innovation.

35 Yilmaz, 2003.

36 [www.dialoguesociety.org](http://www.dialoguesociety.org)

I assure the American people that I pray to God Almighty for the victims and share their pain and sorrow from the bottom of my heart. May God give them with patience (Washington Post, September 13, 2001).

Gülen also clearly stated his condemnation of Bin Laden, his accomplices and their actions:

Bin Laden is among the persons in this world that I hate most. Because he has defaced the beautiful face of Islam. He has produced a dirty image. Even if we work on repairing the terrible damage he has caused with all our power, it will take years. We shall speak on every platform everywhere. We shall write books. We shall declare “this is not Islam”. Bin Laden replaced Islamic logic with his own desires and wishes and lives as a monster. The men around him are like that as well. If there are people who think like that, they are also locked into monstrosity. We equivocally condemn their perspective.<sup>37</sup>

On this point, Özdalga notes:

Gülen is not suggesting any radically different or heterodox interpretation of Islam, but adopts a solid, conventional Hanafi/Sunni understanding of the religious traditions. So it does not seem to be the content of the religious interpretation as such, but the very existence of a new relatively strong group, filled with religious fervour and claiming a place in the public arena that annoys the establishment in Turkey radical margins who see this as a threat to their ideology. This new element is perceived as being an anomic force, a force that challenges the norms and values, the order of the established hegemonic elite community. Thus, it is not religion per se that is at the root of the conflict. On the contrary, religion has been used as a “false ideology” to displace the real threat. From the Established-Outsider perspective, the key to the problem seems to lie in the threat posed to the existing power balance and established status hierarchy.<sup>38</sup>

The Islamic radical do not study their own civilization history and have focused only on the Caliphate history. They draw the models of their ‘Islamic state’ from the Caliphate and this is not leading Muslims anywhere for it is based on following the past while the world is changing. According to Gülen “Regardless of changes, advancement in science and technology, and new ways of thinking, the feeling of attachment to a religion always has been the primary factor in forming humanity’s scientific and intellectual life, developing human virtues and establishing new civilization with its charm and power, religion is still and will be the most influential element and power in people’s lives.”<sup>39</sup> As a power in the lives of Muslims Islam created Islamic civilization which emerged to the surface from the 8th till 16th century. It was creative and powerful and it even influenced the West in those times by its knowledge.<sup>40</sup> What is the position of the Muslim world in contemporary times? It is living in a post-Islamic civilization world and the Muslims are lost and confused and for that reason they have been easily persuaded towards fundamentalist thinking assuming that this might regain their lost world.

Gülen’s thinking then poses this challenge to the Muslims to develop their selves within their faith and become a powerful innovator of Islamic civilization. It is not surprising then why some Western scholars regard Gülen as “one of the major figures in defining the contemporary global Islamic experience... his work helps to redefine the nature of Islamic discourse in

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37 Akman, N., Zaman, March 22-April 1, 2004.

38 Özdalga, Redeemer or Outsider, Muslim World, 2005, pp. 441-442.

39 Voll, pp. 245-246.

40 Eugene Myers, Arabic Thought and the Western world in the Golden Age of Islam. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing company, 1964.

the contemporary world.”<sup>41</sup> Voll observes that

in the clashing vision of globalization Fethullah Gülen is a force in the development of the Islamic discourse of globalised multicultural pluralism. As the impact of the educational activities of those influenced by him attests, his vision bridges modern and postmodern, global and local, and has a significant influence in the contemporary debate that shape the visions of the future of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.<sup>42</sup>

It is this kind of vision from the Islamic world view that has to be internalized by Muslims living in the West. Muslims who hate the Western countries in which they live are vulnerable to Fundamentalist Islam and its sub-sectarian interpretations. It is therefore important to change such Muslims’ Fundamentalist world vision to Gülenic world vision of Islam because the “Gülen movement deserves careful study...not just because of the quality of Gülen’s ideas but also because it represents one of the few such progressives and inclusive mass-based civil society movement in the world.”<sup>43</sup> Gülen believes that Islam is a religion of peace and wherever there were conflicts in countries like Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, the Philippines, Banda Aceh, Northern Iraq Gülen addressed the problems of ethnic and religious conflicts. His movement opened hundreds of schools for education both in Turkey and abroad for he believed that education for Muslims was necessary for people to have more knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Gülen also believes strongly in interfaith cooperation and dialogue. He developed relations with Pope John Paul II of the Catholic faith; Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians as well as the Chief Rabbi of Israel “to develop interfaith cooperation on various issues in order to bring peace.”<sup>45</sup> Most Muslims from Conservative Islam do not want to have any relations with other faiths. Developing an understanding and respect for other faiths is extremely important when Muslims are living in Britain or other Western countries. Most believers of Conservative Islam do not do this nor want to know about other faiths except their own which is why it is important to make them aware of other faiths from the Islamic point of view. Gülen is very clear about this and states that

Islam recognizes all religions previous to it. It accepts all the prophets and books sent to different epochs of history. Not only does it accept them but also regards belief in them as an essential principle of being Muslim. By doing this it acknowledges the basic unity of all religions.<sup>46</sup>

One of the most important ways of being the ambassador of Islam in the public arena is the development of one’s Self of the Muslims with honour and dignity and above all, credibility. This kind of development of their Islamic self identities has to emerge from their spiritually. Gülen’s understanding of what kind of Islamic identities Muslims should develop is very important for every Muslim and it means that

True Muslims are people of safety and trust, so much so that other Muslims can turn their backs on

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41 John Voll, Fethullah Gülen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse in M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito (Ed) Turkish Islam and Secular state: The Gülen Movement. Syracuse: Syracuse: NJ. University Press. 2003. p238.

42 Voll, p. 247.

43 Paper by Greg Barton, Progressive Islam’s thought, Civil Society and the Gülen movement in the national context: Parallels with Indonesia. 8 November 2005, p. 2

44 Zeki Saritoprak, Peace and Non-Violence: A Turkish experience. The Muslim World. Vol. 95. NO. 3, 2005, p. 8.

45 Saritoprak, p. 8.

46 Ihsan Yilmaz, Ijtihad and Tajdid by Conduct: The Gülen Movement in M. Hakan Yavuz and J. L. Esposito. Turkish Islam and the Secular State. Syracuse. Syracuse University Press, 2003. p. 230.

them without doubt or suspicion. They can entrust a family member to such people without fear, for that person will be absolutely safe from the Muslims' hand or tongue. If they attend a gathering together, the person can leave in full confidence that no one will gossip about him or her, and neither will he or she have to listen to gossip about others. Such Muslim are as sensitive to the dignity and honour of other people as they are to their own. They do not eat; they feed others. They do not live; they enable others to live. They will even sacrifice spiritual pleasure for others.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, as Saritoprak comments "the victory for Gülen is the spiritual. . . . He also gives an example from history saying, 'Tariq bin Ziyad the Muslim conqueror of Spain, was victorious not because he defeated the army of the Spaniards, but because of his self-sacrificing when he stood before wealth and said "Be careful Tariq! You were a slave yesterday; today you are a victorious commander; tomorrow you will be under the earth;'" In Gülen's teaching, spiritual strength was much more powerful than Tariq's military victory. These are the things that make the theology of non-violence essential in Gülen's understanding. According to Gülen, love is an undefeated weapon, and love for others will bring sacrifice and service to others. Sacrificing oneself for the service of others is an essential part of his teaching. He says that heroes are those who do not live for themselves but live for others. An attribute of peace in Gülen's teaching is compassion and love---not only towards humans, but also towards animals"<sup>48</sup> Muslims have to develop these kinds of identities for radical fundamentalists have demonized Islam with its terrorist actions. Living in Britain with this worldview of Islam, not only the image of Islam will redefine itself in the minds of non-Muslims but Muslims themselves will be considered as assets as 'golden' people who once belonged to the 'Golden age' mentioned earlier. If we can promote the Gülen understanding of what it means to be a Muslim and convert Muslims to authentic Islam, then we will not only save 'Islam' from the clutches of terrorist ideology and rhetoric but also facilitate constructive citizenship among Muslim communities in Britain.

## Conclusion

A brief exposition of the authentic Islamic thinking of Fethullah Gülen has been provided in this paper. Clearly his views and school of thought need to be read and made accessible in Britain. Muslims will not react or reject to Gülen's teachings and views since they are not from outside the fold of Islam but from within. The fact that the Gülen movement have not succeeded in spreading their views in the Muslim world to date is because they are not funded by petro-dollar states like Saudi Arabia.

From what has been discussed in this paper some facts which specialists on terrorism or policy makers may not be aware of should be clearly understood. First, preventive measures of terrorism will never be effective when eradivative measures are not given any attention. Eradivative measures reinforce preventive measures and will make it effective to achieve its ends. Secondly, engagement with predictive measures is complex and if corrective approaches are not taken, then it will fail. The sub-sectarian interpretations of Islam are the virus that causes terrorism. They have to be detected and measures have to be taken to eradicate it.

Thirdly, if one embarks on the path to eradicate the virus of terrorism which is emerging from various sects then engagement with Islam becomes necessary. But any engagement with

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47 Zeki Saritoprak, Peace and Non-Violence: A Turkish experience. The Muslim World. Vol. 95. NO. 3, 2005, pp. 8-9.

48 Zeki Saritoprak, Peace and Non-Violence: A Turkish experience. The Muslim World. Vol. 95. NO. 3, 2005, p. 11.

Islam has to make clear which perspective of Islam one is supporting as the Wahhabi state of Saudi Arabia will be mainly supporting Wahhabi sects; the Shiite state or Iran will be mainly supporting Shiite sects so the engagement discussed above will have to make clear that it is supporting the Sufi sects. Since Fethullah Gülen is the only major thinker of the Sufi tradition in the contemporary Muslim world, then his views must be supported. Some may argue that because he is a Turk why has Turkey not supported him. The answer is that Turkey is a laicist state and does not support any of its great Islamic thinkers like other Muslim countries do. This is the reason why many Muslims from the Sufi tradition may not know about him but about great Sufi thinkers of their past histories. But Fethullah Gülen's interpretation does not contradict any of the past history of the Sufi tradition for it is authentic Islam whose characteristic is not to use Islam for personal motives but for helping humanity.

Lastly, to discover Fethullah Gülen's views is one thing. But to eradicate terrorism it has to be implemented. In order to do this some steps have to be taken which are suggested in the specific recommendations. For translating Gülen's views into action in Britain has to be done in a sophisticated manner.

## **Recommendations**

- i.** The British government has to come out openly in its support for Islam as one of the great faiths of the world. Misinformation and disinformation has spread, equating Islam with terrorism and this has to be rebutted by all politicians including the Prime Minister and other policy makers. The last Prime minister as well as the American president had made positive statements about Islam but it was done just once or twice. Since the war on terrorism is being fought every day and since it focuses on the Muslim terrorists, it is not surprising that the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has been interpreted by terrorist organizations as being war on Islam. Recently, the British government has realized this and advised that the term GWOT should not be used. This is a good step but what is being recommended here is that all governments and authorities involved should make it much more clear that they do not consider Islam to be responsible in any shape or form for the terrorism of some extremist groups. Since GWOT is ongoing should the frequency of this message until common Muslims are convinced that this is not a war against Muslims and that they are as much the victims of this plague as everyone else. It is this kind of projection which is not coming out of the government.
- ii.** Why the first step is necessary is because the governments cannot combat terrorism with preventive measures unless it joins hand with the Muslim community. The Muslim community will not join hands with the British government if it suspects it of being anti-Islamic. The credibility of the government has been at stake, as stated above for its GWOT has been considered as being a war on Islam. The past history of Britain from the Crusades to Colonialism has not been positive with Islam. Its recent award of knighthood to Salman Rushdie has in fact reinforced the view of its being anti-Islamic. Although the award was given for his contribution to South Asian literature, those who recommended it did not think what its political repercussions will be in the Muslim world. Their ignorance produced consequences that it not only effected the national security of Britain( for threat was made against Britain and the Queen by Al-Qaeda) but Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa again became activated, monetary awards were raised for beheading Rushdie and some even gave an award of Saif-Allah (Sword of Allah) to Bin Laden!. If such

knighthood was worth being given against the security of the British public—then such policies have to be rethought for it affects the credibility of the British government.

- iii.** Terrorism cannot be combated only in Britain so it has to engage the Muslim world as well. The British government should know about its low images as well as that of the USA in the Muslim world. This has to be improved and this can only be done officially through news policies of Public Diplomacy to raise its image in the Muslim world for winning the hearts and minds of the Muslims. In order to do this it has to openly do this as one of the defenders of Islam as a great faith with its strong support of Sufi traditions. The other sects may oppose it and Britain will be placed on one side of being supporter of the Sufi tradition but would not be accused of being on anti-Islamic. It will gain support from the Sufi Muslim population and will develop its own space within the Muslim masses.
- iv.** There is no doubt that there is a struggle going on between the Muslim world, between the Fundamentalist and ‘Moderate’ Muslims. Whatever labels are being used, the real struggle is between authentic and inauthentic Islam. Authentic Islam produces enlightened Muslims and because they perceive God as Light (Nur) it has been labelled as Enlightened Islam against Conservative Islam; in terms of sects the struggle is between Sufism and Wahhabism and Salafism. The Western world has to clearly decide whom it supports and it has to support Enlightened Islam through strong economic and political support both in the Muslim world and in Britain.
- v.** Although many more detailed recommendations can be made, for the purposes of this paper, these four set the general tone and direction the British authorities need to follow to eradicate extremist elements in society. This will help bring the Muslim community on board and pave the way towards a collective struggle against terrorist ideology.