HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The UK's international counter-terrorism policy, HC 330

Tuesday 7 May 2024

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Alicia Kearns (Chair); Dan Carden; Neil Coyle; Fabian Hamilton; Brendan O'Hara; Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

Questions 201-266

Witnesses

I: Aimen Dean, Co-Founder and Director of Operations of Cruickshank & Dean Global Intelligence, former MI6 agent and former member of al-Qaeda.

II: Professor Alexander Evans, School of Public Policy, LSE

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Examination of witness

Witness: Aimen Dean.

Q201 **Chair:** Welcome to this hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the penultimate hearing of our counter-terrorism inquiry; the last will be with Ministers. Aimen, could you kindly introduce yourself?

Aimen Dean: My name is Aimen Dean. In a past life I used to work in an undercover capacity for the UK's intelligence and security services.

Q202 **Chair:** Do you have any declarations to make before we start?

Aimen Dean: I don't think there is anything relevant, apart from the fact that I worked in banking.

Q203 **Chair:** Perfect. As you know, parliamentary privilege applies here. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. You joined al-Qaeda in the '90s. I am interested in your view on how al-Qaeda has changed as an organisation since then, particularly in the post-9/11 period. How you think their ideology and objectives have shifted since then and since the emergence of Daesh as part of that?

Aimen Dean: They moved from analogue to digital. That is exactly what happened. Then after that they kept changing their objectives, from global to regional to local, and they adapted according to whatever branch they had established in whatever country—such as in Yemen, where they have their own different goals and aspirations, and in Somalia, where there is al-Shabaab, though they have declared their allegiance to al-Qaeda. Nonetheless, they remain committed to the horn of Africa and their objectives there, so they changed really.

Q204 **Chair:** Why do you think AQ were able to remain resilient despite the death of bin Laden?

Aimen Dean: At the end of the day, I think al-Qaeda was about an idea. It is part of a civil war within Islam, if I can describe it that way. There is a war between those who believe in the nation state as a concept and institution and as the perfect model to live in in the 20th and 21st centuries and those who believe in transnational ideologies—in other words, empire building, which is the idea that all these borders need to be erased to create the pan-Islamic caliphate. Al-Qaeda started that aspiration and slowly other groups picked up on it, including ISIS.

Q205 **Chair:** Thinking historically back to my childhood, yes, we had Bosnia and Chechnya, but a lot of the activity was in the Middle East, so why do you think the horn of Africa become this new hub for al-Qaeda?

Aimen Dean: Wherever there are ungoverned spaces and chaos and a lack of central governance, you always find this disease spreading. That is why we call them non-state actors. They flourish in places where the rule of law and governance is so weak.

Q206 **Chair:** In contrast to that, the Emirati Foreign Minister back in 2017 said that European countries should be classed as "incubators of terrorism" and that he thought the route for radicalism was becoming a lot more ripe within Europe. How does that sit with your explanation of ungoverned spaces? Do you think that was a fair statement for him to make?

Aimen Dean: Not necessarily. When we talk about ungoverned spaces, we are talking about places with the ability to carry arms and establish authority by force. That is where you have the proliferation of such ideologies.

Radicalisation is a different issue altogether. If you look at Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, we are talking about the two far ends of the spectrum in the Arab world. One is secular and the other is conservative, at least until recently. During the height of recruitment for ISIS, in Saudi Arabia roughly about 145 people per 1 million joined. Tunisia was fiercely secular under Habib Bourguiba and then Ben Ali. It was absolutely secular, yet immediately after the Arab spring and the rise of ISIS, 206 people out of every million joined ISIS, which was more than in any other Arab country.

So it is not necessarily because the environment is secular and there is a strong rule of law and a strong Government; I think other factors are at play. If you compare even Tunisia with Europe—the UK had 345 out of a million, France 354 out of a million and Belgium 722 out of a million—the numbers are really big. They are even bigger in Europe.

Chair: That is really helpful. Fabian.

Q207 **Fabian Hamilton:** I was just wondering whether you can tell us a bit more about the motivations underlying the reasons why people join jihadist terror groups. Have those reasons evolved? Are they more complex now than they were, say, 25 years ago, or since 2001? Is it to do with increasing inequality in society? Is it, as you said, to do with ungoverned spaces and the rule of law, or is it just to do with a perception of decadence and islamophobia? Can you tell us a bit more?

Aimen Dean: There is so much to unpack here. We have to understand that no one wakes up one day and decides, "Today, I am going to be a terrorist. I am going to join a terrorist group and go and kill everyone around." No, it doesn't happen like that. It all starts with good intentions. The path to hell is paved with good intentions. That is why, in Islamic principles, good intentions are not good enough. You need to have wisdom with it.

However, when I was 16, wisdom was in short supply, and even when you are 26 or even 36, wisdom is still in short supply. That is the role of the elders, but the elders neglect their duties to share their wisdom with the young and tell them, "Don't do this. Don't go down this path. It will lead only to suffering, misery, death and destruction." If those voices were more amplified, things would have been different. But unfortunately, those voices were more muffled than amplified.

The reality is that there are many complex answers. They include grievance, but not all grievances are legitimate. Someone just wanting to build an empire and saying, "Get out of my way," is not a legitimate grievance. Then you have the question of Western culture being dominant. People just get angry and frustrated about it, so they feel their voices are silenced. I am talking about certain parts of the Arab and Muslim world.

Then you have the desire for empowerment, which is an important motivation. As soon as they end up in these jihad theatres—if we can call them that—you see many of these people taking pictures and posing with the weapons. They feel that sense of pride and empowerment, because they feel that they are marginalised. They feel powerless wherever they come from, but once they are there, that inner desire for power is liberated. That is one of the reasons why prisons were fertile ground for recruitment. Many of these people experience humiliation and guilt about the things they have done, but then an ideology comes that offers redemption through struggle, fighting and dying for a cause, while at the same time liberating their inner sadism to allow them to become violent but in a rewarding way.

We could talk for hours just to explain the multi-layered, complex nature of radicalisation. That is why there is not one single jihadi prototype. I used to see all people—from PhDs all the way down to prison graduates.

Q208 **Fabian Hamilton:** Would it be fair to say that one of the antidotes to violent radicalisation might be education?

Aimen Dean: That is at the core of it—not only education, but critical thinking. We are not asking people to really look deep into the consequences of their actions, while at the same time understanding that the world is far more complex. If we tell people, "This is the nation state you live in, but if you try to bring down that nation state, the result will be that there will be no ATM outside to withdraw, no ambulance to come and pick you up, no school to educate you and your kids, and no police to come and help you if anything goes wrong," that is when we start to tell them, "Don't bring down the state structure, because what will replace it will be far worse."

Q209 **Fabian Hamilton:** Can I then ask how you think the UK can disrupt the appeal of jihadist terrorism? That should be an area you know quite a bit about. What factors—we've already talked about some—draw recruits from the West to groups such as Daesh and al-Qaeda? Can you tell us a bit more about how we can disrupt that?

Aimen Dean: The best way to disrupt—there are not any silver bullets—is always debate because that is how you insert the virus of doubt into the minds of those who would use the absolute certainty of their faith to carry out unspeakable atrocities. How do you stop someone from taking a knife, stabbing someone and taking someone else's life?

If you put a doubt in his mind that, "Well, if you do that you are not going to end up somewhere nice. In fact, you will have to answer and pay for what you have done"—inserting doubt, even 1%, 2%, 3% doubt, into the

mind of someone who went into that path of radicalism could basically disable that violent threshold.

Q210 **Fabian Hamilton:** Can you tell us a bit more about your view—you have mentioned this already—of the types of people who join jihadist terror groups? You mentioned the PhD graduate and the prison graduate. Is there a particular character trait or multiple character traits that push people towards jihadist terror and violence, more so than any other?

Aimen Dean: Within the jihadist context, there is one common denominator: seeking redemption. In Catholicism, you go to a priest, confess your sins, and that's it; you gain absolution. There is not that system within Islam. You have to repent directly to God, and you have no idea if your repentance is accepted.

At the same time, there has been some crisis in the state of preaching within Muslim societies over the past 50, 60, 70 years, because of the advent of Western culture and liberal values. Preaching in Islam used to be based on three pillars: love, hope and fear. You love the Lord, you hope for his reward and you fear his damnation.

A standard preaching would be to divide your preaching into three thirds. However, I think the emphasis on damnation and eternal punishment has pushed a significant number of young people to think, "That's it; I have no hope." The way I listen to preaching these days, people just keep telling their congregations—out of love, of course, out of the idea that they want to safeguard their congregations from whatever temptations—that if you drink, hell; if you smoke, hell; if you deal drugs, hell; if you join a gang, hell. But there is not the incentive that if you do not do any of those you go to heaven.

Some preachers—not all—have replaced hope with fear. That has created a generation of guilty people, who would say haram to everything. Who would say, "You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't greet people for Christmas. You shouldn't mix with people who are outside our faith circle." It starts with guilt and that guilt, unfortunately again, through the desire to do good, ends up with people doing bad.

Q211 **Chair:** Can I ask you about that point on critical thinking? A lot of people who have left terrorist groups talk about having that moment when they realise, for example, "Why do my leaders keep asking me to blow myself up, and why do they want me to have this great eternal hopeful future, but they don't want it for themselves?"

Was there a turning point for you where you thought, "I need to leave al-Qaeda."? Or was it that were just approached by an effective recruiter? It is one thing to leave an organisation and it is another to turn actively against it and work against it for the secret services. Can you talk us through what that journey was for you?

Aimen Dean: Doubt—it all started with doubt. The first thing is that you need to have something like a moral compass pointing true north, a little bit at least. On top of that, there is the fact that you also have that fear of

God, that you do not want to do the wrong thing. You become more and more inquisitive about the legitimacy of whatever you are asked to do.

So it was the East Africa bombings in 1998. I remember that day—it is etched in my memory; it was 4 August. When it happened, I was shocked by the number of civilian casualties. There were 12 American diplomats killed, but there were more than 220 innocent people killed—Tanzanians, Kenyans, Somalians, Ugandans.

That was too much for me even to contemplate, and to understand, and to put within a context, to justify it. I wasn't thinking that this was what it was going to be. Prior to that—this was the first time al-Qaeda used terrorism on a massive scale—I thought we were joining al-Qaeda to harass the US forces within the Middle East, not to go and kill innocent people going about their own daily lives in Africa. This is where it all started.

Q212 **Dan Carden:** Good afternoon, Aimen. How successful are groups like al-Qaeda and Daesh with online radicalisation? Who is most vulnerable to it, and how influential are their online magazines? Who are they targeting?

Aimen Dean: In the 1990s, recruitment used to be peer to peer because there were no digital means, and so you had to go and recruit people one by one, more or less just like with a fishing rod. You had to catch them one by one.

The net brought the era of the net. You have a whole net cast wide, in order to catch as many people as possible. In the past, you couldn't invade 100,000 living rooms, 100,000 smartphones, 100,000 bedrooms at night with your videos, your tweets, your posts, your secret Telegram postings—it wasn't possible. But the explosion, no pun intended, in the number of recruits took place as the means of communication became more prevalent, easy and widespread. That started to target more people who are tech-savvy, and people who are curious. Who are they? The young.

I remember that in the 1990s I was maybe the youngest or one of the youngest there, but then you started to see, in the 2000s, the age bracket started to drop, to the point where we started to see ISIS recruiting children, and not only from the male side, but also from the female side.

Q213 **Dan Carden:** What steps should the UK be taking to tackle this threat?

Aimen Dean: There are no more effective measures than the seeds of doubt, always. You have to destroy the credibility of the people who carry out the recruitment: "Why don't you go? You want me to go, but your kids are going to this university or this college, or they are enjoying life in this public school. Why is it that you get to enjoy the fruits of this life, but you are more than happy to send other people to their slaughter?" There is always that.

It is the same in the other world where I work more constantly: terrorism finance—not that I provide terrorism finance, I mean to counter terrorism

finance. In that field, the disruption happened through highlighting how most of that money ends up in the pockets of those who are raising it and doesn't actually reach the groups that the donations were intended for. Through highlighting the embezzlement of those who are raising funds, because fundraising and recruitment go hand in hand by the way, when you do that, you start to hurt both fundraising and recruitment.

Q214 **Dan Carden:** Do you think we are doing that?

Aimen Dean: Not effectively.

Q215 **Chair:** Quickly, before we move on to Neil, I was interested in what you said about the move to start recruiting women. When you joined al-Qaeda in the 1990s, were they actively targeting women or was it solely people to fight? Do you think it is that transition towards the creation of a caliphate and therefore the need for repopulation, or do you think that there is something else that suddenly saw them want to target women and bring more women to join them on the path to radicalisation?

Aimen Dean: I think it was when the jihad started to take root in Syria and there was the idea of a territory, and a territory to be populated—that women needed to be recruited. I remember that al-Qaeda was entirely male-dominated and the females were only the wives or the daughters and sisters of the senior people even. Most of us were just single men.

Q216 **Chair:** So recruiting women was a practical requirement, rather than some great rejuvenation.

Aimen Dean: Yes, recruitment of women became prevalent because it was a necessity.

Q217 **Neil Coyle:** It used to be the case that in prison and online were the two key areas for radicalisation. Are they still the worst places to be radicalised? I think you just said that there wasn't sufficient effectiveness in tackling online radicalisation, so what more powers or resources are needed to tackle the problem?

Aimen Dean: For the three key areas where people are vulnerable, you are talking about the online space, university campuses and prisons. I know these three are far in-between—they almost make a triangle. But the reality is that university campuses are where people go in order to think they will change the world, and when you offer someone the means to change the world through a radical way, some of them, unfortunately, will take it. In prison, these are souls looking for mainly three things—redemption, empowerment and the means to liberate their inner violent sadism. And online is where there are people who are curious, who want to know, who want to find out answers.

The problem with online is the fact that it all starts with several starting points; there isn't one starting point. Some people start from conspiracy theories: "This world is run by a certain group of people, a cabal or whatever, and we have to fight against this cabal." They are drawn to conspiracy theories and then those conspiracy theories lead them down

the path of "I must do something." Other people end up in the world of fantasies invented due to civil wars within Islam—actually dynastic wars within Islam—1,300 years ago, in order to look into prophecies, eschatology, about the end of time. They think, "These are the battles at the end of time. God ordained this fight and I need to join it. Who am I to argue with the divine? I need to join this fight." So again, it is a really complex phenomenon.

Q218 **Neil Coyle:** But they are not being taught this in university. You are saying that they hang on to an idea and then explore it further, and that is where the conspiracies come in. There is the algorithm of escalation for both right-wing and Islamic jihadist extremism. Are the platforms doing enough to tackle that, and do the Government have sufficient powers to be monitoring and intervening to try and prevent that escalator?

Aimen Dean: It is not about power; it is about knowledge. If I tell you about an object that you have to look for for me, if I tell you, "This is the object," but I don't give you any good description, how will you find it? Those who are supposed to enforce the laws, the regulations and the powers need to know what they are looking for in the first place. I think one of the reasons is just the lack of awareness, the lack of a full understanding and a holistic approach to what actually makes a jihadist, because there isn't one single journey. You have to imagine jihad as a river, and all the other factors are tributaries to it.

Q219 **Bob Seely:** Just on that point about redemption, empowerment and, you said, inner means of sadism for prisoners, is there a link between people at university and in prison, in that both are seeking a sense of order and ideology—maybe more of an ideology at university and a sense of order in their lives in prison—and radical Islam, Islamicism, provides that?

Aimen Dean: The reality is that most of what I would call the Islamist, ideology-driven groups—when I say "Islamist", I mean political Islam. Most of these groups were actually founded in universities—that is where it all started. They think that the world around them is chaotic, and especially in the '50s and '60s with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and jihadism, that was because of the pull and push between communism and capitalism, or socialism and the free market. As the Muslim world was being squeezed from both sides, the question was: why aren't we united? Everyone started to yearn and become nostalgic for an era that hardly existed. It was just that a romanticising of the history led to the idea that we could all be united, one big empire—which basically never happened in the entire history of Islam, except for 59 years. I think this is an ideology of empowerment. Similarly to how communism started, the idea is a world revolution that unites all the people in one happy, semi-utopian empire, but it is just not going to work.

Q220 **Bob Seely:** When you are talking about that, are you talking about Sayyid Qutb?

Aimen Dean: Yes.

Bob Seely: When you look at the structure of his ideas, although they

are clearly very different because one was very secular and one was very religious, do you there is a similarity in structure between Qutb and the Bolsheviks and Marxist-Leninism, or do you think they are really very different in their structure?

Aimen Dean: Actually, Sayyid Qutb in his early life was a socialist, so therefore he was affected and influenced by socialism. The idea is to borrow the framework of socialist society and structure of governance and to bring it into Islam, in order to create that revolutionary sense. Islam generally was not really revolutionary throughout the 1,300 years of its existence. It was more of a religion that left the leadership of the state to statesmen—kings, royals, princes and tribal leaders. It did not involve the clergy in the ruling. The first cleric since the Prophet Muhammad to actually ascend into power in any Muslim community was Khomeini, and there was 1,400 years difference between the two. That tells you that Islam never actually gave ruling and governance to the clergy. It gave it to the ruling class, and who are the ruling class? Merchants.

Chair: Very interesting. Dan, I think you wanted to come in on that point?

Q221 **Dan Carden:** In your view, what is the most effective form of Government to counter the threat of radicalisation and terrorism in the Middle East—for instance, monarchies or autocratic leaderships?

Aimen Dean: The reality is that the Middle East is a complex place. I always advise people, especially those from the private sector, not to refer to the Middle East as one homogeneous zone. There are two zones there—the royal zone and the non-royal zone. The royal zone is inherently stable; the non-royal zone is inherently unstable, and there is a reason for that.

The Middle East was the birthplace of monarchy from the beginning, with King Sargon of Akkad and Hammurabi and the Mesopotamian kingdoms, and it then spread throughout. I think that kind of system has been around for about 7,000 years, and we more or less see that it has established its roots and its legitimacy. In tribal societies, what is a king but a glorified tribal sheikh, at the end of the day? Therefore, the social contract between kings and their people is far more binding than with autocratic generals or dictatorial presidents of a republic. There is a difference; the king is looked at as a legitimate form of governance that has been around for thousands of years, while the other is just a usurper who has taken the place. He is a commoner like the rest of us—why is he better than the rest of us? That is why you see the difference here with countries in the Arab world—the six GCC countries plus Jordan and Morocco. Despite all the challenges, they are resilient. In all the countries where the monarchies ended up being overthrown—Iraq, Libya and Iran—you can tell what really happened. They became inherently unstable.

Q222 **Dan Carden:** What do you think about how we, as democracies, engage with those types of leaderships? Often, we will have our own views of leadership, our values and democracy. Can you comment on how we engage with those types of countries?

Aimen Dean: By acknowledging that, while democracy is the most admirable governance system that man has created so far, it cannot always be applied overnight and there has to be that kind of transition; and the best vehicle for transition into that system is the monarchies. One of the greatest missed opportunities in Afghanistan was when the US objected to the return of King Mohammad Zahir Shah to Afghanistan. He would have united everyone, including the Taliban eventually, because in a tribal society kings command far greater status and far greater legitimacy, and therefore their words are heeded.

The oath of allegiance in Islam given to kings is the same as the one given to a caliph, so there is that religious anointment—let us put it that way—of the nation to the oath that you give to the king. I therefore think it was a missed opportunity because then Afghanistan ended up where it is right now, 20 years later. That is why the engagement needs to be, first, by accepting that this is the current reality and we can work with it because that is the best outcome right now. Any attempt to destabilise it is going to create even more trouble down the line.

Q223 **Dan Carden:** Beyond monarchy, what other factors do you think bring about stability in the region? Can you think of any?

Aimen Dean: Preservation of tradition while, at the same time, introducing modernity, socially, economically and in the field of science. That is important; it is like a steady ship, going forward. There is no going backward. That is why you will see that only the monarchies in the Middle East seem to have improved their HDI more than any other of their neighbours. Just look at the human development index of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman and compare it with that of Egypt, Iran, Iraq and the rest. It is just abysmal for the rest while it is almost approaching European standards in the GCC countries.

Q224 **Bob Seely:** Just on that final point, is that because those people that took power did so in the name of socialism or communism, which has not been particularly successful in many human societies, and effectively, kings have allowed something approaching a democratic capitalism? Or is it more complex than that?

Aimen Dean: It is more complex because Iran is a theocracy—acting in the name of religion—and yet it is a failed state. The Taliban is going to be a failed state at some point. That is why it is important to understand that it is not just because of the abandonment of Islamic traditions, because kings within a tribal society do have the responsibility of preserving tradition, and under that umbrella of tradition is religion. They are viewed as the guardians of virtue and values and therefore no one questions whether they are legitimate and whether the way they run their Government is legitimate. Even though countries such as the UAE or Kuwait are absolutely liberal by any standards in the Arab world, there is the sense that their leaders are also the guardians of conservative values.

Q225 **Bob Seely:** But once a monarch loses their role—in Afghanistan, for example—is it not almost impossible to bring that monarch back? Once

the magic of the irrational idea of monarchy goes, it is very difficult to recreate. You are assuming that, in Afghanistan, it could have been recreated.

Aimen Dean: Because the last king was still alive at that time. That is why there was a chance. There was just that chance, and his memory was still there.

Q226 **Brendan O'Hara:** Could I ask about the potential impact of 7 October, and the conflict in Gaza, on the growth of radicalisation, and how concerned we should be about that? Is there evidence that al-Qaeda, or Daesh, or Iranian proxies, for example, have exploited the conflict? Have you seen a greater level of support and funding of those groups since 7 October? And where should we be looking for that potential growth, and those dangers?

Aimen Dean: When it comes to terrorism, it is cyclical; there are cycles, like the moon. I always used to say that we always have the full moon sometimes. We had Afghanistan in the 1980s, we had Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s, we had Iraq in the 2000s, we had Syria in the 2010s. This is when a new moon, with its gravity, brings about the upheaval, causing people to become lunatics. We have a situation now where Gaza is the new Syria; this is the gravitational pull that is bringing out the worst in people, unfortunately—again, because of a lack of wisdom, lack of understanding, and lack of awareness.

When you talk about 7 October, yes Hamas did it, but it is my assessment that since 2014 Hamas ceased to be a national Palestinian liberation movement and became an Iranian tool. It wasn’t doing anything on behalf of the average Palestinian; it was doing it on behalf of the ayatollahs of Iran. Many people are still blind to this fact. This blindness is a lack of awareness, lack of education, lack of wisdom. People are not confronting back with evidence-based facts, and therefore, when the narrative is hijacked by radicals who try to simplify this whole complex conflict, when in fact it is as complex as it could be, this is when radicalisation happens.

Unfortunately, since 7 October, we have seen a revival of ISIS in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and also a revival of al-Qaeda in Yemen. We start to see more funding going to al-Shabaab in Somalia. We start to see the Taliban also improving their funding mechanism, especially through trade in commodities. All of this highlights the fact that Gaza became a lucrative brand in itself—not only for the Sunni terrorist groups but also for the Irian Shi’a threat network, such as Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and the militias in Iraq.

Q227 **Brendan O'Hara:** You talked a lot there about Syria, Iraq and Somalia. Is there any evidence of a domestic upsurge? Should we be aware of anything that is going on domestically in increased radicalisation since 7 October?

Aimen Dean: I don’t think there is anything that basically makes it domestic in places like Yemen and Iraq and Syria, because the war has been going on there for years and years. The conflict, and the dynamics of

the conflict, has been going on there for a very long time. It is just the opportunity—again that cycle, that new moon that has risen, called Gaza; it is the best way to exploit people's emotions, anger, frustration, and it is a perfect neon sign for recruitment.

Q228 **Brendan O'Hara:** Finally, just to go back to something you said at the beginning about the nation state. Has there been a pivot away from that sort of global, transnational terrorism to more of a localised focus? Is there any evidence for that?

Aimen Dean: You will see that, in the protests around the globe, in recruitment efforts or in fundraising, Gaza plays an important part, and yet how many of those involved are actually originally Palestinians—from Gaza or even the West Bank, or from the diaspora? You will find that the majority are non-Palestinians, some of them non-Arabs—from the Indian subcontinent or from Sub-Saharan Africa. You see that, really, they are not galvanised by domestic nation state concerns; they are galvanised by this notion of pan-Islamic solidarity as a precursor to a pan-Islamic action to establish a caliphate again. The idea of the caliphate has started to take centre stage again. Look at what happened in Hamburg just a few days ago, when a group of protesters in their hundreds were carrying black flags and chanting slogans for the return of the caliphate in Hamburg, in Germany.

Q229 **Neil Coyle:** In some of the protests here, we have seen the emergence or re-emergence, if you like, of some terrorist paraphernalia, including Hamas paraphernalia, on the streets of London. Are the police trained sufficiently to identify and intervene when we see the symbols, flags, leaflets or literature? I know Prevent is overseen by the Home Office, rather than the Foreign Office, but do you feel that Prevent is resourced enough to intervene to prevent people from going down a path of radicalisation?

Aimen Dean: Again, the domestic issues here are very complex because of the sacred laws when it comes to freedom of speech. The question is: how do you define the very thin line between free speech and incitement? What is it that actually causes radicalisation, and what is just political speech? It might be radical; it might not be to everyone's taste, but it is still legitimate speech in the minds of those who authored it. I think it is quite subjective, and it is really up to the authorities to judge case by case. But let us say that, as Hamas is a proscribed organisation, if its literature were to be spread, that in itself would be an incitement and a crime. The question is whether the police take action. Generally speaking, my experience over the past 25 years, looking at how different Governments around the world deal with terrorism, is that the more you try to appease people to avoid confrontation, the more that invites confrontation. The more you have a moral backbone and show the bravery to confront things head on, not try to skirt around them, the more that generates that level of not just fear, but respect from the other side so that they step back and think about what they are doing.

Q230 **Fabian Hamilton:** I am trying to remember when there was last a

caliphate in Hamburg, but I can't quite work that one out.

Can I move on to the subject of financing terrorism, because it is often said that if you want to stop criminal action, you follow the money? How did the financing of terrorism evolve in the wake of restrictions imposed following 9/11? How do you expect it to change in the next few years? Who are the main donors and financiers of jihadist terrorist groups? I wonder where they are located and what their motivation is. Why would they give money? Is it to fund terror from a shared ideology, or is it to leverage specific geopolitical outcomes? Sorry, that is a multifaceted question.

Aimen Dean: I remember that, at some point in 2016, I was on my feet for eight hours explaining to the captains of the diamond industry in the Antwerp World Diamond Centre how terrorism finance works. It took eight hours, including question and answer. It is a really complex area, but I can condense it by saying that terrorist groups are in two categories: state sponsored and non-state sponsored. Examples of the state sponsored are Hezbollah or the Houthis. They have a state sponsor, such as Iran. Then, of course, they have other means of funding, such as criminal enterprises, weapon smuggling and narcotics. Narcotics are becoming an important staple of financing Hezbollah and the Syrian regime. For example, Captagon, which is called the "zombie drug" and which has started to become available even here, on the streets of the UK, Germany and France—this is all manufactured in Syria and in Lebanon and then shipped here. What was the target? The target was Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait. We are talking about a multibillion-dollar business annually. That is the state sponsored.

If we go to the non-state sponsored—such as al-Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS, al-Shabaab—there is a multitude of funding streams. You have donations coming from the diasporas or from ideologically like-minded people who see, in their struggle, a kindred spirit: something, basically, that they share as a common cause. However, there are also the business networks. Many people do not understand the fact that al-Qaeda in the 1990s and the precursor to ISIS, which was the ISI, or the Islamic State of Iraq, in the 2000s, built a network of businesses—farms, consumer goods places, cafés and restaurants, retail—in order to generate funds to keep laundering that cash and to make sure, basically, that they have a network of intelligence gathering through these shops and legitimate businesses but also, at the same time, to generate funds. Al-Shabaab exploits natural resources, selling the coal and copper of Somalia in the markets in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia. Of course, you also have the Hawala system. The Hawala system is alive—in fact, it is doing even better than before. The reason is the conflicts. The conflicts have now driven tens of millions of people out of their homes in Syria, in Libya, in Yemen, in Iraq, in Iran, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan so you end up with tens of millions of people fuelling this black economy, hiding among those big numbers. You are now hiding maybe 20, 40, 50 needles in a billion haystacks.

Chair: You make a very interesting point because you said earlier that

radicalisation and finance go hand in hand. Exactly to that point, most of Daesh's funding came from small Western Union transfers, of less than 50 quid at a time, from the UK. It was not the billions, or the millions, coming from big donors. It is small scale. You might compare it to some political parties, which are more focused on small donations than they are on the big ones now.

Q231 **Royston Smith:** Can I talk to you about involving terrorists in political settlements? You talked earlier about appeasement, a show of strength and confronting the ideology, or the terrorists. But there is an alternative that we are perhaps seeing in Yemen, where the Houthis may well be part of a political settlement. Is that a good or a bad thing?

Aimen Dean: A political settlement can be reached if the objective of the group in question revolves around power and material gains. If the group in question is not concerned about borders—with staying within the confines of their internationally accepted borders—we have a problem. Ideologically-driven groups—such as Hamas, the Houthis, and others—have the idea that these borders are artificial and the construct of a colonial era that needs to be deleted, needs to be erased, needs to be gone. The question then is: how do you expect to have a rational outcome from someone who might not be entirely rational? They might be rational tactically, but the strategy is not rational. I think this is the exasperation that was expressed by multiple regional leaders in the GCC when they complained publicly, on TV, about the irrationality of the other side.

Article 5 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates who the leader of the country is. You might think that the leader of the country is Ayatollah Khamenei—the supreme leader. But he is just the deputy. The real leader is someone who has been missing for 1,200 years. You have a five-year-old child who disappeared 1,200 years ago, and it just so happens that this child is, by article 5 of the Iranian constitution, the leader of the state. Ayatollah Khamenei and, before him, Khomeini, are just his deputies, waiting for his return. This is why the constitution says that during his occultation, someone will deputise for him—someone who has to be a grand cleric, brave, knowledgeable and experienced.

This is the first red flag of irrationality. This is not like something traditionally monarchical, secular, liberal or even conservative. This is something outside the realm of rationality, and we have to deal with it. Yet this particular problem of eschatology, which I talked about as being the driving force for terrorism and radicalism across the Muslim world, both Sunni and Shi'a, is what is causing most of our problems right now. The Mahdi—the idea that there is this messiah figure coming—is driving Hezbollah, the Houthis and the Shi'a militias. It drove al-Qaeda before. It drove ISIS before. Everyone has the idea that they are paving the way for a saviour.

I wrote a long paper about this eschatology about 13 years ago. I said that in a sense it is going to poison the minds of so many people, especially young people, by convincing them that they are God's instruments and therefore must join God's army. That is exactly where we

are right now. What is the battle cry of Iran-sponsored Shi'a terrorists? "Labbaik Ya Mahdi": "We are here for you, Mahdi." What is the battle cry of al-Qaeda, ISIS and al-Shabaab? "We are here to establish the state for the Mahdi." Unfortunately, we are caught between two radical visions fed by eschatology that is not even properly rooted in Islamic texts.

Q232 **Royston Smith:** The West seemed to look in the wrong direction when a lot of these organisations became more radicalised and more capable. Are we in danger of seeing that again, in either Afghanistan or Yemen, where in the last few weeks AQAP has carried out attacks on the recognised Government of Yemen and is said to be working hand in glove with the Houthis, who are releasing al-Qaeda prisoners and supplying them with drones and all the rest? Are we in danger of seeing this happen again somewhere else, and of the West not seeing it coming? Are capabilities increasing in places like Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere?

Aimen Dean: Yes. The idea of using al-Qaeda and other Sunni radical groups, including Hamas, is something that Iran has perfected over the past two and a half decades. In 2002, 2003 and 2004, when I used to work for the UK intelligence services abroad in Arabia, the orders used to come to al-Qaeda from where? From Iran. Hamza Rabia, who used to be the head of al-Qaeda's operational command, was based out of Chabahar in Iran. Saif al-Adel was in Zahedan then he moved to Tehran, and many of the other leaders ended up under the protection of Qasem Soleimani himself. Even though al-Qaeda was fighting Iran in Iraq, their entire focus in Iran was fighting alongside Iran against Saudi Arabia and trying to destabilise the Saudi royal family. That happened between 2002 and 2006.

There is a brilliant documentary called "Path of Blood" available on Apple TV. This is where you will see how it was an entire war; it was warfare between al-Qaeda and the Saudi authorities for four years. This was mostly funded and directed by al-Qaeda operatives based out of Iran and supported by Iran, because at the end of the day "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." That is how the Houthis started to apply this Iranian textbook strategy and started the process of supplying al-Qaeda in Yemen with whatever they need to create that chaos and make it difficult for the Yemeni Government, because at the moment, based on the truce between the Houthis and the Saudi Government, the Houthis will not attack Marib and Aden, so they relegated that task to a third party.

That is one of the reasons why I always argued that Iran cannot be trusted to be a nuclear power: because of the presence and founding, establishing, nurturing, training and funding of so many proxies. You never know if they are going to build a device and modify it for land detonation then hand it over to one of these terrorist groups, especially if it is a Sunni one, and say, "Go and do with it whatever you want." At the end of the day, it is deniable: "It is not my material. It is not my bomb." That is why it is important to understand that the Middle East is truly the battleground between the modern nation state as a concept and institution and the non-state actors there.

Just to show you how the cancer of non-state actors is so prevalent in the Middle East, how could it be that the Iranian standing army is about 600,000—that is within Iran—but they have a standing, serving 100,000 fighters under their banner outside their border? There are Iraqis in the militias, Hezbollah alone has 100,000 and the Houthis have 300,000, so the question is: how could there be this massive number of people under arms fighting for them and all under the banners of non-state actors—states within a state? At the same time, to make it even more bizarre, there is the fact that some of these groups, like the Houthis, possess weapons with long-range offensive capabilities exceeding 2,000 km. That is more than the armies of Egypt and Turkey possess, and Turkey is a NATO member. They do not have anything that can reach beyond 2,000 km.

Q233 **Royston Smith:** Finally, we are sure that the Houthis are being funded as a proxy from Iran. What about in Afghanistan and in Yemen with al-Qaeda? Are ISIS in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda in Yemen being funded directly or indirectly, or does Iran have nothing to do with that?

Aimen Dean: ISIS is a separate issue, because after the fall of ISIS in 2019, when their last territory was taken over and extinguished, their cash was not recovered, and there were hundreds of millions of dollars of it. There was a question of what happened to that cash. Most likely, that cash moved to Turkey, where it was converted and invested and became the seed money for other cells, including in Afghanistan. It is not a coincidence that we started to see a resurgence of ISIS in Afghanistan just when the Taliban started to have direct Hawala—semi-official banking—with Turkey.

Q234 **Brendan O'Hara:** Can I ask you about the Daesh detention camps in north-east Syria? Do you think that the UK pays enough attention to what is going on in those camps, or are we kind of taking a "less seen, quickest forgotten" attitude?

Aimen Dean: Some of these people are kids, and some of them will grow to become even more resentful and vengeful. It is better that they are under control, even if that is in prison here, than for them to be on the loose out there without any degree of control. That is why I think—and this is something that I floated in 2019—that the UK sovereign base in Cyprus could play an important role. Maybe there could be a detention centre there to process their cases, and a court could be established in order to try them and pass sentences. Leaving them there indefinitely is going to create that uncertainty, which could have an indefinite danger down the line. They need to be under control somehow.

Q235 **Brendan O'Hara:** I don't know if you saw it, but there was a fascinating series of reports from Alex Crawford on Sky News. She painted a pretty terrifying picture of the women and children detention camps. Basically, they are a breeding ground for a new generation of radicals. Do you think that the UK, and the West generally, are sufficiently robust in tackling what is going on in those camps, or have they essentially left them to the Kurds to guard and control, and hoped for the best?

Aimen Dean: I think that, given the fact that all of them are gathered in one single camp, that camp will become, unfortunately, a breeding ground of radicalism and extremism. They are people who have already seen enough death and trauma. Instead of us trying to first confront their radicalism and then rehabilitate them, unfortunately they are left to their devices and to become more resentful and more vengeful in the future, without any control. That is why I am stressing this. The fact that they are out there with minimal control is what worries me.

Q236 **Brendan O'Hara:** Forgive me, but I am going to ask you to generalise here. What is the general view of the public in the region about those being held in the camps in Syria? Are they sympathetic, supportive, apathetic or indifferent? What is the general opinion, and have you noticed a shift at all?

Aimen Dean: It depends who you ask. Generally, ISIS has a toxic legacy right now among most of the populations in the Middle East, especially after what they have done and the atrocities they have committed, yet most of these women and children are viewed as unfortunate, idiotic people who just ended up in the wrong place. Some of them are viewed with suspicion that they came on their own volition. The sympathy is reserved more for the children who were children at the time of the fall of the ISIS territories.

Q237 **Chair:** I am afraid that we have to wrap up this session, but I have two final questions. I am often considered to have quite an extreme view on deradicalisation: I don't think that you can deradicalise people. I think that the psychological drivers remain there; you can only redirect them or refocus them to a different area of obsession and focus. Given that we spend a lot of time being told that we should take back all of these people to the UK and allow anyone under 18 to live in society freely, where do you think that we sit on that in terms of being able to deradicalise people?

Finally—this is a very different question—what is the biggest change that you would make to either UK foreign policy or our approach towards counter-terrorism that you think would meaningfully make us safer from the risk from terrorism?

Aimen Dean: In terms of deradicalisation, I never really agreed with it, because I agree with the term rehabilitation. I think that is the best approach. I find "countering violent extremism" and "deradicalisation" unhelpful, because it carries a stigma. The idea is that you have to confront the problem head on and say, "You are on the wrong path. Being a member of this group is equivalent to being a member of a gang, drug circle or something like that. You need to get out of that." The question is therefore, how do we do rehabilitation? It is not about deradicalisation; it is about taking away the violence and the driver towards violence from the person, in order for them to function normally or semi-normally within a society. That is the best you can hope for. Then with time, you hope that the seeds of doubt that you sow in their mind will grow enough to make

them think critically about the path they have taken before and how they can do what they need to do, which is a U-turn.

As for UK foreign policy, it is my view—and this is just my personal view—that the UK should conduct its foreign policy according to the interests of the UK and its people. It should not be dictated by any loud voices from any minority. This is where the nation state asserts its authority and its entitlement to set policy according to the mandate on which it was elected. This is how the Government should behave with any dissenting voices: "Look, I'm the elected Government. I decide what foreign policy is the best for the UK and its population. You can disagree—no problem. You can take a megaphone and shout all you want, but if you step out of line and use violence to assert your point, things will be different." It is the same with incitement to violence.

Q238 **Neil Coyle:** To be clear, you are making a distinction. You are not suggesting that you are functioning semi-normally—you are rehabilitated, right? You are not suggesting that it is impossible for some; you are suggesting that those who have committed violent acts should be treated differently from those who have not.

Aimen Dean: I do not think that those with blood on their hands should be treated exactly as those who—thank God, I never had any blood on my hands. Those who got out early are not the same as those who got out too late. It always has to be case by case. Rehabilitation works according to the needs of the individual. Some individuals went too deep, and some individuals realised they were on the wrong path early on and did a U-turn at the right time.

Chair: Some might equally have had the will to shed blood on their hands but not the opportunity, and that is the challenge. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Professor Alexander Evans.

Q239 **Chair:** Welcome back to this hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee, where we are very pleased to be joined by Professor Evans. Could you kindly introduce yourself?

Professor Evans: Thank you, Chair. My name is Alexander Evans. I am a Professor in Practice in Public Policy at the London School of Economics. I have also been a career diplomat for 21 years. I need to emphasise that I am still a diplomat on sabbatical, so I am not speaking on behalf of Government at all. Relevant to this inquiry, I am a former co-ordinator of the al-Qaeda/Daesh/Taliban monitoring team of the United Nations Security Council. I think you have heard from two of my erstwhile colleagues in previous sessions.

Q240 **Chair:** Thank you. Can you give us an overview of the current state of Daesh Khorasan and what threat it poses to the UK and our interests?

Professor Evans: I should begin by saying that I don't track it as closely as I would have done in that United Nations avatar, but I still think that there is an active threat to the United Kingdom, both to homeland security and to UK nationals overseas, from Daesh and its international networks, and indeed from al-Qaeda and affiliates globally. That is something that we shouldn't lose sight of.

Q241 **Chair:** In terms of the relationship between Daesh and Daesh Khorasan and the Taliban, can you unpack that for us slightly?

Professor Evans: When we peer into Afghanistan, we see that it is a complex terrain. It is tempting to reduce Afghanistan to one amalgam of terrorist groups and organisations, but even prior to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban you had a differentiated set of organisations operating in Afghanistan. You even had differentiated factions within the Taliban itself.

Essentially, you now have a Daesh faction in Afghanistan that is in opposition to the Taliban regime but also in affiliation with elements in al-Qaeda and other regional groups. Jamaat Ansarullah, a group operating in Tajikistan, is one that should be mentioned in this regard.

Q242 **Chair:** Is the Taliban actively working to defeat Daesh Khorasan. Do you see that as a likelihood? Do they have the capability or the will?

Professor Evans: Do they have the capability? I think that is questionable, because trying to assert governance in Afghanistan was a difficult task at any moment in recent decades, regardless of the flavour of Government that was in control.

Do they have the will? They certainly have the will not to be challenged by Daesh elements or indeed other armed groups in Afghanistan, but I think the nature of Taliban capability in the country means that exercising that will is more challenging than having the desire to exercise that will.

Q243 **Chair:** Before I bring in Fabian, you were here for the last evidence session, when we heard a view about what might have happened had the previous King of Afghanistan been brought back and a monarchy re-established. You spent a lot of time in Afghanistan and getting to know tribes across the border. Do you think there is any likelihood that that was possible and that it would have helped to stabilise Afghanistan and bring back that governance that you say is so hard?

Professor Evans: I would perhaps offer a slightly more sceptical air about post-9/11 futures. I worked in Afghanistan for UNAMA before I joined the Foreign Office in early 2002. A side comment on expertise on the area: the fact that I had worked in Kashmir and Pakistan was considered to be good enough to be hired on a Tuesday and in Kabul on the Sunday. There is a lesson here about longitudinal expertise in Government.

I wonder how much a restoration of a monarchy would have been sufficient to restore consensus and political harmony in Afghanistan. It is one of the "what ifs", but had Abdul Haq, one of the mujaheddin leaders, not been murdered when he returned to Afghanistan, might he have

played a role in bridging in a different way? Possibly, but that is for historians and regional experts to debate in future, rather than for us to be confident that it would be true.

Q244 **Chair:** I have one final question about some evidence that we have heard over the last few weeks. We had a former head of MI6 in here saying that we don't seem to have learned the lesson that you cannot bring a military solution to a political problem. Do you think that leads to a lot of the problems that we are currently seeing in Afghanistan and potentially in other theatres as well?

Professor Evans: My view, in Afghanistan at least, is that ultimately one needed to pursue a political settlement. You can't always achieve a political settlement, and it has to be a political settlement that respects the red lines that you have as a nation and as a like-minded democratic community. But that doesn't absent the need for force or coercion. The negotiation specialists talk about the ZOPA. Of course, academics, just like bureaucrats, love acronyms, but ZOPA is the zone of possible agreement. If you are looking for a ZOPA in an international conflict or in a national conflict, you have to be confident that there actually is a common terrain that would be at least minimally acceptable to all parties. The challenge often with terrorist groups is that there is not an acceptable ZOPA to reach.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q245 **Fabian Hamilton:** Professor Evans, can I move us to Central Asia to look at the threats coming from there? How serious do you consider the threat of terrorism to be in places like Tajikistan and some of the other Caucasus nations, and how serious is the threat overall emanating from Central Asia, certainly with respect to the nationals of those countries who partake in terror attacks or become foreign fighters?

Professor Evans: I would distinguish between the threat posed to Central Asian states by those networks and groups and the threat posed to the UK homeland from those groups. The threat posed to the UK homeland is relatively slim, but the threat potentially posed to UK nationals elsewhere is not absent, and the threat posed to countries like Tajikistan is real, although the security services in those countries have generally been fairly effective at identifying and containing threats within those countries from those groups.

Q246 **Fabian Hamilton:** Is that because they are a hangover from Soviet times and still have the infrastructure of the Soviet mechanism for repression?

Professor Evans: At times. They also get quite a lot of external assistance from regional actors, be it from the Chinese or the Russian Federation. Also, many of the actors and networks, for example, with Tajik groups and Uzbek groups, are present in Afghanistan, or in Syria and Iraq, rather than in Central Asia. The operating terrain in Central Asia has not been a very easy one for some of these groups. The Fergana valley, which was an anchor for some of these groups in the 1990s, became less permissive for them. So you see this networking, operating and training in

diaspora in both those places—particularly the Middle East and particularly Afghanistan—and you also see a focus on trying to conduct attacks in Moscow. We saw that very sadly in recent weeks.

Q247 **Fabian Hamilton:** Does any one of the republics stand out over and above the others in terms of its population for its contribution towards terrorist activities?

Professor Evans: In terms of its population, Uzbekistan generally has probably been the chief one. Uzbek nationals were one of the most predominant groupings within the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The Tajik elements have generally been affiliated with the group Jamaat Ansarullah. The last time I looked at it, its numbers were in the low hundreds, and it is mainly based in the east of the country in Gorno-Badakhshan, but again, many of those individuals are based elsewhere.

It is an interesting counterpoint to the argument that organised crime always ties up with terrorism, because for many of the smuggling networks that smuggle, in particular, narcotics in eastern Tajikistan, it is not in their business interest to maintain ties with terrorist groups. They are interested in getting their product through that terrain. So sometimes there is a lack of confluence of interest between these organised crime groups and terrorist groups.

Q248 **Chair:** On that point, I want to ask about our approach to areas where we see vast amounts of terrorism within a country. Are we doing enough on the governance, capacity-building and political settlement side, or is it that we create a space for political settlements where political teams run around doing a lot of very hard work, but if we cannot get a ZOPA, as you call it, and there is no real room for agreement, we essentially let CT take over and drop the political settlement and governance work to one side? Yes, capacity building might continue—helping a host Government improve their armed forces, for example—but do you think we can essentially only throw one ball in the air at once, and we are either going for political settlement or we see it as a CT operation? Or do you think that is slightly unfair?

Professor Evans: There is a wider longitudinal piece here about joined-up Government, whatever you call it: whether you subscribe to Mark Sedwill's fusion doctrine or whatever the nomenclature is—"integration", I think, is the name of the day in recent years in the British Government. But there is a marked step change. If we think about the history of the UK in international counter-terrorism, the Foreign Office really developed a capability in the 1960s and 1970s. It was still relatively niche as late as the mid-1990s, and it was only really after 9/11 that it acquired the cadence and resourcing and cross-Government footprint that it has today. A big lesson of that was integration across Government.

In the 1960s and 1970s, it was about dealing with aircraft hijackings in particular, so it was about joint work internationally through the International Civil Aviation Organisation, joining up with airlines and joining up internationally, because you were talking about point-to-point

airport security, which was really important. After 9/11, it was about the ability to try to fuse development, diplomacy, justice and the security and intelligence services along with political work by diplomats. If I may, I will offer a brief anecdote on this. When I worked in Pakistan in 2007 to 2009, we were sent a prosecutor from the Crown Prosecution Service to join us, who is now sadly deceased. The cultures of integration across Government took time.

In this particular case he persuaded us by being a very excellent cocktail maker by virtue of having been a cocktail waiter in Newcastle in a previous avatar. More importantly, he was someone who was very critical to ensuring successful, sustained prosecutions in the UK. Once you have integration proving its worth in terms of carry-through to prevention, disruption, prosecutions, I think people take it on board.

On trying to get that integration right, I am not claiming that the British Government is perfect, but I would argue that it is a lot better than it was 20 or 25 years ago. In many of the other Governments I have visited and worked with, I think they still struggle with that. Police officers do not talk to intelligence services and intelligence services do not deign to talk to police officers.

Data sharing between Government agencies is very difficult. Institutional cultures and cultures of accountability and authority inhibit the data sharing and co-ordination in Government that is so crucial at home as well as overseas.

Chair: That is really helpful.

Q249 **Dan Carden:** Good afternoon, Professor Evans. You have talked a bit about the crossover within Government. How effectively do you think the FCDO has exerted its influence on counter-terrorism policies bilaterally and multilaterally in recent years?

Professor Evans: I am not trying to be facetious about it, but we are in a world where sovereignty matters to most states, so states will ultimately make sovereign decisions about their national security policy, including around counter-terrorism. I think the UK can bring to bear influence, insight and information sharing, and it does in many different spaces. I will perhaps talk more about the UN and multilateral architecture where I think the UK has been a credible accelerant of international co-ordination and co-operation, partly because I think the UK has been willing to talk in private as well as sometimes in public about the failures and challenges of that integration, as well as about the successes.

It has not just been the UK on transmit about "Here are the ways in which we have done this well", or, "Here are the ways in which we have achieved success." It has also been a recognition about how difficult it is to get this integrated culture within Government, but also integrated co-ordination and co-operation internationally, particularly when you are talking about states that do not share good bilateral relations. It is one thing for the UK to co-ordinate with like-minded states or states with which it has relatively

good bilateral relations; it is quite another thing to achieve co-ordination between two warring states or sparring states in the international system. That is where regional organisations and the UN system can sometimes play a useful role.

Q250 **Dan Carden:** Can you tell us a bit more where the UK needs to strengthen those bilateral relationships? Where should we look to build closer relationships, where we perhaps do not currently have them?

Professor Evans: Again, I might pause given my still suspended animation Government identity. I think there is always a trade-off between the now and the next. There is a delicious Norwegian word, "tidsklemma", which means "time squeeze". It is a description of a parent of an under-five-year-old. I am sure various Committee members will recognise that in the different stages in their lives—I have an eight-week-old baby at the moment.

Time squeeze applies to most Government policymaking, including national security policymaking. One of the challenges of the time pressures and the crisis pressures on national security policymaking is that you focus on the immediate crisis and the immediate threat reporting now rather than think prospectively about where a threat might come from in three, five or seven years' time. There is a really powerful argument here. It is difficult to do in a tightly resourced environment, but how do you maintain multiple relationships with almost every state on the planet, including the states where that might not be an immediate priority? It might not even be a middle-level priority.

We can all do the matrices where we measure the states that matter most against the current threat environment or against the current transnational structures of al-Qaeda or Daesh affiliates. Just as with foreign policymaking, there is a powerful argument for an insurance approach to it. In insurance approaches you have as wide an area network as possible and relations with as many different states and actors as possible, because one constant element of foreign policy, which is also one constant element of counter-terrorism and national security policymaking, is surprise.

Q251 **Dan Carden:** Do you think the fact that we are moving in the direction of a multipolar geopolitical environment is making this even more challenging?

Professor Evans: I think one aspect of that multipolarity makes it even more challenging. That is, a growing distrust internationally—a growing hedging, a greater willingness to use hybrid policies overseas for a range of states, particularly states hostile to the UK. This potentially encourages the bad behaviours of supporting proxies or supporting terrorist groups for some states.

It also inhibits the trust that is necessary for sharing information. One of the huge gains of the international campaign against both al-Qaeda and Daesh was the growth of an architecture of international information sharing. You can see that in sharing biometric data on citizens and their

travel, and in the introduction of a global exit control regime so that we are measured when we exit a country as well as when we enter. That is crucial for tracking and disrupting foreign terrorist fighters. You can also see it in the willingness to find vehicles to share advance threat intelligence—whether Interpol, or bilateral mechanisms, or European or other like-minded mechanisms—and to publish that information externally. The greater use of travel advisories to provide shared environments to help shape risk decisions by citizens, not just UK citizens, has all been a massive plus.

That is I think at risk in some ways in an international environment where trust is reducing, not increasing. That will almost inevitably affect counter-terrorism information sharing as well. This is despite the fact that, when I worked for the UN Security Council, counter-terrorism was one of the very few spaces where Russia, China, France, the US and the UK were still able to find common ground. It was also still possible to find common ground between authoritarian states and democratic states—with two health warnings. One was obviously human rights compliance. The temptation to mistreat detainees and to not treat citizens with the same norms to which we would behave was evident in many states.

The other was the temptation to misattribute domestic political opponents as terrorists. There were a number of occasions on which I would have discreet conversations with member states of the UN that wanted to sanction their political opponents. I had to gently explain that the likelihood of getting that through the UN Security Council was low.

Q252 **Fabian Hamilton:** Can I just ask you how you think the increasing tendency for state-sponsored terrorism undermines the multilateral approach to curbing terrorism worldwide? There is a complete contradiction, isn't there?

Professor Evans: There is a contradiction there. I am not saying the tendency is growing massively across all states, but I think that the risk appetite is growing among certain states. That growing risk appetite then has a secondary effect on other states as well. I do think that is something of concern. Does it fundamentally destroy the fabric of international co-operation, co-ordination, the standards, sanctions on counter-terrorism: no. Does it undermine, though, the credibility of those regimes? Yes it does. There is a challenge there. If you are a state that covertly supports terrorist groups, your likelihood to invest heavily and robustly in the architecture of counter-terrorism internationally is perhaps somewhat reduced. You do not want to expose yourself to embarrassment or to charges of hypocrisy.

[Royston Smith took the Chair]

Q253 **Fabian Hamilton:** Thank you very much for that answer. Can I move on to a question about the UK's influence in multilateral organisations concerned with countering terrorism. Do you think the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the Department for International Development has influenced our ability to be considered a leading actor

in this area? Or, indeed, to be a leading actor in this area?

Professor Evans: Ordinarily, I would demure from answering given that I am still in the service, but actually on this one I would also say I do not believe it is material, actually, to it. I would again speak to this integration of insight across Government. I think there is a really important insight that is gained from development as well as from diplomacy. I will give a practical example relating to counter-terrorist finance.

If you want to understand informal remittance flows—Hawala and hundi systems—actually the people with the greatest expertise on that are the development community. It is looking at remittance flows and at micro-payments internationally. But that is also relevant for understanding the peer-to-peer funding that supports terrorist organisations. So that is one example of where insight from the field of development can be very helpful to the world of national security, but also vice versa. You actually have the ability to have a constructive dialogue and debate, which hopefully leads to better policy making.

Q254 **Fabian Hamilton:** Which issues relating to terrorism do you think the UK could contribute to more effectively in the international fora? For example, we have already discussed today the repatriation of British nationals from the camps in north-east Syria. How else could we help contribute more effectively within the international fora?

Professor Evans: Let me pick one issue that certainly has been on the UN Security Council's agenda for some time, which is kidnap for ransom payments to terrorist organisations.

At one level, a lot of terrorism is relatively inexpensive, notwithstanding the capital that has accrued to Daesh through Daesh's temporary control over lots of territory and resource in Iraq and Syria. Many terrorist organisations operate on budgets that would probably not match the expense accounts of many people in public service, and certainly would fall below the threshold for suspicious transaction reporting in the counter-terrorist and anti-money laundering frameworks internationally.

If you have large payments of multiple millions of dollars for hostages, where that money is accruing to an al-Qaeda affiliate or to a Daesh affiliate, that is really material to increasing the risk to all citizens elsewhere. Both publicising the threat of kidnap for ransom, and also trying to encourage and foster greater action on it, has been a helpful role, not just for the UN Security Council—I think the UK has played a leadership role within that for some years.

Q255 **Fabian Hamilton:** And so have the Americans, because they have a dedicated official to kidnap for ransom issues and crime.

Professor Evans: They do. It is a particular area of robust Anglo-American co-ordination on that policy agenda. But it is also an area, again, where the UN Security Council has passed a Security Council resolution against the practice, but the practice does still continue in some instances with some states. It is about the trade-off—sometimes it is politically very

difficult for states, including some democracies, to consider what you do now to protect and secure your citizens versus what is the effect of that policy action later on. Kidnap for ransom payments to terrorist organisations is a classic case in point, where what you do now generally generates greater threat to your citizens later on.

Q256 **Fabian Hamilton:** That is very helpful.

This is my last point, Chair. In your assessment, do you think sanctions are an effective tool with which to counter terrorism both nationally and at the multilateral level, or are they a very blunt instrument?

Professor Evans: I think targeted sanctions can be an effective tool of disruption and of messaging and de-legitimisation as well, and ideally of deterrence, but I think it is important not to overemphasise what targeted sanctions can achieve.

I would particularly take here travel bans and asset freezes. It is tempting to think, "Well, actually, this doesn't really make much difference." For example, Osama bin Laden used to be on the UN Security Council's sanctions list. One suspects that didn't necessarily have that much effect on him. But if you can disrupt, for example, financiers linked to Daesh or the Taliban or al-Qaeda, and it becomes more difficult for those people to move across borders or to use the formal banking system, that can actually have a disruptive effect on those organisations.

Sometimes, I think the temptation with sanctions is to focus on the level 1s, the leaders of organisations, rather than focusing in on where targeted sanctions are impacting on the fundraisers—if you like, the equivalent of party agents. If you disrupt a party agent for an MP, you potentially have quite a significant effect on their local operations and their electoral campaigns. People will tend to know who the MP is, but they will not necessarily know who the party agent is. So a bit of it is about how you then focus on the nodal points in networks that will be most influential.

The other argument that is sometimes used against targeted sanctions is that they do not have much effect in a cash economy—for example, if you are talking about reaching into parts of Yemen, Somalia or Afghanistan. But even there it can have a chilling effect, in a positive way. Let me give an example. If you are somebody engaging in financial investment in Somalia or Afghanistan, sometimes what you do to reduce your risk as you invest is get co-investments from people from other groups around you in your area.

If you are the subject of sanctions, you may have no bank account that is materially affected. You may not be using Western Union, Wise or any other money service business to move money overseas, but you do need co-investment by your peers to invest in whatever business you want to invest in in Somalia, Yemen or Afghanistan. If you are sanctioned, those peers may well have a legitimate business or the use of formal banking elsewhere, so suddenly you will find that your other business activities, particularly if you are a financier, can be affected. For those who are

cynical about the reach of targeted sanctions, I would counterpose that with the fact that often they can have a greater disruptive effect as a financial tool than people think, but it is important to see that it is only one element in a suite of tools that can be used.

I will also pause and talk about the importance of the travel ban and the deterrent effect. On the travel ban, fine, you may not be able to stop somebody taking a boat between Yemen and East Africa, but you can stop them getting on a plane. The world of biometrics today makes it very difficult. The days of masquerading under multiple identities are gone when it comes to movement by aviation or movement across any border that is secured by biometrics. Again, the fact that sanctions lists have gone from an analogue list, which was literally a list of names of names and addresses, to a much more digital framework, with biometrics where possible, which is allied to Interpol red notices so has the ability to exercise the Interpol system, and is linked into screening systems in airports or on entry and exit from countries, disrupts the travel plans of financiers or level 2s or level 3s.

Finally, on the deterrent effect, there is something that many of these groups crave, which is legitimacy. If they are not seen as equal, legitimate actors to states, and if they are seen as being beyond reasonableness by the international state community, that is an important message in multiple ways.

Fabian Hamilton: That is really helpful, Professor.

Q257 **Chair:** Professor Evans, may I ask you about the rise in polarisation internationally? Is there a risk that countries and regions will start to counter terrorism themselves rather than use the existing multilateral agencies?

Professor Evans: I think there is a risk, but it is offset somewhat by the value that people have people have seen in, for example, the sharing of advanced passenger information or red notices via Interpol mechanisms on individuals of concern. Can some of these systems be misused by Government? They certainly can, so the risk is that you get dissidents put on there and certain countries overusing the mechanisms for domestic political purposes, particularly if they are authoritarian countries and wish to inhibit the civil rights of their citizens or of opponents elsewhere.

The benefits of this international architecture of data sharing and advanced sharing of threats probably mean that there will still be a use of it by all states, but where there are particular breakdowns in trust, what we will see is the loss of bilateral connectivity between states. Even for states that have often had very difficult bilateral relations, when it comes to a threat by terrorists to kill innocent civilians in a city or at a public event in that country, information will still be shared. I would point to the public advisory that was issued about the threat in Moscow as an example of that in practice. I think there is a commitment to protecting civilians that exists in many of the counter-terrorism units across the world, and in the Government bureaucracies around those.

The question I would have is, to what extent do geopolitical frictions, which are not about multipolarity per se, but poor bilateral relations between states, inhibit sharing among experts, between services or between police forces of information that would be material to preventing terrorist attacks that kill civilians?

Q258 **Chair:** What reform could we or should we see at the UN Security Council to help to protect stability in the Middle East? In your assessment, which country or countries should be given a permanent seat on the Security Council?

Professor Evans: Thank you very much for that wonderful question. I would describe it as roughly the same question as, who should I invite to my 50th birthday party? It seems easy to answer until you start listing the names on a sheet of paper and work out that your venue has space for 30, but you have 50 people you would like to invite, 20 of whom will be offended if they do not receive an invitation.

There are, of course, a range of credible candidates. It is important to signal that, in early 2002, the UK was the first P5 member—this is often forgotten—to publicly endorse India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. That was very important in my time as a diplomat in India, and it is important to recognise that the UK was the first mover on that among UN Security Council members. The balance between the efficacy of having a small council that can reach decisions speedily, along with questions of how and where the use of veto is exercised, and representation across the UN system is a delicate one.

Self-evidently, the UN Security Council needs reform. How that reform should be manifested and who should end up on the council is a trickier question, and that is where so much of the international debate has lain of late. It is important to note—this is perhaps pulling back to the multipolar operating environment we are in now—that it is sometimes tempting, if you are sitting in the Security Council, to think that we live in a world of 15, where five may be slightly more equal than the other 10. We do not; we live in a world of 193. Many of the frameworks that would shape counter-terrorism—and indeed much other international policy, such as the regulation of, or international agreements or standards around, technology—are made among 193 countries, not 15. One of the challenges for UK influence and engagement internationally is that the relationship with the 193 is important, not just the membership of 15.

Q259 **Chair:** Some might argue that you wouldn't have 193, but you might have more regional representation. For example—this is not my view; it is just something I have read—some people think that Saudi Arabia, as the region's leading light, if you like, might be one of the countries that would be considered for Security Council membership. Do you have a view on that, especially with the Middle East being what it is at the moment?

Professor Evans: As I said, individual candidacies pull me back into birthday party terrain.

Chair: At least you haven't said you're going to cancel your birthday party.

Professor Evans: That's true; it is going to be a virtual event, obviously—actually, it has already passed. I would pull back and say that there is a legitimate debate on whether you can really have a continent without recognition or a significant grouping within the international system without representation. Of course, there is representation through elected members—the E10 of the Security Council—but that is materially different to being a permanent member of the Security Council.

On counter-terrorism, it is important to recognise that there is a balance between Security Council mechanisms and General Assembly mechanisms. The General Assembly activity on counter-terrorism is really important if we are thinking about Prevent, deradicalisation, some of the capacity-building issues internationally, the funding mechanisms for capacity building and support, and the work of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism.

The Security Council plays a crucially important role in the sanctions regime—the chapter VII capabilities of the Security Council. I would also argue that an unsung, but hugely important, part of international counter-terrorism machinery is the 1540 Committee of experts working for the UN Security Council, which looks at chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological risk linked to terrorist groups. It does extraordinarily valuable work. In some ways, it is viewed as a technical backwater, but I think that, with the rapid-onset growth of technology, the ability today to learn things at a pace, using access to the internet and grey literature, that would not have been the case 10 or 15 years ago, and the ability of generative AI—I realise that everybody has to, for marketing purposes, mention AI at every meeting nowadays, but outside of that marketing pitch—the risk of accelerated capabilities within terrorist groups should be a concern for us. It is a very different world to worrying about toxins or CBRN use by groups in the 1990s, when I first worked on this—my academic background was doing a PhD on some groups in Pakistan.

That concern, again, leads us back to the 193, because in terms of the mechanisms for international regulation—there may be bilateral mechanisms, and there may be European mechanisms, and there are obviously things that the UK will do nationally and will do with like-minded partners—it is important for the international architecture to encompass all states. The 1540 Committee is the anchor of resource and expertise in the UN system on that, and it deserves support.

Q260 **Chair:** When I was a kid, terrorism was fertiliser in shoeboxes in Northern Ireland. Now, it is drones and cruise missiles, and the Houthis are proscribed and have some significant kit available to them. We have talked about AI, and everyone has to; it is almost like we did not talk about it two years ago, but now it is the only game in town, and we did not see it coming. I know this is a bit of a crystal-ball question, but where do you see the UN and other multilaterals in five or 10 years' time in terms of trying to be ahead on that issue—we have been talking about

things we already know about and how to deal with them—to counter terrorism in the future?

Professor Evans: I have a particular preoccupation with long-range policymaking. I teach anticipatory policymaking at the LSE, and I also teach technology data science and policymaking, including around national security and counter-terrorism. Again, it's this problem that, for Governments and international organisations, the temptation is to do now rather than next. Next is often the optionality—that's the thing that gets deprioritised, against the super-prioritisation of what we are dealing with now.

I think the UN can play a useful role in some of that blended analysis from all states. The UN can talk to the Sudanese, the Russians, the Chinese and the Iranians, as well as to the Israelis, the Americans, ourselves and the French. The ability to talk to everybody is a particular, and I would argue largely unique, capability of the UN, and particularly of these UN Security Council expert groups.

I would hope that the UK Government, like other Governments—whatever might be said in strategy documents, and it is sometimes tempting to get over-obsessed with how many lines in a particular Government strategy document mention counter-terrorism over some other subject—would see that there is something really material here about how much capacity within Government is dedicated to two things. One is anticipation: how much have you got people thinking about where the threat might go next? What does it mean around UAVs? What do we think about the future of toxins and terrorist groups? What are some of the implications of new technologies around that? But also, how do you then factor in not just that long-range thinking about what next, but the insurance policy of making sure that we have enough insight on Tajikistan, the Maldives or Panama, as well as on the more obvious countries and issues that we might prioritise and look at?

One of the perennial challenges of Government is how to do next as well as now, and how to build that not just into resilience planning and resilience in counter-terrorism, but also into strategic policymaking. It is not just whether you have a group of people working on this in DSTL or in FCDO, but the extent to which it is ventilated and aired at senior official level—permanent secretary or director general level—but also at ministerial level. That is the subject that always gets squeezed out of every committee meeting.

Q261 **Chair:** Do we have the bandwidth? I was talking about Yemen earlier because that is an example. Mr Dean said that it was obvious to him that, while the Houthis are in negotiations with the Saudis and the UN on the road map to peace, they are now devolving the attacks on the southern lot to al-Qaeda. Do we—the multilaterals, as well as the UK—have the bandwidth to see these things coming? You were saying that we need to look beyond now. It does not look like we are doing that. We are the penholder in Yemen, for example, yet we did not see most of what has happened, even with the Houthis in the Red sea, and now with al-Qaeda

being resurgent in Yemen. Do we not have the bandwidth to see it? Is that the problem?

Professor Evans: May I answer that by dividing it into two? One element here is, do we often get things wrong? Yes, of course. Do all Governments often get things wrong? Yes, of course, because our ability to predict the future, strangely, has not yet reached AI avatar standards. The ability to look forward does not guarantee the ability to predict accurately. There have been improvements in British weather forecasting; we now can have the same confidence about weather forecasting for twice the length of period that we used to have 20 or 30 years ago. Certainly, given the weather in April and early May, there is no guarantee that weather forecasting is concurrent with the ability to predict whether you need an umbrella or not in London, for example. So I would not necessarily hold us too harshly to account for not being able to predict all the time. Insight and expertise does not always lead to predictive capability.

That question of bandwidth, however, is a really important one. To what extent is there senior-level bandwidth? To be fair to Government, in all Governments and all international organisations, you cannot do everything everywhere all at once—it's just not possible. There is only so much time in the day; there is only so much attention time, red box time or committee time to attend to different issues. This is where having a wide area network diplomatically and internationally is important.

This is also where—this is not a plea for academic expertise necessarily—expertise on countries, languages and groups becomes very important. I learned an awful lot in the 1990s by sitting at the feet of somebody who had been in the diplomatic service in the 1980s, and who had been given a nearly two-year leave of absence to go and study Islamist groups around the world as a visiting student at SOAS. But that requires the redundancy to allow somebody to go off and spend two years learning about that. I would argue that it was really material to UK interests to have somebody who was an expert on Islamist movements everywhere from Indonesia to Nigeria, but it takes a degree of redundancy.

There is a risk for UK plc on counter-terrorism. On the one hand—you have met many of these experts in recent evidence sessions—we have an extraordinary group of terrorism experts, from St Andrews to King's College London, and I think Professor Peter Neumann, Antonio Giustozzi and others gave evidence to you. That is good news, but we have far fewer people today who have spent time on the ground among Islamist groups, doing that anthropological fieldwork, because, after 9/11, that became very dangerous and difficult to do. I spent a chunk of my time as a PhD student in the 1990s interviewing members of terrorist organisations. Frankly, I could not get that through a risk committee nowadays in a university—probably rightly so—but the risk environment has also shifted very fundamentally, and you cannot necessarily do that kind of fieldwork any more.

So I would argue that one of the risks that the UK has, and this is also true for peer nations, is that we have reduced capability in academia to

get that really granular, on-the-ground understanding of what political Islam looks like in country X or what radical right-wing terrorism or radical nihilist terrorism looks like in a particular university environment, for example. We have fewer people who have done that experiential, ethnographic, on-the-ground fieldwork, with languages, in high-risk environments. On the one hand, we have more insight; on the other hand, we have less, and that should concern us. If we are thinking about blinking forward to try to understand the future, do we have the expertise and insight, not necessarily just within the stovepipe of His Majesty's Government, but within UK plc? I would argue that the jury is out on some of the expertise we might require.

Q262 **Chair:** Are we our own worst enemy in some ways? For example, in Africa, parts of Government will not sign any export guarantees if fossil fuels are involved, for example, so British businesses do not bid for business over there; they do not know if they can trust some of the Governments to pay, and they would need to have some sort of support from our Government to give them the comfort to go and do that. They are moving out—not the establishment necessarily, but British businesses and others—and the Chinese and Russians are moving in, because they do not have the same set of values as we do. We talk about bandwidth, and are we losing more than just academia, language specialists and the rest by vacating these spaces and allowing our adversaries, to all intents and purposes, to come and fill the vacuum that we leave?

Professor Evans: My expertise is not in trade diplomacy, so I could not really talk about export guarantees and the impact on, for example, small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK. But thinking about the UK presence overseas, what do we benefit from? We benefit from the fact that we have a huge UK diaspora globally. We do not even know exactly the number, but we have something like 6 million Brits living beyond our borders, and we have more Britons living in the Indo-Pacific region than France has French citizens living there—we are certainly on a par—which is a hardy reminder when we talk about the Indo-Pacific.

So I agree with you. British businesspeople overseas, people working for NGOs overseas, British teachers overseas, and British retirees and residents overseas are part of that plethora of insight and knowledge that we have about other countries, and the relationships—the tissue of relationships—that we have with other countries.

Academia is—obviously, I would say this as an academic, wouldn't I?—a useful avatar and vehicle for insight and often for certain forms of deep insight, but it is by no means the only one. The slight danger is that academics, journalists, diplomats and businesspeople all look at each other and think, "Crikey, we know more than you do." Having inhabited some of these different silos, each of them brings different forms of insight and different forms of relationships. If I want to understand the international financing of terrorism, or if I want to understand the evolution of technologies and geopolitics, I am going to reach to the private sector; I am not going to reach to Government most of the time.

Q263 **Fabian Hamilton:** Can I move us back to UK governance? How do you think the transition from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund—the CSSF—to this Integrated Security Fund will affect the UK's engagement on counter-terrorism internationally? Will it make any difference, or will things remain the same?

Professor Evans: We will have to see as that transition takes place. I would not want to underestimate the degree to which the creation of pooled, merged funding transformed the Whitehall landscape—I don't think we are meant to say "Whitehall" any more, because it is obviously beyond London and the south-east, so let me say Whitehall, Glasgow, York and Darlington, and I am sure there are other places I have not mentioned as well. I should remember that from my time in the Cabinet Office.

However, I think there is a hugely important ingredient here that is sometimes less spoken about. It is not just the shared funding and the ability to engage in capacity building, work on insight or support bilateral projects or multilateral projects; it is the fact that this shared funding required shared governance, and it required shared governance at grade 7 level in Government, not just at senior civil service level in Government. Often, directors and directors general in Government will work closely together because they are beginning to be in that apex system within central Government. It is much more difficult to get this bit of the MOD to work with this bit of the Home Office and this bit of FCDO.

The huge value of these shared funds, from my perspective, was that it forced jointery with different operating cultures and different parts of Government, and that jointery helped educate. When I was doing CSSF in its early days, it was one of the vehicles for understanding defence insights into the international policy issues I was working on, and to understand development and Home Office insights into those policy areas.

So I would certainly hope there is no detrimental effect, and I hope it continues that pathway of encouraging integration across Government, without punishing particular forms of vertical expertise or application that are also required.

Q264 **Fabian Hamilton:** Do you think there is a risk that the UK focuses too heavily on threats that impact only our national security? Surely that would affect the threats of international terrorism more broadly Isn't a threat to all of us a threat to each of us?

Professor Evans: I will perhaps parry a little. What you have seen consistently is a combination of the two. Yes, you have seen successive Governments, right back to the 1960s, prioritise threat to the UK homeland and British citizens. So there was more investment in countering Northern Ireland-based groups, or groups that were targeting the UK, rather than international terrorist groups that did not. The UK invested more resource combatting 17 November in Greece, because it targeted British personnel and threatened British tourists, than it did on Sendero Luminoso in Peru, which did less targeting of British citizens or officials.

Q265 **Fabian Hamilton:** Sorry to interrupt, but shouldn't we be equally concerned about the attacks on the "Charlie Hebdo" publication as about anything here in the UK? What happens in France could easily happen here.

Professor Evans: Absolutely. On the one hand, prioritisation of UK citizens, as the prime focus, seems reasonable to me. At least, as a UK citizen I would expect that of Government. At the same time, the British Government has invested over many years in that international architecture. It has invested in the capabilities of the International Civil Aviation Organisation; that is not an organisation that trips off the tongue, but it plays a hugely important role in aviation and airport security. The UK invested in that, and that had a beneficial effect for all, not just for the UK.

Some of the capacity-building work that the UK has done will be in countries where there is no prime threat to UK citizens or interests, but there is a net interest. There is a particular area where a threat to one is a threat to all. Often, third countries can be used as pathways or vectors to attack UK interests. We saw that with foreign terrorist fighters; if you did not want to come up on a risk register by flying straight into Birmingham, you would fly to Malta first and then fly to Birmingham, or you would fly somewhere else, such as Latin America, and then fly to the UK.

So all countries are relevant to the threat to the UK. All countries are also relevant to the important principle that it is not all right to threaten, kill or maim civilians in the name of a violent ideology, whatever that violent ideology might be. That is where reasserting the universality of counter-terrorism is always important for the UK Government. It is also a fundamental moral principle.

Fabian Hamilton: Absolutely.

Q266 **Chair:** Is there anything, Professor Evans, that we should have asked you but did not? Or is there anything you might like to add before we wrap up?

Professor Evans: Thank you, Chair. All I would say is that the technology aspect of this is hugely important. That is not just in the context of radicalisation online, and self-radicalisation. It is also about the peer-to-peer ability to share capabilities, and to improve the competence and danger posed by terrorist groups. That is something of live concern to the UK Government and other Governments, but it is something that should be very firmly on our radar.

Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Professor Evans. We will end the session there.