

June 25, 2006

After Londonistan

By CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

I.

"Behold!" reads an official police notice on the waiting-room wall at the Bethnal Green police station, in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. "Fear from people should not prevent one from saying the truth if he knows it." It is a hadith saying of the Prophet Muhammad, stuck amid a row of posters urging Britons to do their civic duty and report any crimes they might get wind of. Tower Hamlets, which includes large Bengali and Somali communities, is a majority-minority borough. Someone there apparently felt that the hadith poster might help woo those for whom civic duty was an insufficient spur. Today, [Britain](#) has more than a million and a half Muslims. A million live in London, where they make up an eighth of the population. They are not just the refugees and tempest-tossed laborers of the developing world, large though those groups may be. London's West End is full of Saudi princes and financiers, and journalists and politicians from around the Arab world; its East End is home to erudite theologians from the Indian subcontinent, along with some unhinged ones. In the 1980's and 90's, a hands-off government allowed London to become a haven for radicals and a center for calls to jihad. Culturally and politically (and theologically and gastronomically), London ranks among the capitals of the Muslim world and is certainly its chief point of contact with the United States and the rest of the West. Since last July 7, when four young British Muslims used backpack bombs to take their own lives and those of 52 others on London's public-transport system, getting information out of the city's various Muslim communities has become a desperate preoccupation of British law enforcement.

Lord Carlile of Berriew, a Welshman who is Britain's independent reviewer of counterterrorism laws, has wide access to classified intelligence about terrorism plans. He is the last person you would expect to hype the dangers. For one thing, his party, the Liberal [Democrats](#), has reaped electoral gains by opposing [Tony Blair's](#) war on terror, particularly Blair's belief that Iraq is a front in that war. For another, Lord Carlile has made a name for himself as a civil libertarian — a champion of legal underdogs from the terminally ill to the transsexual — and civil libertarians are the ones who have led the opposition to antiterror measures. "How serious is it?" he asked, sitting beside a conference-room table in his law chambers off the Strand on a sunny morning this spring. "Very. Complacency, tempting though it is, is the worst possible attitude. We've been fortunate we haven't had more attacks. There will be more."

British unease about terrorism has deepened in recent weeks. In early June, hundreds of London police officers, backed by chemical-weapons experts, raided a row house and shot a man in Forest Gate, a heavily

South Asian neighborhood, reportedly acting on a tip that some kind of cyanide device was inside. They discovered nothing — aside from hostile neighbors and the outrage of several influential Muslim organizations.

Not long before, a report on last summer's bombings, issued by the Home Office, which is in charge of national law enforcement, told a disturbing story of normal English Muslim kids turning into terrorists. Three of the bombers were Englishmen of Pakistani descent from Beeston, a neighborhood in Leeds. One was a Jamaican-born Muslim convert from nearby Huddersfield. A few years ago, all of them would have been considered part of the new, multicultural England branded "Cool Britannia" in the press and bragged about by government and citizens alike. Especially demoralizing was the posthumous video message of 30-year-old Mohammad Sidique Khan, the ringleader, which was broadcast on [Al Jazeera](#) two months after his death. His claims that Muslims were being mistreated throughout the world were familiar enough from other suicide-bomber videos. But Khan's thick, native Yorkshire accent — like something that had strayed out of a film adaptation of a Brontë novel, or a documentary about striking miners — was disheartening to British viewers. By then, Khan's white childhood friends had made it known that they had called him Sid and had been really fond of him. One told the BBC, "I just thought of him as a Beeston lad, and that's what he was — a Beeston lad, born and bred."

Seven or eight major plots were reportedly broken up between 2001 and the July 7 bombings. One involved a ricin attack on the Heathrow Express train planned by terrorists linked to a radical Algerian group. Since July 7, there have been four more serious terror plots — including a widely reported incident last year on July 21 when four suicide bombs failed to detonate. The would-be terrorists were arrested days later, but not before a Brazilian on his way to work was mistaken for one of them and shot dead by the police in the Stockwell Underground station. Considering that Britain is less despised among the world's Islamist radicals than the United States, and that its Muslim communities are, by and large, smaller, better-integrated and more prosperous than those on the continent, this is a lot of activity.

II.

"Let no one be in any doubt," Prime Minister Tony Blair told the country a month after last July's attacks. "The rules of the game are changing." Britain has been adjusting its terror laws since the Blair government came to power in 1997. But Sept. 11, 2001, sparked calls for broad new government powers, and July 7, 2005, has created a consensus — a fragile one, but a consensus nonetheless — that even those are insufficient. The new rules Blair spoke of were to be found in a 12-point plan that included tighter enforcement of asylum and deportation, blacklists of extremist bookshops and bans on hard-line Islamist groups. Some of the measures were discarded as too punitive, but the ones that remain have dominated parliamentary and public debate ever since. After the bombings, Blair warned that those who do not "share and support the values that sustain the British way of life," or who incite hatred against Britain and its people, "have no place here." In February, he added that Islamist preachers who condone terrorism

"should not be in this country." It was tempting to assume that Blair was simply hardening his line, moving from Islam-Is-Peace to Love-It-or-Leave-It. But the government insists that it will do everything in consultation with the country's 1.6 million Muslims, half of whom are under 25, with the goal of winning their hearts and minds.

Whether that kind of outreach is compatible with a hard line depends, of course, on Muslim sentiments. Identifying and influencing those sentiments — promoting "moderate Muslims" is the way the challenge is usually framed — is trickier than it sounds. What is a moderate Muslim? It could mean someone who's not very serious about his religion or someone who's quite serious about his religion but not very political about it. What of the common formulation that terrorism is "not Islam"? This could be a politically correct dodge or a hardheaded diagnosis that something more unholy is at work. The mainstream Islamic organizations, which unite Muslims around political grievances, are certainly a useful route into the British political system, but maybe they are whipping up those grievances in the first place. And nonbelievers are so numerous among people of immigrant background that dealing with religious leaders may be a wrongheaded strategy in the first place. Britain is working out its answers to these questions by trial and error.

Potential terrorists now in Britain — those worthy of being kept under careful watch — may number in the several hundreds, as Blair said last year, or in the thousands, as a police official told me this spring. Britain's approach — tightening up law enforcement for all its citizens, while trying to ensure that Muslims feel represented in every step of the process — differs from that of both the United States, which has focused on border control and electronic eavesdropping, and France, which relies on infiltration and an aggressive investigative judiciary. But its basic problem in fighting terrorism is the same one that all Western countries face. Britain is trying to clamp down on its Muslim communities and empower them at the same time. Clamp down too hard, and you alienate the people you want to win over. Empower communities indiscriminately, and you give free rein to people it is foolish to trust.

III.

Juliet Luswa, a police constable who grew up in Uganda, and Ahmed Asania, a Bangladeshi-English special police constable, see a lot of London when they walk the beat on a Friday afternoon in Shoreditch, Spitalfields and Whitechapel. The areas are both rich and poor, teeming with immigrants and encroached on by the booming banks and brokerages of the City of London nearby. They are both yuppie dining destinations and caldrons of deprivation.

Asania visits a woman who runs a Middle Eastern-style hookah bar who has seen her bike, stolen the week before, being sold by a street dealer a block away. Among the worshipers leaving Friday prayers at the Jamia Masjid mosque — which was built as a Huguenot church in the 18th century and served as a synagogue for most of the 20th — they greet an elderly Liberal Democrat politician from somewhere in South Asia who has just won a seat on the local council, despite his unsteady English. Asania and Luswa

point out the flats on Heneage Street where the most dangerous Caribbean gangs loiter and the podlike public toilets on Bethnal Green Road, which are going to be removed because heroin addicts barricade themselves inside with their works.

Back on Brick Lane, a musclebound, slick-haired hood, loitering in front of a fried-chicken shop across the street, starts haranguing Luswa in Urdu, which she doesn't speak. The guy has a reputation for this sort of thing. His insults are probably misogynistic. A couple of people nearby snicker. You would need to know a lot about the neighborhood to say whether they're laughing out of sympathy, contempt or intimidation.

"He's in a boxing league," Asania mentions as the two walk away. "He's really excellent." It seems to be an explanation of something.

The London Metropolitan Police have long had an official, national counterterrorist role and were prominent in the fight against the I.R.A. But there is not yet a consensus on what the police role ought to be in the fight against Islamist terrorism. Are they there to take the fight to the malefactors, assuming they can find them, through hard-edged tactics ranging from surveillance to raids? Or are they there to keep the peace and listen, particularly in minority neighborhoods, minimizing the discontent, insecurity and alienation on which terrorism feeds? "Communities defeat terrorism" has become the mantra of the police under Sir Ian Blair (no relation to the prime minister), who has been commissioner since early last year. Blair is undertaking big reforms in the police, even as adversaries inside and outside the force call on Tony Blair to fire him — over the recent Forest Gate raid and the mistaken-identity killing in Stockwell last summer. By the end of this year, he hopes to have set up hundreds of Safer Neighborhoods teams, like the one Luswa and Asania serve on, which mix traditional bobby work with a bit of cultural translation. Commissioner Blair aspires to kill two birds with one stone — enhancing police familiarity with the most intimate corners of dangerous neighborhoods while winning the trust of communities that often feel left out of the main current of British life. But, as in the London of Hogarth and Mayhew, the borderline between cultural variety and dangerous criminality can be a fuzzy one.

The British government has dropped broad hints that it is stepping up surveillance and infiltration. The percentage of intelligence resources devoted to terrorism has more than doubled in the last five years. Mosques are not off limits. "Any cleric with radical ideas proselytizes at his peril," Lord Carlile told me. According to the Home Office, extremists are using mosques less and less — and private homes more and more — to carry out their activities.

But the inability of the police to spot what was happening in Leeds on the eve of the July 7 bombings has given rise to doubts over whether there is much surveillance at all — or, if there is, whether it works. Beeston had a Muslim youth club, which Mohammad Sidique Khan helped manage; an Islamist bookstore; and a place known, even before July 7, as [Al Qaeda](#) gym, where Khan and two of his collaborators worked out. Nearly a year after the attacks, the Home Office admits that no one has yet

given a clear account of what went on inside those places.

Aggressive information-gathering is also meeting steady community opposition. Section 44 of the Terrorism Act 2000 lets the police designate areas where anyone can be stopped and searched without cause. Muslims say that Section 44 is being used to target them. It tends to be the first thing heads of Muslim organizations complain about if you bring up the war on terror. Liberty, the British equivalent of the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), has accused the London Police of making virtually the entire city a Section 44 area. And other governmental organizations have put police antiterrorist operations under close scrutiny. After the raid in Forest Gate earlier this month, the Independent Police Complaints Commission arrived on the scene to respond to complaints that had been filed before the wider public even knew the purpose of the raid.

IV.

How you go about gathering information on a community depends on whether you think the best intelligence is dug out by agents or volunteered by concerned citizens. This is a question on which police officers of the very highest rank are divided. Sir Ian's predecessor, Lord Stevens of Kirkwhelpington, champions traditional police skills. "It helps when communities come out with information," he said in May. "But most I.R.A. attacks were solved by fingerprints and other forensic police work. This is not just hearts and minds. You can never put all your eggs in that basket."

Sir Ian, speaking on a drizzly May afternoon in the Westminster police headquarters building called New Scotland Yard, puts himself in the camp of those who think that most useful information is volunteered. And that is no less true when dealing with Muslims than with any other religious group. "After an atrocity of the scale of the 7th of July, it is impossible that we will not be more intrusive," explained Sir Ian, a ruddy and eloquent man with excitable eyes and a direct manner. "But we can't do this to them, we can only do this with them. We start from a different place than we did with the [Irish Republican Army](#), which had declared war against the British state. This is a far more difficult arena. We mustn't be seen to be attempting to infiltrate the entire Muslim community, 99.9 percent of which are entirely law-abiding." Safer Neighborhoods teams, in other words, are not spies. "The whole deal here," he continued, "is to engender the trust that one afternoon may allow one of those Islamic leaders to say to the sergeant, 'You know, I'm worried about young so-and-so.'"

It takes no great leap of imagination to see how sensitive policing could prevent terrorism. The garbage man who serviced 18 Alexandra Grove in Leeds, where Khan and his friends made the bombs for the July 7 attacks, said that in the days before the explosions he collected something he had never seen before on the job: rubber cartons of peroxide in large quantities. That peroxide, used to make bombs, bleached the hair of the young men, to the consternation of their Pakistani parents, and killed the flowers in the boxes outside the window.

But community policing carries a big risk: in reaching out to people on the streets, the police may become overly dependent on them. At a local level, it can mean police collusion with whichever interest group makes the most credible threat of disruption. A year and a half ago, Sikhs in Birmingham rioted over the play "Behzti" ("Dishonor"), which many found offensive. Representatives of the theater and the community sat down with the police. The theater subsequently issued a statement saying that the safety of its patrons could not be guaranteed. As John Lloyd, a director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford, recalls, "The police decided they were more interested in not having a riot than in freedom of expression." The play closed. When the representative organizations in question are not Sikh groups but Muslim ones, which are more numerous and more visible, the likelihood of conflict increases a lot.

V.

What the police are doing on the street in East London is being replicated in other walks of life. The legislative packet Tony Blair outlined last August tries to balance two things: the harder line demanded by the public after July 7 and an unwillingness — whether out of common decency, constitutional propriety or political correctness — to single out Muslims. Proposals that didn't manage both things — closing radical mosques, for instance, which clearly made targets of Muslims — have been sidelined. But ensuring that all new laws were both tough and unbiased hasn't got Blair out of the woods. On the contrary, it has produced strange, new ad hoc coalitions against him. On one side are many Tories who have shed their traditional law-and-order views and now object to seeing law-abiding Middle Englanders scrutinized as if they were potential terrorists. On the other side are the left of his own party and the even more left-leaning Liberal Democrats.

In controversy after controversy, it has been New Labor versus everyone else. First, the government continued its fight — started before July 7 — to establish a new national identity card. The rationale has always been clear: to identify people who are in the country illegally, as a tool against both terrorism and welfare fraud. But the database established along with the card was wide-ranging enough to frighten civil libertarians. "What if you've had an [abortion](#), or been treated for a sexually transmitted disease?" asks David Davis, who as the Tories' shadow home secretary formulates his party's terrorism policy. "The government says this information can't be accessed by someone without your knowing about it. If not, then why the hell is it there?" He has a point, but since July 7, the political alignment favors security over privacy, and the card is on track to be issued in two or three years.

The government also sought laws that would permit it to detain terrorist suspects for 90 days without charge. There was strong resistance, particularly from "ancient rights" Tories, who pointed out that habeas corpus has been enshrined in British law for 700 years. The government and the police replied that the evidentiary puzzles that arise when international terrorist networks, computers and tight deadlines meet were something entirely new. One case they like to mention involved inquiries abroad

concerning 10 men with 860 false identities, using 2,500 different mobile-phone SIM cards and encrypted computers on which much of the data was in a Farsi dialect. The government did not get its 90 days, but it did get 28, a victory under the circumstances.

In a further initiative, the government sought to establish an offense of "glorifying terrorism." The new crime was meant to catch the whipping-up of homicidal feeling, as when the group al-Muhajiroun publicized an event, on the second anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks, that would celebrate the 9/11 hijackers as "the Magnificent 19." It was also meant to block recruitment. The home secretary at the time, Charles Clarke, suggested that saying "Terrorists go straight to paradise when they die" might be captured by the law. But what else might be captured? Some asked if an Irishman who celebrated the Easter Rising of 1916 would fall afoul of the statute. Not to mention Blair's own wife, the human rights lawyer Cherie Booth, who once said, with reference to the Palestinians, "As long as young people feel that they have got no hope but to blow themselves up, you are never going to make progress." The law passed on an understanding of "glorification" that resembled Justice Potter Stewart's famed definition of hard-core pornography: as something that judges and the public would know when they saw it. The law has probably been too undermined by ridicule to serve for much.

The government also brought to a final vote a "law against incitement to religious hatred" that it had been discussing for five years. It is here that the intellectual underpinnings of the Blair approach were clearest. The law, which had been sought only by Muslims, was first demanded by the U.K. Action Committee on Islamic Affairs, a group formed to protest Salman Rushdie's portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad in "The Satanic Verses." One argument for the law was that Anglicans, as worshipers in an established church, were already protected from certain insults by blasphemy laws, while Jews and Sikhs were protected from others by antiracism laws. But to the legislation's detractors, these were just post-facto rationalizations, for the law was unprecedented in its sweep. As drafted, it would have made it difficult to criticize anything that advanced itself in the name of religious belief or practice, since the law permitted prosecution of anybody who was "reckless as to whether religious hatred would be stirred up" by things he said or wrote.

It was a sort of horse trading with the principles of free speech, and it drove much of the country into a fury. The Daily Mail columnist Melanie Phillips later told me: "The term 'politically correct' does not do justice to this sinister totalitarian project. It is against not just freedom of speech but also freedom of thought." She added that Britons were particularly vulnerable to such incursions: "It's very British not to want to give offense. And political Islam is the world grievance culture par excellence. It's a perfect fit." Rowan Atkinson, the comedian, said that the law, if passed, would make it impossible to crack jokes involving religion.

The measure was clobbered in public opinion and was neutered by Parliament when it came to a vote in late January. David Blunkett — the blind, hard-line, scandal-plagued home secretary from 2001 until 2004 and the architect of much of Britain's post-9/11 antiterror policy — defended the bill to the bitter

end. Many accused him of offering a sop to Muslim organizations in exchange for which they were supposed to accept the rest of the Blair antiterror program. Blunkett makes no bones about the law's having been meant mainly to protect Muslims. "Yes, I do accept that," he said when we spoke in April. "They were the primary beneficiaries because they would have been provided with a degree of certainty they didn't have before. But the debate got silly. It got distorted into whether people could make jokes about religion."

It didn't help the bill that it was scheduled for a vote in Parliament as the Danish cartoon affair was exploding across the Middle East. Gunmen raged in Gaza, and it wasn't long before protesters would hold up placards outside London's Danish Embassy calling for genocide against nonbelievers. Under such circumstances, limiting people's ability to criticize Islam looked not only cowardly but imprudent.

VI.

Britons have a strong rhetorical attachment to liberty, as something for which a certain price in danger and disorder is worth paying. When I asked Blunkett if he accepted the idea that terrorists had enjoyed too many freedoms in London in the 1990's, he said, "Well, in the sense that Karl Marx moved to London, Britain has always had a tradition of taking in people oppressed in their own countries." This is a common view. Immigrant troublemakers are likened to Marx and Engels, and any difficulties welcoming whole groups are likened to those occasioned by the arrival of Russian Jews in the 19th century or of Huguenots in the 17th.

This freedom has another name, for those less willing to take it in stride: "Londonistan." In January, at his trial for incitement to murder and other charges, the radical cleric Abu Hamza claimed that between 1997 and 2000, members of MI5, the British domestic security service, effectively O.K.'d his frequent incitements to jihad, on one occasion telling him: "Well, it's freedom of speech. You don't have to worry as long as we don't see blood on the streets." Hamza is an Egyptian-born British citizen who was maimed during the Afghan war against the Soviet Union and who later ran the Finsbury Park mosque in North London. Foreign governments (including the United States') urged for years that Hamza be arrested, most loudly after he was accused of organizing a 1998 attack in Yemen — in which his son was an assailant — that killed four tourists. Hamza's mosque was also linked to a plot to construct a weapon using ricin. When the police raided it in 2003, they found guns, chemical-warfare suits, stolen passports and laminating equipment. Hamza was finally arrested in 2004.

The term "Londonistan" was first coined by French officials outraged at the British government's inability — for the better part of a decade — to extradite the Algerian Rachid Ramda, who had been charged in France with financing a series of attacks on public transport in Paris in 1995. Until Ramda was finally sent to France this past December, British courts held that he could not get a fair trial there. Other prominent jihadists — the Syrian-born Omar Bakri Muhammed, who fled the country after July 7; the Syrian-Spanish Qaeda leader Abu-Musab al-Suri, captured by coalition forces in Pakistan last fall; and Abu Qatada, who

led several European Qaeda cells and is now fighting deportation to his native Jordan — found a safe haven in 90's London.

The government has lately worked hard to roll up the most brazen radicals. But a series of geostrategic accidents has complicated its efforts. The leaders of Al Qaeda — a movement created by a Saudi and chased into exile in Sudan and then Afghanistan — have apparently wound up in or near Pakistan, one of Britain's major sources of immigration since the 50's. A significant conclusion of the government investigation of the July 7 bombings was that two of the bombers — Mohammad Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer — probably "had some contact with Al Qaeda figures" on a trip they made to Pakistan in 2004.

Like most modern "diaspora" immigrants, the Pakistani-British visit their native country with little difficulty. There were 400,000 British visitors to Pakistan in 2004. All countries with large Muslim diasporas are vulnerable to the worldwide Wahhabi radicalization fomented at mosques and cultural centers financed by Saudi Arabia's government and its private charities. But on top of that, Britain is vulnerable to radicalizing trends of South Asia — India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. These trends risk becoming Britain's own, particularly among its socially isolated minorities.

For many years, Britain has had a well-deserved reputation as the European country that best integrated its new arrivals. For one thing, it had rich immigrants as well as poor. Many Muslims — not just Arabian playboys but also East African businessmen — arrived with some capital, hired their fellow exiles and educated their families. Britain's tradition of local democratic institutions, like town and city councils, means that anywhere an immigrant population settles, a class of political leaders grows out of it. There are now several Muslims in Parliament and even in the House of Lords. The contrast with France, where 1 in 10 residents are Muslims but there are no Muslims among the 577 deputies in the National Assembly, is stark.

But over the past quarter-century, Britain has seen a dispiriting tendency toward segregation, or resegregation. Young newcomers have not found a niche in the service economy as easily as the arrivals of 40 and 50 years ago did in the industrial one. Others, born in Britain, have cast about for identities other than the British one they were raised with. In 2001, the northern industrial towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford experienced several days of violent racial mayhem between white and Asian gangs. A Home Office report issued in the wake of the riots found "separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks," producing living arrangements that "do not seem to touch at any point." As one Pakistani Briton told the report's authors, "When I leave this meeting with you, I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week." Last year, Trevor Phillips, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, warned that much of Britain was "sleepwalking its way toward segregation." And this segregation is especially entrenched among Muslims. The researchers Tariq Modood and Richard Berthoud have shown that only 1

percent of British Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have white partners, versus 20 percent of Afro-Caribbeans. The percentage of South Asian Britons who return to Bangladesh and Pakistan to find wives or husbands is hard to measure, but some researchers place it above 50 percent, and a European demographer calls ethnic endogamy "arrestingly high."

It is not just outward behaviors but also inward mentalities that are diverging. Through a familiar paradox, global media play a role in this divergence. London is one of six cities in which *The Daily Jang*, Pakistan's largest paper, is published, so the second-generation tube rider who 20 years ago would have been absorbed in the county cricket scores in his *Evening Standard* is now preoccupied with the conduct of India in Kashmir and with what Pakistani Muslims ought to do about it. Many South Asian immigrants get their news from Urdu television stations and, despite the language barrier, from Al Jazeera. Many more are likely to subscribe to Al Jazeera once its English-language service — slated to have made its debut this spring, but delayed — is up and running.

South Asian religion has changed, too. The Islam that most immigrants took to Britain from the Indian subcontinent was a pious traditional Sufism, marked by great reverence for the Prophet Muhammad and an elaborate system of mentorship, under the control of various pirs, or holy men. Probably the majority of Britain's 1,500 or so mosques have their roots in Sufism. This kind of Islam has not been wiped out, but it has been losing ground in South Asia and Britain alike to simpler, more fashionable trends in Sunni Islam. The Deobandi school, which was founded in Pakistan in the 19th century, has grown increasingly conservative — and distrustful of non-Islamic cultures — under the influence of the Saudi Wahhabis. At least since the Afghan war in the 80's, hard-line Deobandi madrasas have spread throughout Pakistan. *Jamaat-i-Islami*, the sectarian and highly politicized movement started by the journalist Abu A'la Maududi, has grown since the 60's and is influential in the largest Muslim group in Britain, the Muslim Council of Britain (M.C.B.). While the M.C.B. has no official government status, it does claim to speak for much of the Muslim population and is the government's interlocutor of first resort when integration is at issue.

Afzal Khan, an attorney who has just completed a term as lord mayor of Manchester, is a Labor member of the City Council and sits on the central working committee of the M.C.B. as well. Khan recently secured the financing that will help him realize his dream — to build an Islamic cultural center in the city he moved to as a youth, where 125,000 Muslims now live. Since this project is about "bridge building," he sees no need to apologize for having sought a great deal of the money for it from Saudi Arabia. "My attitude is, if it's a good cause, everyone has a right to contribute," he told me in an empty conference room in Manchester's City Hall on his last day as mayor. "If anyone in America wants to give a million, they have as much right as anyone else."

Asked to address terrorism, Khan said: "The real issue is taking a step back and looking at the whole issue in a wider context. One side's terrorist is another side's freedom fighter. How do we bring about a just and

fair world, so there are not any causes for terrorism? You have the Middle East. Then America comes into the game, and that brings in petrol. Quite frankly, it has been appalling. They didn't give a damn about the suffering of people. That's one thing that winds people up.

"And another thing," he adds. "There are many Muslims who have a question: How come America gets to decide who gets a nuclear weapon?"

When you talk to many Muslim leaders in Britain, you hear them focus almost obsessively on international politics, to the exclusion of religious, social and local political issues. The charitable way of looking at this is to say that it is a function of young people's burning to change the world — for the median age of Muslims is more than a decade younger than that of other Britons, which is pushing into the early 40's. The uncharitable way is to say that even some mainstream religious leaders are practicing what the French Islamologist Olivier Roy calls "neofundamentalism" — or what the Iranian journalist Amir Taheri calls "a religion without a theology, a secular wolf disguised as a religious lamb."

If the "religion" causing problems is not really about religious things at all, then the risk of talking at cross-purposes is high. The "national" government wants to talk about local integration and facilities and role models, while "local" representatives want to talk about the West Bank. Sir Ian Blair, the police commissioner, has suggested broadening the interchange with Muslims following what he calls a "traffic light" system. The government will obviously speak to community leaders (green), and it obviously won't speak to terrorists (red), but it will speak to certain "amber" (yellow) interlocutors whom Americans might be reluctant to touch. Among those who fit in the amber category might be Yusuf Qaradawi, the telemufti of Qatar, who has issued several fatwas in support of suicide bombing. Lecturing in the United States recently, Commissioner Blair granted that Qaradawi "has views on the Palestinian intifada that probably would not be very acceptable either here or in the U.K.," but also said that he was impressed that "he can command an audience of 50,000 young people at the drop of a hat."

Sir Ian once said that "there is nothing wrong with being a fundamentalist Muslim, any more than there is anything wrong with being a fundamentalist Christian." He was assailed in the press, but he had a point. What if terrorism does not come from a certain attitude toward religion but from a certain attitude toward politics? Pushing Muslim identity in a more "fundamentalist" direction could mean more contemplation of God and less contemplation of grievance. Pushing Muslim identity in a more "mainstream" direction could mean encouraging grandstanding and political ultimatums.

The Muslim Council of Britain now boycotts Holocaust Memorial Day every January, on the grounds that it focuses too exclusively on the genocide committed against the Jews. In response, Asim Siddiqui, the young leader of a London-based Muslim group called City Circle, organized a separate Holocaust memorial event. City Circle declares itself "nonaligned to any overseas or established doctrinal organization." Siddiqui is clearly a courageous and independent man. Yet the M.C.B. still gets more invitations to governmental meetings and is accepted as the logical outlet for the community's demands

after, say, an antiterrorist raid. It is a good example of how the "traffic light" strategy can fail. Its incentives drive community representatives toward radicalism. Strident political voices are not just admitted to conversation — they are the preferred voices, because they are seen as more "authentic." If the government's top priority is finding people with the street credibility to dissuade potential terrorists, then the ideal Muslim interlocutor is someone who shares the terrorists' goals while publicly condemning their means. Standing up for Holocaust victims and for fellowship among Britain's peoples is not much of a credential.

VII.

How much sympathy do most Muslims have for radical extremists? "Abu Hamza is in Belmarsh prison," says the Palestinian journalist Abdel Bari Atwan. "Have you seen a demonstration for his release? A petition protesting his treatment?"

Atwan edits *Al Quds al Arabi*, an international Arabic-language daily. Its offices are upstairs from a housing authority in Hammersmith, where the redeveloped part of King Street peters out into hairdressers and used-clothing shops. Through a security-locked front door you enter a mini-newsroom of dusty carpets and a half-dozen old and mismatched computers. The walls are hung with Palestinian posters, and Arabic TV runs in the corner. Atwan's premises are modest, and his paper has a low profile locally. But it has a reputation throughout the Arab world for reporting the news without fear or favor. Atwan interviewed [Osama bin Laden](#) at his hideout in Afghanistan in 1996 and recently wrote an authoritative history of his movement. When Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the March 2004 Madrid bombings, it was to Atwan that the claim was faxed.

The problem, as Atwan sees it, is that the British and the Americans have always underestimated the intelligence and logic of Al Qaeda: "For the British, it's a terrorist organization that did Sept. 11 and is linked to July 7, that kills indiscriminately. But they never try to understand what's behind it. They never look at the roots of the problem. It's a terrorist organization, yes! But why?" Atwan's answer is that the United States and its allies pursue a foreign policy that includes military occupation — in Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Until that changes, he says, "the current escalation of suicide attacks is unlikely to abate."

Taji Mustafa, a charismatic and confrontational spokesman for the group Hizb ut-Tahrir, would agree. Hizb ut-Tahrir, like Al Qaeda, favors the re-establishment of the caliphate, the central Muslim authority disbanded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924. Arguing that its doctrines can serve as a "conveyor belt" to terrorism, the British government has discussed banning the group, whose activities have already been banned in Germany. "Ourselves, the vast majority unequivocally condemn terrorism," said Mustafa, who is the son of Nigerian parents, over a cup of tea in a hotel near Regent's Park. "None of us justifies targeting civilians in London or Madrid." Nonviolence is the official Hizb ut-Tahrir position, although when it comes to Israel, Mustafa (in his conversation) and the organization (in its literature) are much

less direct in their disavowal of violence.

Mustafa says that in talking up a ban on Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Blair government is expanding the definition of terrorism to cover nonterrorists. "They're creating a thought crime," Mustafa said. "If they ban Hizb ut-Tahrir, is it going to stop me as an individual from arguing for a caliphate?" But worse, he says that the government is dodging a legitimate argument over its foreign policy and misrepresenting the wishes of British Muslims. Mustafa was particularly angered at a speech Blair gave nine days after the bombings last summer, in which he described the "evil ideology" of terrorists in a way that made it sound a lot like Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideology. "They demand the elimination of Israel," Blair said, "the withdrawal of all Westerners from Muslim countries. . . the establishment of effectively [Taliban](#) states and Shariah law in the Arab world en route to one caliphate of all Muslim nations. We don't have to wonder what type of country those states would be."

"Why didn't he take our views on?" asked an indignant Mustafa. "My challenge is, Go to Whitechapel and ask: Do you question the state of Israel? Do you believe in Shariah law?"

Shariah does not quite command majority support among British Muslims. A poll in February in The Daily Telegraph showed that 40 percent of British Muslims favor the establishment of Islamic law — but only piecemeal, and under certain circumstances. Even in heavily Muslim neighborhoods, there is no great public clamor to ban alcohol — usually a telltale sign of pro-Shariah agitation. And Britain's relaxed laws regarding religious dress — more akin to the American model than to the French — have allowed it to avoid the controversies over the Muslim headscarf that have roiled the rest of Europe. But Mustafa's other claim — that the vast majority of citizens in heavily Muslim Whitechapel sympathize viscerally and overwhelmingly with the radical position on Israel and, more generally, on foreign policy — must be faced squarely. For Mustafa is unquestionably correct.

People often talk about the "diversity" of the British Muslim population. This is fair if the dimension you are concerned about is skin color or per capita income or attitudes on the relative merits of Hanafi and Hanbali jurisprudence. But if the dimension is Western foreign policy, then there is really very little diversity at all. A Draft Report on Young Muslims and Extremism leaked from the Home Office in 2004 found that a main source of anger among youth was "a perception of 'double standards' in British foreign policy, where democracy is preached but oppression of the 'Ummah' (the one nation of believers) is practiced or tolerated, e.g. in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya." By overwhelming numbers, Muslims oppose all intervention in the Arab and Muslim world. Somewhere between 64 and 80 percent, depending on the poll you consult, opposed the recent Afghan war. "Yes, we have a responsibility to encourage our children against extremism," I was told by Abdirahman Warsame, a Somali who was chosen by the Muslim Association of Britain to run the Finsbury Park mosque after Abu Hamza, "but government has the responsibility to review its policy."

Foreign policy may be the only dimension on which moderates and radicals agree. But it happens to be

the dimension the terrorists cite when they blow up buses. That harmony of worldview is a dire problem for Britain in general and Muslims in particular — no matter how narrow the terrain on which it is built. It creates a climate in which a sympathetic hearing is guaranteed for any claim that the real cause of terrorism is Iraq or Israel or America's love of big oil. (And if you are hunting terrorists by, say, tapping phones, it makes terrorists impossible to identify solely through the politics they profess.)

In this light, Britain's participation in the war in Iraq opened a can of worms. A draft of a top-secret Joint Intelligence Committee report, leaked to *The Observer* this spring, found that "Iraq is likely to be an important motivating factor for some time to come in the radicalization of British Muslims and for those extremists who view attacks against the U.K. as legitimate." John Denham, a Labor M.P. who resigned from the government over the Iraq invasion, says that such viewpoints are common. "Iraq is one of the factors that feed the view that the government is casual to the point of unconcern about lives of Muslims," he told me in the cafeteria in Portcullis House, across the street from Parliament. "By providing a focal point for Muslim anger, it was likely to bring a rise in world terrorism."

Whether Iraq is a "cause" of terror or a mere pretext is a difficult question. Radical jihadists have threatened and attacked countries that opted out of the Iraq conflict. And if Iraq "causes" someone to become a suicide bomber, it is almost certainly not in the way Western liberals understand political causation. The terrorist may already hold jihadist views. He may be whipped into bloodlust by images on TV or the Internet. He may regard the invasion of Iraq as an incursion upon the prerogatives of the Ummah — but the source of his anger is unlikely to be any supposed violation of international law. In the end, though, it may not matter if everyone means something different by "Iraq." A shared opposition to the war tightens the identification between radical and nonradical Muslims, and between both those groups and some members of the non-Muslim Western left, and this muddies the terms with which the battle of ideas around terrorism is fought.

There is another problem. If the jihadists from all over the world who have gone to fight in Iraq follow the example of their Afghan forebears and carry on the jihad when they return home, then Britain is going to be very hard hit. Earlier this month, *The Sunday Times* reported that there is a "British brigade" of 150 radicals fighting coalition forces in Iraq. Shortly before the death of Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi in a U.S. bombing raid earlier this month, his Web site was running English-language recruitment messages reading, "They are fighting; you should be too."

A wave of arrests in the past few weeks has made clear how hard it is to separate the fight at home and the fight abroad. In the Yorkshire town of Dewsbury, not far from Beeston, the teenage grandson of a prominent British Muslim scholar was arrested for links to the 17-man bombing conspiracy in Ontario. The two brothers mistakenly arrested in Forest Gate appeared to have a half-brother involved in February's protest in front of the Danish Embassy after the cartoon controversy. Following the raid, Yvonne Ridley, a journalist who was seized by the Taliban in 2001, converted to Islam two years later and

is now a leader of the anti-Iraq war Respect Party, called on Muslims to stop cooperating with the police. Muhammed Abdul Bari, the new leader of the Muslim Council of Britain, spoke of community anger and warned: "Angry people can do anything. Angry people can even feel that they should take the law into their own hands, so anger has to be directed into positive action."

VIII.

On a breezy evening in May, Denis MacShane, the Labor M.P. from the northern coal-and-steel town of Rotherham, sat on the parliamentary terrace overlooking the Thames, eating a dinner of bangers and mash that he had carried out on a tray from the commons cafeteria. Other members were drinking their pints and smoking their cigarettes. As the child of a Polish immigrant, MacShane expects newcomers to claim their voices in the British conversation quickly. In 2003, he came under fire from party leaders for calling on moderate Muslims to speak up more loudly against terror. After July 7, he organized Muslim and non-Muslim leaders in Rotherham to take out a newspaper ad condemning the bombings. MacShane has always been enamored of the freedom-fighting side of his country and the cold warriors in his party — but he is realistic about the timetable of the current conflict. It is almost as if he expects to win the war on terror with the same patience that enables his fellow countrymen to stand in lines. "You can't stop individuals doing violence," he told me. "You need to wear down acceptance and approval. Asking Muslims to repudiate all these Muslim causes is like inviting the Galway peasant of the 1940's to support Churchill." It's tough to tell if he's stressing the nonnegotiability of such a demand or the recalcitrance with which it is likely to be met.

MacShane is basically counseling patience, as many in Britain's government do. A month before the July 7 attacks, Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee made the judgment that "there would probably be a successful attack of some sort in the U.K. in the next five years." Today, British authorities are not much more confident of thwarting all plots, so they have erected a line of defense that is absorptive, not pre-emptive. It rests on harmony between social groups and on the country's ability to suffer atrocities from time to time, as it did during the heyday of the I.R.A., without escalating unrest or oppression, or the rise of extremist parties. Britain is now betting that the country will retain its historically bottomless reserves of sang-froid in the face of a threat that is orders of magnitude more dangerous than the threat of the I.R.A.; that there is something in the makeup of Britons that makes them more stoical than, say, Americans in New York about bombs going off; that the quiet tenor of the British fight against Islamist terrorism thus far is a sign of good manners and forbearance, not of abject fright or sneaking sympathy; and that Britain in the age of the Diana funeral is the same country it was during the blitz.

It is a risky bet.

Christopher Caldwell, a contributing writer, is at work on a book about immigration, Islam and Europe.

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)
