



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Counter-terrorism](#), HC 933

Tuesday 3 February 2015

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Nicola Blackwood, Mr James Clappison, Michael Ellis, Paul Flynn, Mr David Winnick.

Questions 45 – 170

Witnesses: **Sally Evans**, a mother whose son converted to Islam and travelled to Somalia to fight alongside Al Shabaab, and **Micheal Evans**, brother, gave evidence

Q45 Chair: Could I call the Committee to order and ask members to note anything that they wish to declare in respect of matters connected with them that are not already in the Register of Members' Interests?

Can I welcome Sally Evans and Micheal Evans? As the Committee knows, we are revisiting our previous inquiry into counter-terrorism and we have picked one particular aspect of that revisit, which is to look at the foreign fighters who go from the United Kingdom to other countries, to talk to the families and to look at the deradicalisation programmes. Mrs Evans, you of course have talked about the departure of your son, Mr Evans, from the United Kingdom to Somalia. I wonder whether you could tell the Committee to start with, before he left, what kind of young man was he? Was he an ordinary young man with ordinary interests or was he interested in what was happening abroad?

Sally Evans: No, he was a normal teenager, interested in going to the pub on a Saturday night. He was an electrician, which is something he had always wanted to be. He was just a normal teenage lad with his friends.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q46 Chair: Among his friends, obviously some of them used to come to your house.

Sally Evans: Yes, they were all welcome.

Q47 Chair: You met them and they stayed there and communicated with him. Did you suspect any of them were involved in any activities other than what we would describe as normal activities?

Micheal Evans: No.

Sally Evans: No. None of the friends that came to the house were like that at all. All his friends that were like that, I never met many of them at all, only one of them I met. The rest of them, I never met any of them.

Q48 Chair: Micheal, you are quite close in age to Thomas. What is the age difference between the two of you?

Micheal Evans: Two years.

Q49 Chair: Did you suspect before he finally left that there was a problem with the people he met and the people he communicated with?

Micheal Evans: There was a couple I had suspicions about, but never to the extent that I could see what he was going to do, no.

Q50 Chair: Mrs Evans, you have talked about a sudden decision on Thomas's part to become a Muslim and to go to a particular mosque in High Wycombe. When did that happen? When did he decide to change his religion?

Sally Evans: That was in 2009 he started practising to be a Muslim. Initially I was quite happy with it. I had no reservations at all. He had done one or two things that I was not proud of, so I was quite happy for him to follow Islam if that is what he wanted. Initially, he was good.

Micheal Evans: They really sorted him out, yes.

Sally Evans: Yes, it was really good for him, but then slowly he started to drift down a path that was not right and I thought, "This is not how you should be a Muslim," and we had many heated debates over it.

Q51 Chair: What was the path that he was drifting down that you were concerned about?

Sally Evans: What, with regards to being a Muslim?

Chair: Yes.

Sally Evans: It was his views. It was things like he would not use my pots and pans for his food, he would not eat my food. I had to buy him his own saucepan to cook his boiled eggs that he would eat, because he would not eat out of my saucepans. He had his own

bowls to use. He did not like me listening to music in the house. At Christmas, when we had the Christmas tree up, he would not even walk in the front room where the Christmas tree is, he would just stand in the doorway.

Q52 Chair: As far as you are concerned, other Muslims would have no problem in doing any of those things.

Sally Evans: I had never met another Muslim that would be that strict, no.

Q53 Chair: What do you think the tipping point was from being the son that you had known all your life and the brother that you had known, in which he decided he was going to go and fight abroad? When did you first find out about that and what was your reaction?

Micheal Evans: When he had already gone, wasn't it?

Sally Evans: Yes. We did not know until he had gone.

Chair: Sorry, you need to repeat that. The acoustics, I am afraid, are very bad.

Micheal Evans: We only found out after he had left for Egypt.

Sally Evans: Initially he went to travel to Kenya. He told us he was going there to start a new life and to live as a Muslim, as he would be able to follow Islam better living in Kenya. I was not happy about it, but he was 21 and I could not stop him, so he went. Then obviously he was stopped at the airport by the police and then he came back home.

Q54 Chair: Did the police contact you and tell you that he was stopped?

Sally Evans: No.

Micheal Evans: No.

Chair: They didn't?

Micheal Evans: No.

Sally Evans: No. We had no contact from the police at all. I wish that they had contacted us. I know he was 21, but as his mother and his brother, we could have helped them maybe, or if they had told us their concerns, we could have acted on it. We could have worked with them to help save Thomas.

Q55 Chair: He just came back from the airport?

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q56 Chair: Is it he, Micheal, who said that the police had turned him back?

Micheal Evans: Yes. He said he was about to board the plane and he was stopped at the gate, they asked for his passport and detained him then. They apparently questioned him for a few hours.

Q57 Chair: Then what happened after that? How long did he stay with you after his return from the airport before he left for Egypt?

Sally Evans: He was at home for four months with us. He went back to his old job, he settled down. I thought he had settled down and he had put all this travelling behind him, because he had at first, hadn't he?

Micheal Evans: Yes, because he was on about moving to Burnley.

Sally Evans: Yes, he was going to go to Burnley, buy a house and settle up there. He used to talk about us coming up for a weekend with him. Then all of a sudden it came out of the blue that he was going to go to Egypt to study Arabic, as he would learn it better if he was living there. He decided to do a car boot—and I helped him do this car boot—to sell off things that teenage lads have like DVDs, CDs, clothing and he got the money together to go and buy his ticket to go to Egypt.

Q58 Chair: It was not Burnley he was going to, it was Egypt?

Sally Evans: No, no. He decided, no, he wasn't going. That all went by the bye.

Q59 Chair: When did he tell you that he was going to Egypt, after he had gone or when he finished—

Sally Evans: No, it was about two weeks before he went he said that he was going to go to Egypt.

Q60 Chair: What did you say about that?

Sally Evans: Initially, I was relieved, because he said he was going for six months to learn the language. Initially, I thought, "Okay. If that's what you really want to do, you need to learn Arabic, then that's fine". He did tell me he was coming home.

Micheal Evans: Yes, because when he went to Kenya he didn't have a return flight booked. For us, that was it, we wouldn't see him again. But with Egypt, it wasn't as bad, because he had that return flight and we thought he was definitely coming home.

Q61 Chair: When did you find out he was not coming home?

Sally Evans: In the August, we had a visit from the police to tell us of Thomas's travels, where he had been and that they had lost contact with him. Then we had one phone call from him in—no, we had an e-mail from him at the beginning of September to say that he was well.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Then we never heard no more from him until the following January.

Q62 Chair: This is January which year?

Sally Evans: 2012. We heard from him then.

Q63 Chair: Then what did you hear from him? What did he say to you then?

Sally Evans: He rung up then and he told us that he was in Somalia and that he had joined Al Shabaab and not to worry.

Q64 Chair: What did you feel about that? Did you know what Al Shabaab was when he told you?

Sally Evans: In all honesty, at that point, no, I did not really know what Al Shabaab was. I do now, but I did not then.

Q65 Chair: Did you have any contact with the police from the time they told you of his travel plans and the time he rang and said he was now a member of Al Shabaab?

Sally Evans: We reported him as a missing person in the October, but then when he didn't get the flight back in December—I was a little bit shocked about that—we were just told, "Oh, he's actually a missing person now." I was a bit taken aback by that, because I already thought we had reported him as a missing person.

Micheal Evans: Yes. Apparently he was only considered missing when he didn't board his flight. That is what we were told.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Q66 Chair: Tell the Committee—some of us are parents, so we would know about teenage children; some of us do not have teenage children—for you, what kind of a shock was it to suddenly realise that your teenage son eventually went off to fight for a terrorist organisation in Africa? How did you cope with that?

Sally Evans: That was the biggest shock in the world. How did I cope with it? I think I denied it for a while to myself, but slowly the realism of the situation crept up on me and I realised where he was and who he was with and the type of people he was with.

Q67 Chair: You, Micheal, a brother who you had lived all your life with suddenly had gone abroad to fight for a terrorist organisation. Do you ask the question why and how this happened? Who do you blame for this? Where do you think he was suddenly turned from being the brother that you always knew to somebody who wanted to go and fight for a terrorist organisation?

Micheal Evans: I see it as the change of mosque. When he changed mosque, the way he practised Islam changed completely. Every night he was at home would be an argument, any discussion we would have with him we'd be called racist. We were told numerous times we were going to burn in hell because we are not Muslims.

Sally Evans: That is a view he still holds today.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q68 Chair: Do you know where he is now today? Do you have an idea?

Sally Evans: All I know is he is in Somalia.

Q69 Chair: You are on record as saying, I think, Mrs Evans, that you would rather he was home behind bars than at risk of dying, to quote you, "Because of some warped ideology".

Sally Evans: Yes.

Chair: Is that still your view—that you would wish he was here in prison?

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Yes, because then at least I know he would be safe.

Q70 Mr Winnick: First of all, Mrs Evans, I am sure the same view is shared by other colleagues in congratulating you on your courage in making this public. It will be very useful, I am sure, for other parents who may well feel that their children are going in the same direction.

When he converted to Islam, was it immediately that he adopted a fundamentalist line?

Sally Evans: No, it was not. It was gradual. It was, as Micheal said, he changed the mosque that he was going to, and he had also been going to a gym where there was quite a lot of Muslims that used to meet together and work out together. Whether the change of mosque was influenced by them, I don't know.

Q71 Mr Winnick: Because people do convert to religions—Christianity, Judaism and certainly Islam—without the slightest wish to do harm to anybody. Indeed, in very many cases, it is the very opposite. But as I understand the position, he then went to a prayer centre. That particular prayer centre, would you say it had people in it that could have influenced him along the path that he took?

Micheal Evans: Definitely, yes.

Sally Evans: Definitely, yes.

Q72 Mr Winnick: You realised after a short while that his conversion was becoming extremist?

Sally Evans: Initially when he became a Muslim he was fine, and I was quite happy for him to follow that path, but it was about a year after that he started to show signs that something was not right, the way that he was practising it, and then it became more intense as time went on.

Q73 Mr Winnick: Was he in employment at that stage?

Sally Evans: He was working with an electrician initially. He did his apprenticeship with him. That electrician had to let him go because of his appearance. Then he had a job working with a Muslim guy who was running an electrician company.

Q74 Mr Winnick: As you were saying to the Chair in answer to his question, he tried to convert you on the basis that if you did not, you would burn in hell.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Mr Winnick: Thank you very much.

Sally Evans: He still holds that view today.

Mr Winnick: Given what he is doing, one is hardly surprised. It is the view, of course, of fanatics that everyone will burn in hell unless they accept their interpretation of Islam or some other religion, as the case may be.

Q75 Tim Loughton: Mrs Evans, was he a person who had faith before? Was he interested in religion? Did he go to church? Are you a particularly religious family or not?

Sally Evans: No, we are not a particularly religious family, no, no.

Micheal Evans: No.

Q76 Tim Loughton: This absolutely came out of nowhere, that he should have an interest in a faith in this case?

Sally Evans: Yes. I think he was looking for something in his life, and obviously Islam at that time filled that gap for him.

Q77 Tim Loughton: He was looking for something in his life. Was he a bit of a loner?

Micheal Evans: No.

Q78 Tim Loughton: Did he have a big circle of friends? Was he a very sociable person? How would you—

Sally Evans: He was a sociable person. He had quite a big group—

Micheal Evans: Yes. He was always sociable, yes.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Q79 Tim Loughton: You would have never singled him out as somebody who might go off and do something odd as teenager?

Sally Evans: Never, never. No, no, he was just a normal teenage lad.

Q80 Tim Loughton: That is the frightening thing about it—I have three teenagers as well—that it can come out of nowhere.

Sally Evans: Out of nowhere, yes.

Q81 Tim Loughton: When he started arguing with you—you said you had lots of heated debates at home—what was his argument for why it was so important to be a Muslim and do what he was doing? What did he object to?

Sally Evans: Everything.

Micheal Evans: Yes. If we could have an argument over it, we would, any little thing, be it listening—

Tim Loughton: That sounds like a normal teenager, but in this case—

Micheal Evans: Yes, yes, but just listening to music, he would have a go at us for listening to music or watching TV.

Q82 Tim Loughton: Because?

Sally Evans: It was haram, as he used to say.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Everything was haram.

Q83 Tim Loughton: It was all sort of corrupt western ways and all this?

Sally Evans: Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: For instance, if I was cooking bacon on a Saturday morning, which I normally do, towards the end he would get very cross. He would come down and he would throw open all the windows and the back door because the house was stinking because we were cooking bacon.

Q84 Tim Loughton: One can almost understand that—you might get that from a militant vegetarian as well as somebody who objects because it is clearly a part of that religious faith—but I am trying to get to the bottom of what other things he objected to that were sufficient for him to ultimately take up arms against it. What was he against? Because one can see somebody can convert to Islam, any religion, because they want to progress their lives in a certain way, they want to believe in faith for positive reasons. You can why he wanted to go and learn Arabic—a lot of people do that—but at what point does an interest in something positive turn into a much more militant and destructive pursuit of something clearly negative, so that you, us, become the enemy, that you have to go the extremes of taking arms against? That is what I think we are trying to understand, which is clearly difficult for you to understand how it happened.

Sally Evans: It is, because I would like to know what that point was that he crossed that made him turn into what he became.

Q85 Tim Loughton: Was he coming back from the trips to the mosque and to the gym fired up, sort of saying, “And another thing: music is evil,” or, “Television is evil,” or, whatever your lifestyle is, “It’s all evil”? Were you noticing a gradual effect of things that were becoming very negative for him that needed to be opposed and for him to berate?

Micheal Evans: Yes, it was. Yes, in hindsight you look back and it was all these small things that add up that at the time you would not have noticed. A big tipping point was when he did a charity trip to Palestine called Road to Hope, and after coming back from

that, he was quite angry at everything, saying how they were oppressed. He did not like British and American involvement in the Middle East, saying how we are just oppressing and killing innocent people. He was very against any Western military.

Q86 Tim Loughton: But again, you can see that as a lot of people may take that view. The vast majority of people do not end up in these circumstances. Do you think he was being spoon-fed—

Micheal Evans: Oh, he was being brainwashed, without a doubt.

Tim Loughton—“This week you must challenge this. Next week you must challenge that,” or whatever, by people who gradually, almost like a drug supplier to a junkie, kept pushing away?

Sally Evans: Yes, he was brainwashed, without a doubt. Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes, it was like they just poisoned his mind. Yes.

Q87 Chair: Mrs Evans, do you feel let down by the authorities? You seem to have had no support whatsoever from any group or any people in authority to help you through what must be the most extraordinary events of your life. Do you think more should have been done to assist you by the police or some other organisation? Of course, Parliament hears a lot about the amount of money that has been spent on counter-terrorism, but was any help given to you? It appears that nobody has been supporting you through this.

Sally Evans: No. I understand that the police have a job to do and they were doing their job, but we were left to get on with it, weren't we?

Micheal Evans: Yes, definitely.

Sally Evans: I did find a helpline at the time of the Olympics. I did find a helpline that was prepared to take me on and give me some support, but basically I had to find that for myself and we were left on our own. You have no support.

Micheal Evans: No. A lot of the times my mum would phone a helpline and because she was not a Muslim, they would not really want to speak to her. At some point we even found a helpline that said if we became Muslims we would understand and accept what he is doing.

Q88 Chair: For example, the Hasaniya Centre in North Kensington—which you may or may not know about—is run by a woman to help families, but they are specifically to help Muslim families cope with that. Do you feel that there is a gap here? There are obviously, as we know, 500 British people now fighting in countries abroad, so you are not the only family involved. Do you think there ought to be some kind of assistance to you to help you through this situation so you can talk to other families who have been through it themselves?

Sally Evans: Yes. I feel we fell between the cracks, because we're not Muslim and so there was nowhere for us to go.

Micheal Evans: It was just frustrating, because I've lost my brother. Religion shouldn't come into it: it shouldn't be that because we're not Muslim, no one should help us. We're all going through the same thing and religion shouldn't come into it in the slightest; it's just we need help.

Q89 Nicola Blackwood: I would like to thank you for your evidence today. It is very moving and very helpful for the Committee.

I just wanted to try to understand the timeline of what happened a little bit more. I think your son tried to go to Kenya in February 2011. When did he go to Palestine?

Micheal Evans: That was 2010 or something.

Sally Evans: Yes, that would be.

Micheal Evans: Yes, 2010. I can't remember what time though.

Sally Evans: That was late in the year, because he came back, I think it was, in November.

Q90 Nicola Blackwood: About November 2010?

Sally Evans: Yes, about six weeks they were doing that trip for.

Q91 Nicola Blackwood: When did he go to Egypt?

Sally Evans: In June 2011.

Q92 Nicola Blackwood: In February 2011 he was stopped by counter-terror police at Heathrow and they contacted you. Did they contact—

Sally Evans: No, they did not.

Micheal Evans: No, no contact.

Nicola Blackwood: They did not contact you?

Sally Evans: No.

Q93 Nicola Blackwood: They knew that this had happened and they did not contact you. Are you aware of any intervention that was put in place through Channel or any of the other Prevent strategies?

Sally Evans: As far as I'm aware, there was nothing at all.

Micheal Evans: No, and it's frustrating, because they obviously had suspicions about him, they stopped him flying to Kenya. For him to go to the airport a few months later and get on a plane to Egypt, no questions asked, it just seems like there is a failure somewhere. Why was he not on some kind of blacklist or the no-fly list, because they obviously had concerns about him? It seems like someone made a mistake somewhere.

Sally Evans: There was a massive failure somewhere. I feel that we have been let down, that they let him fly.

Q94 Nicola Blackwood: You were dealing with a situation where you had a son who had converted in a normal way to Islam and then was progressively, under your roof, being radicalised.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Q95 Nicola Blackwood: But did you feel like you were able to access any information about this? Did you feel worried at any point and try to find any information about what was happening?

Sally Evans: Though he was being changed, we didn't realise to the extent that he was being changed.

Micheal Evans: No.

Sally Evans: No, I would never have—

Micheal Evans: It's all in hindsight, when you look back. As it is happening, it is kind of hard. You couldn't really see where it was heading.

Q96 Nicola Blackwood: The police and others are now appealing to mothers who may be in a similar position to you and asking them to come forward to speak to their children, but also come forward with evidence. What sort of information and in what places do you think it would be helpful to put that information, so that they can be made aware of the risks and the signs and the indicators that you can only see in hindsight, because you were not given that information?

Sally Evans: In colleges, within the mosque it should be. It should be out everywhere. It should be easily obtainable, that you can see it, so that people know that if there is a problem, that is where you can go to get help, because if I had known there was somewhere, I could have gone to get help, I would have done that.

Q97 Nicola Blackwood: But your impression at the moment, do you think that there is more information out there now than there was when you were going through this in 2011, 2012, or do you think that it is still largely not there for people like yourself?

Micheal Evans: It's not there.

Sally Evans: I would still say it is not publicised very much. I have heard of this programme, the Channel programme, but I don't know how to get in touch with them. I would not know how to contact them, but it should be contactable.

Q98 Nicola Blackwood: Are you aware of any community groups working in your area to try to prevent radicalisation, to try to support young Muslims in going in the right direction? No.

Sally Evans: No. The only group that I know is the Quilliam Foundation, but other than that, no.

Q99 Mr Clappison: Just a quick question on the back of that. You mentioned that he moved from one mosque to another mosque. Did you approach either of the mosques to discuss concerns that you had about the possible direction he was going in or that his faith was going in?

Sally Evans: To be honest, no, I didn't, because I didn't realise to the extent he was changing. I didn't realise how much he had been brainwashed until it was too late. Had I known, yes, I would have been banging on their door.

Q100 Paul Flynn: Have you had any indication of how the authorities identified your son and stopped him the first time, but failed to stop him the second time?

Micheal Evans: No.

Sally Evans: No.

Micheal Evans: That is what we want to know. That is the one thing we wanted answered, why he was allowed to fly the second time.

Q101 Paul Flynn: Is there any information of others in the mosque or the prayer centre who have also gone to Somalia or is he the only one?

Micheal Evans: Not Somalia, but some have gone to Syria from the same mosque.

Q102 Chair: In terms of where you are today, I understand that he has telephoned you to say that he is married. Is that correct?

Sally Evans: Yes, he did. That was a Christmas present not this year, the year before.

Q103 Chair: To someone in Somalia?

Sally Evans: Yes, to a young girl.

Q104 Chair: But you do not know anything about her?

Sally Evans: All I know is that she was either 13 or 14 when he married her. That was all. Recently, we have contact with her, asking for money.

Q105 Chair: Sorry, that she was 13 or 14?

Sally Evans: Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q106 Chair: Is this what he told you?

Sally Evans: Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q107 Chair: When you said in answer to Nicola Blackwood you felt let down, your view is that if he had been stopped boarding the flight to Egypt, he would still be in this country?

Sally Evans: Yes.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Q108 Chair: If his passport had been taken away from him the first time, rather than given back to him, he would obviously still be in this country, or at least it is more likely that he would be in the country.

Sally Evans: He would have still been in this country or it would have made it more difficult for him to leave without a passport.

Q109 Michael Ellis: Do you think that this happened to your son—that he was able to travel to become a foreign fighter—because the Government had insufficient powers at its disposal to stop him from going or do you think it was just a question of not taking action when action could have been taken?

Sally Evans: I think it was a case of not taking action when it could have been taken, because I cannot understand why he was stopped flying to Kenya and then four months later he was allowed to fly to Egypt. I have been told by the police that that is a known route to travel to Africa, so—

Q110 Michael Ellis: Is it because it was picked up by the police and security apparatus that he intended to travel the first time and the police stopped him because they knew it was going to happen, but then they took their eye off the ball and did not know that he was going to travel a second time, or do you think it is the fact that they did know and chose not to stop him?

Micheal Evans: They must have known.

Q111 Michael Ellis: Why must they have known?

Micheal Evans: They knew the first time. They would not have just stopped watching or stopped looking at him. He didn't change. If anything, after that he became more extreme in his views—more anti-west, more like that to everything. He was just so angry at everything in the UK and the Government, so—

Sally Evans: But when the police came to us, it was them who told us of Thomas's journey.

Micheal Evans: Yes, they told us what countries he had been travelling through.

Q112 Michael Ellis: They knew more than you did?

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Yes. They knew what I did not even know at that point, that he was no longer in Egypt. As far as I was aware, he was still in Egypt.

Q113 Michael Ellis: What mechanisms was he using that you think the Government—or the police, more accurately—could have been keeping an eye on him through? Was it the computer, was it telephones, was it written material coming through the post? Are you aware of that?

Micheal Evans: It was computer mainly, wasn't it? Yes.

Sally Evans: It was mainly his computer, yes.

Q114 Michael Ellis: Almost all of it the computer?

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Q115 Michael Ellis: The computer was in the home that you shared?

Sally Evans: Yes. The police did take the computer, but Thomas had wiped it all.

Q116 Chair: One of his earlier acquaintances was somebody who was known as Donald Stewart-Whyte.

Sally Evans: Yes.

Q117 Chair: Had you ever met Donald Stewart-Whyte?

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Sally Evans: Yes, I had. Yes, I was cooking dinner one evening when Thomas came home with him and brought Don, as we called him. He sat on the floor in my kitchen while I cooked our dinner that evening while Thomas had a shower and I had a chat with him. He seemed like a very nice guy and Thomas said afterwards that he had converted to Islam and he had brought him to introduce me to him, to meet him. Then he said, "Oh, and by the way, Mum, he's been in prison on terrorist charges," which I was quite shocked about.

Q118 Chair: This was quite a while ago, was it?

Sally Evans: Yes, that would have been. That was quite a while ago.

Q119 Chair: If he was listening to you now, what would you be saying to him, Mrs Evans?

Sally Evans: To Thomas?

Chair: Yes.

Sally Evans: Come home and face the consequences of what you have done. Just come back.

Chair: Micheal?

Micheal Evans: Yes, just come home. Stop. You know, he's been brainwashed and it's just trying to get that through to him. He's fighting for some warped ideology in a part of the world he has no right to be in.

Sally Evans: And he could do more for Islam here. He could help families here that need help.

Q120 Chair: To other families, and other mothers and fathers in a similar position to you—who you did not meet, obviously, because you did not know they existed—what would you be saying to them in circumstances similar to yours? Those who may watch this broadcast and may listen to your evidence, and they see the kinds of changes that you have described today, really dramatic changes in the lives of their children, what would be your advice to them?

Sally Evans: Go and get help. Go and get help for your son. Don't let him go. Don't lose your son like I have lost mine—and like you've lost your brother.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Chair: Micheal?

Micheal Evans: Just don't ignore all these small changes, because over the long term it adds up to quite an extreme change, and when you're at that point, I think it's hard to get them back. You need to intervene early, just to let them know that they're being brainwashed, they're being poisoned.

Sally Evans: With hindsight, I would have approached the mosque sooner. I haven't approached the mosque, but I would have gone and spoke to them to see what help they could have offered us to save Thomas.

Q121 Chair: Mrs Evans, Mr Evans, you have been two of the most courageous witnesses that we have had before our Committee. It must be very difficult for you to recount this story to us today. I can assure you that everything that you have said we have noted very carefully and will be reflected in our report.

Sally Evans: Thank you very much for listening to us.

Micheal Evans: Yes.

Chair: If there is anything else you want to add, please write to me with any information that you have. I hope very much that you will keep your hope and your faith and that you will see Thomas again.

Sally Evans: Thank you very much.

Micheal Evans: Thank you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr Usama Hasan**, Senior Researcher, Quilliam Foundation, and **Dr Erin Saltman**, Senior Researcher, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, gave evidence

Q122 Chair: Dr Hasan, Dr Saltman, thank you very much for giving for evidence. I apologise for keeping you waiting. There was a vote in the House and we had to attend.

Both of you are well known nationally and internationally as people who are concerned with deradicalisation. You, Dr Hasan, have an extraordinary back story, if I might put it like that, where you yourself were radicalised while at university and then went on to be are the forefront of trying to challenge those who are radicalised. I want to start with you, if I may, not to talk necessarily about your life, but specifically about what I and others describe as the tipping point. What is the point where people go from being law-abiding, happy young men like Thomas Evans and suddenly become radicals and they want to go abroad and fight and kill? Where is that tipping point and how can we assess it and recognise it?

Dr Hasan: I would not say there is a tipping point. It is often a gradual progression that seems fairly sensible or logical at the time. It can happen very quickly, so to outsiders it looks like a sudden change, it is a very quick process of radicalisation or extremism. But it is all down to ideology—extreme ideology; specifically in this case of wanting to live in a pure Islamic state of some type; of believing that Muslims cannot live in non-Islamic states or with non-Muslims and must have some kind of pure Islamic state where a particular interpretation of sharia is enforced and implemented. That is what changes people who are otherwise peaceful. I was never aggressive or wanting to fight or anything like that at school, but I was willing to fight and die for the idea—a very powerful idea and ideology—that I needed to live in a pure Islamic state and help create that in the world.

Q123 Chair: Indeed. You were radicalised at university, is that right?

Dr Hasan: No, it started before that, from probably about the age of 12, 13, possibly even earlier, with intense Islamic activity, devout religious activity, combined—

Q124 Chair: In the mosque or in the madrasa or where?

Dr Hasan: Mosque, home and also community organisations.

Chair: Really?

Dr Hasan: Yes, that were promoting this kind of “us versus them” attitude and mentality to the world—“It’s Muslim versus non-Muslim and we have to defend our brothers and sisters everywhere.”

Q125 Chair: Are these ordinary community organisations that we, as Members of Parliament, might come across in our constituencies, or are they the ones that are radicalised, the ones we know about that get into the front page of newspapers or on the 10 o’clock news?

Dr Hasan: I think it is important to understand that what we often call Islamists or political Islam—what I call over-political Islam—a large part of it was rooted in the 20th

century anti-colonial and post-colonial movement. It was to do with the encounter of the Islamic world with modernity, but also with centuries of European colonialisation and bound up with independence struggles in the 20th century. A lot of that thinking has seeped into the general Muslim discourse worldwide. There are, of course, particular Muslim groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami and the Salafi groups. I was one of the leaders of the main Salafi movements in this country, which helped promote these ideas. But that has seeped into Muslim consciousness worldwide, so even if people are not members of those groups, they are familiar with the ideas and they hear them regularly.

Q126 Chair: Dr Saltman, you have done a lot of research through Quilliam and other organisations on counter-radicalism. If I was to name—and the evidence that we have received in previous reports—the places where people are radicalised, obviously what Dr Hasan has said, community organisations would be one of them. I would then say the mosque, the internet and one-to-one activity. What would you put as your top three, if I could put it crudely like that, places where people are radicalised at the moment in Britain?

Dr Saltman: I think that it is important to first recognise that where perhaps we saw cases in the UK of mosques having higher levels of radicalisation, that is probably less the case now. Religious communities are highly sensitive about that subject matter, and when we look at profiles of foreign fighters, they know less about the religion in its more mosque-related form. Right now, we still see very active groups operating within universities, because this is an age profile that is targeted. There is quite a lot of content online. However, the online space is a secondary socialiser, so someone has to be introduced to it. People do not accidentally come on to these groups or sites. This is something you have to seek out and know where to find. I would also add to that list that we still have quite an issue within the prison system, where not only are others vulnerable to being radicalised in prison, but we are not working very well. We need to restructure some of the mentoring so that we have a more robust and centralised format for that.

Q127 Chair: What you are saying to this Committee is that when people are arrested for being involved in these activities and sent to prison, it increases their radicalisation unless they are dealt with in a particular way?

Dr Saltman: Not only that individual, but others that are incarcerated for completely non-extremist related offences. They are vulnerable to being radicalised because of the intense “in” and “out” group psychological format of the prison system. The UK and France are leading examples where we have cases where individuals were not extremist before prison and were radicalised within prison.

Q128 Chair: If you look at a profile, Dr Hasan, and particularly with reference to what has happened in Paris and the two Kouachi brothers and their whole life and how they came to a point where suddenly they became people who terrorised fellow citizens in France, is there a profile that we can look to, where we can prevent radicalisation? The Evans family, who are

sitting at the back in the Gallery, talked about the small changes in people's lives, not recognising them as they were going on, but at the end you look back and you think, "Oh, my goodness. This is what was going to happen." Is there a profile for those who suddenly go over, from reading about Islam and then becoming radicalised and suddenly then becoming killers?

Dr Hasan: There is no single profile, because terrorists have come from a large variety of socio-economic backgrounds and intellectual and academic achievements. I think it is fair to say the attackers in Paris were from largely broken homes and marginalised communities. That is a very common pattern, but we also get university graduates and academic leaders, intellectuals, where the pull is more intellectual; it is ideological. It is a very powerful ideology that says we cannot live in the west or accept the modern world with the UN and everything else; we have to recreate our kind of medieval, pure Islamic state. There is no one profile.

In terms of the small changes in lifestyle at home, I should mention that much of what we heard in the earlier session is what we would call social conservatism and non-violent extremism. Those attitudes are very common right across many devout Muslim groups—for example, not listening to music or avoiding TV or film and so on. In terms of the ideology—of wanting to fight the west or non-Muslim states—that is the crucial ideological difference.

Q129 Chair: Dr Hasan, until you came to give evidence today, I and others were saying quite specifically, "This is only a very small minority of people in a small minority of community organisations dealing with this ideology." Are you telling this Committee that it is much wider than Parliament and the public realise? You are talking about affecting community groups and others. Is it a much wider issue?

Dr Hasan: I would liken it to the problem with the IRA or the problem in Northern Ireland in the 1970s onward, where the—

Q130 Chair: That is a whole community supporting some of the activities of the IRA. Is that what you are saying has happened with the Muslim community?

Dr Hasan: No, what I am saying is there was wide support, as we know from our Irish friends, in sections of Irish communities because of deep historic grievances or political reasons. There was widespread support or sympathy, if not for the tactics, in terms of terrorist attacks, but certainly for the cause, and a very strong anti-British sentiment. What I am saying is that there is something operating in Muslim communities here and worldwide, in terms of an anti-colonial, anti-western idea that Muslims have been victimised. Of course there are groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami, the Salafi organisation, which I was part of.

Q131 Chair: But they are not banned. Hizb ut-Tahrir is still not banned.

Dr Hasan: None of these groups are banned, but from the 1980s and 1990s in this country we have literally seen one or two generations—tens of thousands of British Muslims like myself—who have been through these organisations and are very familiar with all of this discourse. Of course the vast majority do not become terrorists, but there is still some sympathy for some of those actions.

Q132 Chair: Thank you. Finally for you, Dr Saltman, what is the counter-radicalisation narrative? We cannot obviously allow this to continue. There has to be a fight-back, otherwise what happened in Paris will happen more often in other countries. What is the way that we counter this? What is the plan?

Dr Saltman: We talk about it both on and offline, but counter-speech is what we would refer to it online. If we can compare successful models when we look at more broad online racism or sexism, you have a very natural community that very quickly counters any sort of activity, both on and offline, when sexist comments are made or racist comments or homophobic comments. We do not have that natural reaction happening with extremist content, sometimes for obvious reasons—because Muslim community members do not want to come forward and counter that. As Dr Hasan was saying, maybe there is some natural pushback and people do not want to take a strong stance because they do not want to put their face out on a limb, but what we need is to lower the threshold and accessibility to counter-speech. That can happen from different ways. It is most successful when it is civil society-led, but Government supported. There are different infrastructures, so that the private sector works well in supporting counter-speech, civil society actors are brought together to make that more robust. That needs to be reflected both on and offline, so we are seeing some—

Q133 Chair: It has to be community-led, hasn't it, in the end?

Dr Saltman: It should be community-led, because in essence, extremist ideologies are grassroots movements and so having a nation state tackle that with its own voice, that is not a credible voice for that.

Q134 Michael Ellis: Dr Saltman, I think the military made an announcement recently that they were going to set up a specialist military cyber unit. Do you think that is a good idea and do you think that could potentially counter some of the hate speech that we see online? It would be almost civilian-led, in the sense that people presumably would not know who is behind the social media content, but countering it, and as you have said, that already happens with the online community with homophobic speech or hate speech of other sorts, sexism and racism. If there was someone or an entity doing that like this military cyber unit, do you think that is a good idea?

Dr Saltman: I think that having Government security facets engage more with the online resources available to them is good with regards to targeted monitoring and surveillance. When it comes to counter-speech, we already have the example of the United States

Department with their “Think Again Turn Away” campaign strategy, where they are actively engaging online.

Q135 Michael Ellis: Does it work?

Dr Saltman: That has been considered relatively unsuccessful, in that whether or not you get 1,000 plus views on a YouTube video, it is highly unlikely that you are hitting your target audience. The idea of credible voices, it is about who is disseminating the message, what is the message and what is the platform.

Q136 Michael Ellis: Was the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, correct when he said recently something along the lines that the people who are being radicalised are effectively socially inadequate and that is the reason why? You have talked about the online activity being secondary. As I think you have rightly said, someone would have to first of all be at least quasi-radicalised before they go online to find these things, so it is not happening online, people are not stumbling across this stuff. That is just secondary to that. Is that a fair characterisation or would you disagree with it?

Dr Saltman: It is not fair to say that these individuals are socially inadequate. As the people presenting evidence before said, they had what they would consider a completely normal, stereotypical son. In lots of the cases that we look at of returnees or individuals that have gone off, they range. Some of them are highly educated. What we see as motivation is a lot of these individuals feel that they are taking part in a humanitarian cause and a lot of times the ideology comes in secondarily, so we have individuals that are feeling very passionately and sometimes are highly educating themselves through media and various propaganda networks about this cause.

Q137 Michael Ellis: Some have been medically qualified, haven't they, or there have been some reports of quite high academic qualifications in some of the individuals?

Finally from me, on the issue of the prisons, I noticed what you said about it not being just those who are in prison because of terrorist-related offences; it is those who may be in prison for burglaries or thefts or any number of matters completely unrelated to this issue, but while in prison, they are socialising with those who are radicalising them. Is that a fair characterisation?

Dr Saltman: Yes, that is completely fair. We have cases of lone wolf attackers, as we would term them, that have come out of the prison system and did not have these trends beforehand and came out with this ideology from that setting.

Q138 Michael Ellis: Dr Hasan, how would we stop that? If you were in charge, how would you recommend the prison system stop that sort of thing from going on?

Dr Hasan: You would monitor far more carefully. You would also put in place barriers sometimes. We know of dangerous convicted terrorists who have radicalised dozens of others. We have spoken to NOMS about this in the past and they said for people to mix with the general public, perhaps the terrorists will become deradicalised, but of course it is equally likely the other way—or perhaps far more likely the other way—so it has to be handled very carefully. If there are indications of a problem here, then we need trained counsellors, chaplains, imams perhaps, or people who are experts in deradicalisation to come in and talk to those prisoners and to help engage with their ideas to turn them away from extremism and terrorism.

Q139 Michael Ellis: I think there are already chaplains and imams within the prison system, but you would say that is not currently working. Whatever is happening now, it is not enough?

Dr Hasan: What we need is more expertise for frontline workers, not only in prisons, the chaplains, imams, but also teachers and other frontline workers around society, but specifically in prisons. I am aware that many of the people who work there, maybe in pastoral counselling cases, they are not equipped to deal with specific extremist terrorist ideology.

Q140 Michael Ellis: Just a final thing from me: you have talked about your own experience; what are the mechanisms that are being used to get to these young people to radicalise them? Is there a particular route that is being used in terms of what is being said to them to turn them against Western society? Is there any one particular thing, or a couple of particular things, being used? Is it, for example, the Middle East issue? Is it, as you have indicated, the British colonial history? Is it a combination of lots of different things? What would say it is? What is hitting these young people and making them turn that way?

Dr Hasan: It is a combination of extremist interpretation of Islam, which is divided into an “us versus them” conflict worldwide, if you like, and the picking on specific grievances around the Middle East, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, or other hotspots like Bosnia, Cashmere, Chechnya and now Iraq and Syria, plus also a warped reading of history and politics, where everything that fits an “us versus them” narrative of the west versus Islam is channelled that way, and other cases where Muslims are fighting each other are ignored, for example.

There is also the exploitation of the feeling of modularisation—of people experiencing racism, for example. One of the reasons I and colleagues were involved with these groups when we were younger was a reaction to facing racism here in Britain in the 1980s, and we know that that factor plays into some of the French terrorists.

Q141 Chair: Dr Saltman, can we just be clear what you said in answer to Mr Ellis? The Mayor of London said that he made his statements based on MI5 reports, intelligence reports on the profiling of jihadists—that they are tortured, very badly-adjusted in their relations with women, their feeling of being a failure and that the world is against them and they were

watching too much pornography. In all the research that you have done—and you have done a post-doctoral thesis on this—have you come across any evidence to support what was said by the Mayor?

Dr Saltman: First of all, we could profile a lot of people that were pornography watchers that had isolated upbringings and certain profiles and the vast majority of them are not foreign fighters or terrorists.

Secondly, we also have an increasing number of women that are going out as well that are radicalising and joining Syria and Iraq and IS efforts, so we cannot make that profile. Speaking with mentors that are mentoring individuals that have been caught at the border and refrained from going, as well as a few people that have returned, their analysis of the profiles are very ranged. Some would be more vulnerable and some are considered highly intelligent.

Q142 Chair: You do not recognise this description?

Dr Saltman: I do not recognise that description.

Q143 Nicola Blackwood: Dr Saltman, I have a copy of an article that you wrote in which you said that it is essential that young people are trained with skills that involve critical consumption of online content, building a more natural resistance against online extremist content and propaganda. I do not think anybody would disagree with you, especially given the role that online content is playing in radicalisation and the challenges that there are in trying to tackle that. I am just wondering if you have done any further research in trying to find out exactly how that can best be done and if you are working with any Government organisation or community organisations to try to put that into practice.

Dr Saltman: Yes, we are working to pilot with ISD. We are piloting educational programmes that have currently gone live in Canada already and are being piloted in a couple of other countries. Even within the UK, some of the localised Prevent organisations have already piloted educational videos—I think through HumzaProductions, “Diary of a Bad Boy”, things like this—but this has been piloted on a very localised level at the moment.

What we are meaning is that we are dealing with everyone in this room would be considered a digital migrant. We were not digitally literate—my father had a pager. That is far beyond what we see now where young people are digitally literate and completely native to that sphere. What we need to do is evolve with that within education programmes, so that not just extremist propaganda, but a lot of content that you come across that is shared on a daily basis on platforms, we need to teach the skills to not just take that information in as given, but know how to look at sources, know how to put it in a greater context. This helps with a lot of life skills, but this will also help with fighting extremism.

Q144 Nicola Blackwood: As MPs, something that we will all have experienced is being sent something from the internet as though it is absolute fact, with no contextualisation of it at all, but I am just wondering what your assessment is of how well the Government is doing in trying to put this kind of education into our schools at the moment, because I think this must be one of our most urgent priorities.

Dr Saltman: As I said, this is problematic in sort of the workings of how Prevent is distributed—that we have some localised examples of very innovative and forward-thinking efforts in one local area, but there does not seem to be very good central co-ordination or even discussion within the localities of how well that is doing, and there is no framework for assessing at the moment because of the lack of centrality and talk. It should be within an education framework. There is currently no direct point in the curriculum where that is being addressed, but that should be developed moving forward.

Q145 Nicola Blackwood: You will both have heard Sally and Michael Evans's evidence, in which they said that they had no idea of what was happening to Thomas and no point of contact where they felt they could go for help and information about what was happening to him. Obviously in the Counter-Terrorism Bill that is going through the House there is a proposed general duty for certain bodies to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. That would include local authorities, police, but also schools, colleges and universities. I just wonder what your opinion is of how effective that will be and whether it would have a positive impact in trying to create more consistency across the country in the implementation of Prevent and Contest and so on, or whether it will be having a negative effect in stifling free speech and creating resentment among those who feel like they are alienated already. I wonder, Dr Hasan, what you think.

Dr Hasan: I think that is a very good step, making the Channel programme statutory. It will increase joined-up thinking and across Government Departments as well as the roll-out across the country. In terms of avoiding grievances, that depends on the way it is handled and how it is sensitively rolled out. One issue there is, for example, the police lead on Channel, which is perhaps not the best thing for them to do, because the police should focus on the hard end of counter-terrorism, whereas Prevent and Channel is more a soft end, if you will, of countering extremism, including non-violent extremism. That is better community-led, and also with local bodies. If it is done in the right way, it should not increase resentment. Often if police are involved, in fact that is one way to increase resentment, because people think they are being criminalised; in fact, it is a false accusation you often hear about the Prevent and Channel programme: that it is about criminalising Muslims or spying on Muslims, and so on.

Q146 Mr Winnick: Dr Hasan, I want to ask you one or two questions about your earlier life and views, but reverting for the moment to what the Mayor said, this simplistic explanation he gave, do you consider that a dangerous way of going about matters, simply saying that people, in essence, as far as males are concerned, are attracted to extremism because they do not have girlfriends and this will be a way of finding a sex life? Do you think that is a rather simplistic—and could be dangerous—way of trying to explain extremism?

Dr Hasan: Unfortunately, yes, I think it is. I think it sensationalises and trivialises the issue. There is an issue around sexual frustration of young fundamentalists, and especially in fundamentalist Muslim groups where you have strict gender segregation in the midst of an increasing sexualised society, with its media, so there are those tensions that have been looked at. But that is something that affects a lot of people, and of course many highly intelligent, highly courageous and brave people find a cause to go and fight for abroad in all kinds of conflicts, including these ones.

Also, we have dozens of British Muslims who have died abroad in these conflicts—in fact hundreds, if you go back over the past 25 years of jihadism, from my days. It is very offensive to many of those families, who feel that their sons and daughters went to fight for a noble cause—yes, perhaps they were misled or brainwashed—and they have been killed abroad. For our Mayor, we should be engaging with those communities and families in a sensitive way and not kind of attacking with those off-the-cuff comments.

Q147 Mr Winnick: I think that puts the Mayor in his place.

I want to ask you one or two questions about your earlier life, because you have been perfectly frank and explained the way in which you changed later on. But when you held these extremist views, were they more or less on the same basis as the person who we were talking about earlier, when Mrs Evans was giving evidence about how her son had converted to Islam, then became an extremist and believed that everyone who did not accept his interpretation of Islam would burn in hell? Were you of that view as well?

Dr Hasan: Yes. It was a commonly held view across the different groups and movements that I mentioned earlier and there was intense activity around this on colleges and campuses and other community groups. There was a lot of dogma, a lot of theology involved, as well as political aspirations, if you like, to change the world and to assert the supremacy of Islam. It is a very common mode of thinking.

Q148 Mr Winnick: That is a very frank answer, which we might appreciate. Dr Hasan, correct me if I am wrong, but as I understand the position, your eyes were opened—that is one way of putting it—when the 7/7 atrocities took place: 52 people murdered and many seriously injured who continue to suffer from their limbs being amputated. Was that the tipping point when you realised what you had believed in was simply not only wrong, but outright wicked and criminal or potentially criminal?

Dr Hasan: My journey away from extremism started much earlier. The 7/7 bombings were the last straw in terms of propelling me to be more public in countering this kind of extremism, but I had done a lot of soul searching much earlier.

Mr Winnick: Why? Could you explain why you started your soul searching?

Dr Hasan: Because I had been brought up with basic decent civilised values, both from my devout Muslim upbringing at home and mosque, and also through my British schooling and university days. I had a basic sense of right and wrong and when I went to fight jihad in Afghanistan, I felt that was a noble cause. But after those Mujahedeen

groups fought each other in a vicious civil war between 1992 and 1996, that helped reduce my respect for those groups because I realised they did not practise, really, what they were preaching.

After 9/11, of course, where thousands of innocent civilians were killed, that began a lot of soul searching, in terms of, “We have supported defensive jihads in Afghanistan and Bosnia where the Muslims faced ethnic cleansing and genocide, but we had never supported terrorism or the killing of civilians.” Things like the Madrid bombings, the Beslan massacre in Chechnya with schoolchildren—I had young children at the time when that happened—these were all turning points. I had actually moved away and very clearly criticised and attacked the violent extremists, and received my first death threats for that, before 7/7 happened.

I think it is very important to find these entry points with young people who are on this journey, through family, through their background and through their attachment to Britain, which even the British foreign fighters have. They talk about football and they talk about restaurants and things in Britain. We have to use those entry points and touchstones to attract them back to a balanced and civilised way of dealing with things.

Q149 Mr Winnick: Dr Saltman, you carried out, as I understand it, research into extremism in Hungary—

Dr Saltman: Yes.

Mr Winnick:—which had nothing absolutely to do with Islam.

Dr Saltman: No.

Mr Winnick: Hungary, of course, like Poland, is a country unfortunately, tragically known for its notorious racist and murderous past—over centuries, in fact. What did you find in this particular extremist group? Jobbik, is it called?

Dr Saltman: Yes.

Mr Winnick: It is anti-Semitic, of course, first and foremost.

Dr Saltman: I was living in Hungary and I was researching Jobbik and the youth movements involved. I look at youth political activism. I even attended Jobbik youth camp, I went to their summer camp to analyse their propaganda, and really I can say that these processes of radicalisation—the reason I was able to come on with Quilliam subsequently is because these root causes are the same. We should not be boxing extremism into Islamist extremism and far-right extremism; what we find is one builds off of the other, so the more apparent one is, the more it justifies the other’s causes. The profile of individuals that are attached to these groups and the causes behind them are very similar.

Mr Winnick: Thank you very much.

Q150 Tim Loughton: Doctors, you made reference earlier to the colonial roots of some of the people who then become radicalised. One can understand where there are people who have come from countries who have been the subject of colonial powers, where there have been various injustices in the past and that may be subject to abject poverty now. Indeed, the Chairman and I travelled to Yemen some time ago and one could certainly see how radicals were beginning to seize power in areas of extreme poverty.

But we are not talking about some of the people from those backgrounds here. If we look at the case of Thomas Evans, there is no connection with a country like Pakistan. He was not affluent, necessarily, but certainly not poor, and he enjoyed normal western things that a teenager does. It is difficult to explain that in the context of what you have said. We are looking at very different types of routes to radicalisation here, are we not?

Dr Hasan: There are differences, but the political grievances, to do with an anti-colonial or anti-western narrative, transcend people who come from those countries. It includes intellectuals or activists in the west, who of course get very animated about things like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and other places. Often it is young people who are rebels without a cause, who want to join a bigger cause and not just live their lives earning money and having girlfriends and things, for young men.

The extremist narrative is a very powerful one. To say Muslims worldwide are one nation and one political block and your ultimate allegiance is only to Muslims elsewhere—that they are your brothers and sisters more so than your fellow British citizens—is an essential part of the extremist ideology which is often adopted by converts to Islam and others. That becomes the reason why they get very attracted to conflicts abroad: for them, “They are my people.” The leader of the 7/7 bombers said, “You are killing my people in Iraq,” even though he had never been to Iraq or anywhere near it. A British man born and brought up here, he felt the Iraqi people were his people and the British citizens who had been murdered were not. It is very important to understand the impact of that kind of faith-based extremist ideology in creating a disconnect between the people and who they are as a British citizen of this country.

Tim Loughton: They are adopting a cause with which they have no connection in order to satiate their appetite, as what you have called somebody who is a rebel without a cause?

Dr Hasan: I think that is a large part of it. It is also young men and women seeking adventure and, in my view, having come from comfortable backgrounds in this country—not having seen war or conflict which, for example, my parents’ generations saw with the partition of India or the various wars in the Middle East or beyond, or the fact that their parents and grandparents did not live through the Nazi blitz in this country, that they did not have grandparents who fought in the First and Second World Wars, for example—they can use the comfort of a British upbringing, schooling and education to fight for causes abroad.

Q151 Tim Loughton: It has been said that in the past, when young men were more likely to go off to war, World Wars or whatever, that taught—I am not in favour of war—young men to respect who the enemy was and the difference between a just war and whatever. That has

been given as a reason why extremism in this form is a modern phenomenon. Do you think there is any essence in that? We do not have conscription; we do not have obligations for people to go off and do their duty for their country in a military sense. Are some of these people almost looking for some sort of war or conflict to satiate this need for violence, terrorism or whatever? I put that rather clumsily but that is one theory that has been put forward as well.

Dr Hasan: I certainly think there is something in that. Many young people of course have immense energy and want to fight for a cause, if you like. It is important to channel that energy elsewhere. Perhaps conscription is the answer, or at least encouragement to join the armed forces, the Territorial Army or similar. For example, my son is in the CCF, so he has fired a gun at 14 and so on. I do not think he feels the need to go off somewhere and do it, whereas for me at 19 it was extremely adventurous and exciting to go abroad and fight in a war.

Q152 Tim Loughton: Finally, can I just ask Dr Saltman: you used the phrase that some of these people regard it as a humanitarian cause.

Dr Saltman: Yes, very much so.

Tim Loughton: Can you elaborate on that?

Dr Saltman: I would almost say that the same type of person—in fact, there was an article written recently of someone saying, “I am a former fascist skinhead, but if IS had been around instead at the time, I probably would have become IS.” These are not necessarily even violent causes. In fact, possibly the same type of person would chain themselves to a tree in an environmental movement. A lot of these young individuals are very much taken by what is going on in the world.

Driving this particular wave of foreign fighters, especially two years ago, was the propaganda around the Assad Government, where western Governments were saying that this government is violent and brutal and needs stopping. That is the same narrative as the jihadist narrative. It was saying the same thing. Your western media narrative was not actually conflicting with your jihadist narrative and so that “humanitarian cause” feeling—that you need to fight against this evil force that is taking over a land and killing your people—was not negated. There was no counter-speech even from the mainstream western audience.

The humanitarian aspect is backed by a sense of adventure and a warped and edited version of foreign policy, but I do not think it is even necessarily violent. I think a lot of people are looking for a cause. This is a youth generation that, on average, will not be as successful as their parent generation. There is a sense of hopelessness. There is high youth unemployment even for those that are educated. These are causes that offer not only a purpose but a utopia and a romantic notion and sense of adventure. That is very strong.

Q153 Nicola Blackwood: Dr Hasan, in describing to Mr Winnick your gradual progress away from radicalisation, you mentioned that after 9/11 and before 7/7 was when you got

your first death threats. I just wonder if you could explain a little to the Committee the consequences for yourself and for others like yourself of moving away from extremist ideology and standing up and speaking out against it, because that is something that needs to be considered. We often call on Muslim leaders to speak out against it, but there are consequences.

Dr Hasan: One of the challenges in speaking out about extremism from within Muslim communities is that there is a very strong teaching, which is a positive teaching, of Muslim solidarity and brotherhood worldwide. It becomes misused if it is then used to say, “You should not betray your brothers and sisters. You should not wash your dirty linen in public. Do not talk about problems. Do not criticise or attack your brothers and sisters in public, and certainly do not betray them by telling the police, even if they are plotting terrorist acts.” That is a buffer behind which extremists and terrorists hide.

My first death threat, as I said, was before 7/7, for saying publicly that if one Muslim knew of another one plotting a terrorist act in this country, they must do their best to stop them. If they can talk them out of it, that is perfect; otherwise, if the last resort is to go to the police, they must go to the police. I had leaders, scholars and theologians who gave that judgement to say that was a public duty of Muslims. Now, the violent extremists of course do not accept that at all and they do intimidate people who criticise their ideology, as do a lot of violent extremists. It is a challenge for many activists and leaders to speak out.

Nicola Blackwood: In practice, does that mean that you and your family have felt threatened at any time?

Dr Hasan: Yes. Many of us who work in this field, in Quilliam and other organisations, who say unpopular things that we believe to be the correct and just thing to say do get intimidation and threats. A few years ago it was particularly intense and we had a police alarm in the house, for example, for over a year. My family, with children, we did feel intimidated and threatened. I had to keep quiet about certain issues for a period of one or two years, in fact.

Nicola Blackwood: Do you find that the police response is adequate? Do you think that they respond well to protect people like yourselves who are important to try and lead on this issue from within the Muslim community?

Dr Hasan: In my particular example, I was very satisfied with the police response. They were very helpful and supportive, yes.

Nicola Blackwood: In one particular example?

Dr Hasan: I know of other cases as well. I do think they try their best if there is a serious security threat, yes.

Chair: Thank you. James Clappison has the final question.

Q154 Mr Clappison: How do you find that people who are thinking of going to fight, say, in Syria or who have returned from Syria—or who are perhaps even still there; I don’t

know—react to the undoubted evidence of human rights abuses by IS that go beyond conflict with the Assad regime or anybody else by committing human rights abuses against civilians, Yazidis, Christians, and Muslims, which are inconsistent with the peaceful teachings of Islam? How do they react to that?

Dr Saltman: There are different points along the spectrum of radicalisation. For the majority of people that are just getting into the propaganda, something as gruesome as the beheading video might actually turn them away from that movement and make them reconsider going abroad to travel and join there. However, for those that are further along that spectrum—once they have taken on the idea of martyrdom; once they have given up that there are those that are worth protecting and those that are not; once that self/other rhetoric becomes strong—those are the individuals where that more gruesome propaganda might push them further. It really depends where on the spectrum someone is when they start receiving more openly gruesome propaganda.

Mr Clappison: It sounds as though it is more to do with their state of mind than the religion. It is the state of mind that is driving them, not any religious instruction.

Dr Saltman: It is quite abstracted from the religion directly, although it is used vaguely, but not as poignantly.

Dr Hasan: I would agree with that. I would add that there are also political and theological arguments people use to justify their positions. For example, on atrocities they will often say, “Well, the Assad regime is even worse,”—which I think is possibly true—and they will say that western armed forces bomb civilian targets sometimes or there’s collateral damage. They point to the argument of collateral damage and say, “This is the same thing.” That’s political but, secondly, it’s also religious. There is a jurisprudence of jihad going back centuries—which also discusses the ethics of war and a just war and so on—and the principle of collateral damage is an ancient one in Islamic jurisprudence as well. It is important that we recognise that to challenge it.

Chair: Thank you very much, Dr Hasan and Dr Saltman. We could go on all afternoon because it is a fascinating area. If there are any other issues that you want to raise with us, we are just producing a very short report on these issues, based on our previous report last year, it is really a revisit but this has been a fascinating session. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Jamie Bartlett**, Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media, Demos, gave evidence.

Q155 Chair: My apologies for keeping you waiting: there was a Division earlier on and therefore we were delayed with our witnesses. Your work on the dark net has a lot of fans, including the Prime Minister, who seems to refer to the dark net whenever he talks about the

internet. We have asked you here to come and tell us how we draw the veil so we can ourselves look to see what is in the dark net. We know that the internet is being used by terrorists to recruit and to disseminate their propaganda—it is very clear that that is happening—but what we also want to know from you is, how big is it?

Jamie Bartlett: I am not sure the Prime Minister is referring to my book when he talks about the dark net, but I would like to think that he might be. Let me quickly describe what the dark net is. It is used as a shorthand to describe a hidden, encrypted network of sites—between 45,000 and 60,000 sites—although no one is entirely sure, which can only be accessed using a particular browser known as the Tor browser. The Tor browser was originally invented by the US military to allow its intelligence agents to be able to browse the internet anonymously. It, as a result, has been very, very popular once it was open source for others to use.

It has been very, very popular for human rights activists and journalists all around the world who see the great benefits for free expression, for evading censorship, in using a web browser that essentially masks your IP address. You can browse the web without people knowing where you're located. The dark net uses the same sort of protocol as that browser, which means that it hides where the servers are that host these sites. As a result, people can go on and browse these sites, they can't very easily be censored, they can't very easily be removed and it is very difficult to find the individuals that are on them. As a result, you have all manner of material and sites on there.

Q156 Chair: Have you dipped your toe in there?

Jamie Bartlett: Yes, of course, because I've written a book that includes quite a lot of this part of the dark net. The dark net, technically speaking, is more accurately described as a Tor-hidden service but, like I said, the dark net is used as shorthand for that.

Q157 Chair: From your recollection and from what you have seen on the dark net, of the 45,000 to 60,000 sites how many roughly—and this is only a rough guess I want from you—relate specifically to terrorism?

Jamie Bartlett: It is extraordinarily difficult to know with any degree of certainty because for technical reasons, about trying to understand the entire network, many sites are very hard to find. What we do know is that the majority of the sites there—in terms of the amount of traffic they generate and the number of people that go on them—are for illegal markets, which particularly sell drugs, and illegal child abuse images. There is a lot, therefore, of whistleblowing sites—whistleblowing information—and then a very vast array of much smaller blogs and sites that people set up for a very wide range of political purposes. In terms of Islamist terrorist propaganda, very little that I have seen—that's not to say it doesn't exist, because a lot of these sites are password protected as well and we can't very easily get into them, but I have not seen a huge amount at all.

Q158 Chair: Is that because those who indulge in this kind of activity—in Islamic terrorism—want to be seen by other people and they are quite keen for the oxygen of publicity? If they are doing unsavoury or terrorist activities, they want everyone to know that they are doing it.

Jamie Bartlett: They use the internet, in the way many of us use the internet, for two purposes. One is to produce propaganda that they do not want to be removed and do not want to be censored. For that, they will often use well known social media platforms to spread their message far and wide, but they will also use less well known social media platforms to host their content so it is harder to remove. They will often span a series of social networking sites with their material—it would not surprise me if they are also using Tor-hidden services to do that—but they will also want to use the internet to communicate in secret, and there is evidence to suggest they use, at the very least, the browser to communicate with each other or to browse the internet in a way that cannot easily be uncovered.

Q159 Chair: But Eugene Kaspersky, writing in *The Times* on Monday of this week—the founder of the Kaspersky Lab—says that, “Terrorists will soon be able to launch advanced cyberattacks on critical national infrastructure.” Are we prepared for this? We have very sophisticated equipment; we know this is a big problem. Do you think we are prepared for what is coming?

Jamie Bartlett: Yes and no. I think that terrorists’ modus operandi is going to change and is going to increasingly look for weaknesses in internet-enabled devices that all of us use. So, 10 or 15 years ago, to be a computer hacker—to be able to hack into either Government-run or private-run companies—required a relatively high degree of technical know-how that many terrorists would not have. It is now far easier to launch those attacks. It is also far easier to pay somebody to launch those types of attacks. Inevitably there is going to be an increase, and I believe we have seen it already, in terrorists using cyber warfare as part of both their propaganda and, potentially, even for raising money. The large institutions in this country are generally well prepared for that; some of the smaller ones far less so.

Q160 Chair: Because the US Congress reported last year that 45,000 pro-IS accounts were created in the autumn of last year, how do we keep up with what seems to be the No. 1 way in which they communicate through social media and through the internet? Is this something that we are going to be able to contain or is it just out of control?

Jamie Bartlett: I don’t think we are able to contain it. The inevitable direction is that it is already relatively difficult to try to censor all the types of material that terrorists will post online—and remember, much of what they post online is not directly illegal. They will post propaganda that either is just on the lawful side of illegality or a lot of stuff that is not illegal at all—reports to news stories about what is happening in the Middle East, for example, which you cannot remove.

But as the internet will continue to evolve, it is going to be increasingly more difficult to remove content because it is getting easier to evade surveillance. Particularly post-Edward Snowden, there has been a growth in both easy-to-use encryption software and different types of social media platforms that are very hard to censor, and terrorists are going to increasingly use these, as well as the well known ones like Twitter and Facebook and so on. I am afraid it is going to be something that we have to live with.

Q161 Michael Ellis: Snowden did a huge amount of damage to the national security infrastructure, did he not? As you have just indicated, there are more people now using encryption. He gave away information that now makes it easier for terrorists and criminals to engage in nefarious activity. That is a pretty fair assessment, is it not, of the harm that he has done?

Jamie Bartlett: Many people would also argue that he has done a great service in creating a more informed—

Michael Ellis: Making it easier for criminals and terrorists, and that has done a great service.

Jamie Bartlett: Also a great service in allowing for a more informed discussion about the balance between security and privacy. However, the long-term damage is potentially extremely far reaching and indirect. As a result of the Snowden revelations, there has been a huge increase in the number of people generally using encryption—often for very good purposes, but that is going to make it more difficult for the security services to identify those using encryption if they want to. But, in addition, there is going to be—and there already is—a significant increase, as I've mentioned, in default encrypted e-mail services, greater use of Tor browsers. Terrorists will of course be among those who will be the early adopters of those technologies, so, yes. Those technologies are often being created not in order to assist terrorists, but in order to give everybody greater freedom and privacy online, but the terrorists will be early adopters of that and it will make the security services' job more difficult.

Q162 Michael Ellis: Hearing what you have said, including in answers to questions put to you by the Chairman, you must be in favour, I would suggest, of communications data or the legislation that this Government has been seeking to put on the statute books because there is a gap, is there not, in the ability of the police and law enforcement generally to do what they can do with mobile telephone technology, landline telephone technology and every other form of old-fashioned communication.

They cannot do the same things with internet technology as they can do with those forms of technology. Do you think that somehow the internet should be a shibboleth that cannot be touched by the security services or do you think that the law should be brought up to date to keep it at a par with the mechanisms that terrorists and criminals are using to conduct their activities?

Jamie Bartlett: If I may, it is maybe a slightly false distinction between the two positions. I absolutely accept that the internet is not off limits and there should not be particular rules

that apply to it that don't apply elsewhere, absolutely. I also agree that it is getting more difficult for the intelligence agencies and the police to do their job with the changing way in which people communicate. Broadly speaking, I am in favour of refreshed powers, if you like.

But, more generally, it is going to be a less effective way of ensuring public safety. Large scale network-level analysis of data is going to be easier to evade, partly as a result of the Edward Snowden revelations. As a result, I believe that the intelligence agencies need to shift their focus slightly and work more on targeted human intelligence work, which is targeted at individuals that may involve very, very intrusive measures, of course, but which relies less on the broad-sweeping surveillance that many people, quite rightly, are concerned about.

Q163 Chair: In terms of those who profess to be jihadists and who are recruited from the internet to go and fight abroad, do you think that this is now the No. 1 method—it's now the internet, as opposed to other areas—by which people are recruited?

Jamie Bartlett: I wouldn't say that, and you have heard good responses already. Of course it plays a role, but it is important not to focus purely on the internet, because the internet is the form of communication we all use for so many things—to get our information about all different types of things going on in the world. It is inevitable that terrorists will use it too to find information, to share information, to connect with other people. I do believe that, in general, extremist and radical groups are more likely to use new communication because they see it as an opportunity to reach people quickly and easily. It is important not to focus too much on the medium.

Q164 Mr Winnick: Just one question, Mr Bartlett—time is short. Before we go down the route—that Mr Ellis was indicating and asking you to agree with him on—of wide-ranging powers given to the state, would it not be useful to bear in mind that those responsible for 7/7 were known to the police and, moreover, that the two mass murderers in France were known to the police? While recognising the problems that the security services obviously have in both democracies, does that not indicate there is a good deal to be done before we see any question of ever-widening powers?

Jamie Bartlett: There is certainly the danger with collecting too much information that makes it extremely difficult to know where to focus your resources. It is often said that picking out the terrorist among the group is like finding a needle in a haystack, but I am afraid it is rather more difficult. It is more like finding a piece of hay in a haystack that looks almost indistinguishable from every other. The danger with having too much information—too much data—is that it can become ever more difficult to distinguish the signal from the noise.

Part of the problem is that everyone leaves a data trail now, which means that when, as inevitably will be the case, the intelligence agencies are unable to prevent a terrorist attack, there will be a digital breadcrumb somewhere that someone will retrospectively find and say, "You should've spotted that; you should've therefore stopped that." I worry

that that will lead to a slow chipping away of confidence in our intelligence agencies and that is exactly what we do not need, because their work is becoming more difficult and will become more difficult in future. There is certainly a danger of having too much information, which is why, in my response to Mr Ellis, I said I would like to see a greater focus on targeted human intelligence, rather than broad surveillance intelligence.

Q165 Tim Loughton: Mr Bartlett, I have taken over the Chair, but I can ask some questions now. I am not a very technical person here, but I am just trying to understand how this is primarily working on the net. Some time ago I remember I went to Scotland Yard and looked at their department that was trying to intercept paedophiles exchanging obscene images. They were very sophisticated and it was a question of police trying to keep up with the technology to track them down and intercept them.

But that was very much a two-way exchange: literally, paedophiles were saying, “Has anyone got a photo of an x-age—?”—or whatever it might be—and getting something in exchange. Are we talking here more about a more passive information source—so, people are posting information that may be exhorting people to do various things or giving them information about where they can go to learn about certain things? How much of it is more social media, as we understand it, where people are involved in a dialogue, albeit here in a very dark and inaccessible place?

Jamie Bartlett: It is important not to imagine that terrorists use it very differently to how most of us use it. It will range from there being closed forums, where individuals get together to discuss ideas, to share messages, to share content, to motivate or inspire each other. There will be other times where they will use certain types of platform to ask questions of a religious nature. There will be other times where they will simply link to a video-sharing site and tell everybody, “This is where the latest beheading video is. Could everybody please quickly download it on to their hard drives, so when it is deleted we can re-upload it?”, therefore making it more or less impossible to remove entirely. It is an incredibly varied set of purposes, which is partly one of the reasons it is an incredibly useful source of intelligence for researchers, for journalists, for the police and for the intelligence agencies.

Q166 Tim Loughton: One way the police have been intervening on paedophile exchanges is by posing as paedophiles themselves, very crudely trying to entrap groomers, but also, for the more sophisticated ones, using technology to try to get to the source of where these images are coming from, and so on. What mileage is there here for intelligence services and others to be impersonating and using disrupting techniques in order to get in with these groups or disseminating this information, which is on the cusp of being illegal or overtly offensive, as you say?

Jamie Bartlett: That is an extremely important way for both the police and the intelligence agencies to operate. I would like to see far more investment in that kind of digital human intelligence work, as opposed to either large-scale surveillance work or, indeed, efforts to remove content piece by piece—the whack-a-mole effort of constantly trying to remove accounts, censor pages or remove content that invariably turns up again within minutes or

seconds elsewhere. The real win is going to be developing far more capability in infiltrating groups, focusing on understanding the strength and weaknesses of different groups, collecting intelligence on different groups in that way. That might require, I suppose, a particular type of intelligence-gathering analysis, which is not necessarily anything that we have really invested in to date.

Tim Loughton: It is not really happening at the moment, so we are really amateurs at it.

Jamie Bartlett: It is, of course, hard to know precisely what is happening, but as a general principle I would like to see that type of intelligence work being done and being increased, rather than other types.

Q167 Tim Loughton: We have heard so much about whether or not it is North Korea, or what the Chinese do, in terms of using cyber interruption to intervene and cause damage in everything from national security agencies through to corporates or whatever. Is it feasible, and would you support it if, effectively, the authorities were using weapons of technology—using viruses and all sorts of things that are now available—to combat some of these sites as well? Just as certain countries are fighting with bombs and weaponry, should we be doing the same on the internet, or is that just idealistic?

Jamie Bartlett: In principle, yes, I would. It is extremely important that in a similar way to when we use conventional weaponry, we think about the collateral damage that that may cause to a network or to legitimate websites that are operating—that we don't try to remove every single piece of content that we may deem to be extreme or offensive or nasty, but focus those energies strictly upon sites that are either run by terrorist groups or are illegal. There is already, as you will know, a counter-terrorism internet referral unit that has removed a lot of content. I would, again, like to see that type of power you suggested limited to those that are beyond the reaches of the sites or of the police.

Q168 Paul Flynn: If these sites are on secret browsers with hidden passwords, how did you get enough material to write a book about them?

Jamie Bartlett: In my book I did not go and visit terrorist sites on the dark net; I am referencing other research that I have seen on the subject. On the work that I did on the dark net, I focused more on child abuse images and illegal drugs markets. I did go on to illegal drugs markets, to understand how they operated; I did not go into illegal child abuse image sites, so I relied on second-hand evidence for that.

Q169 Paul Flynn: Have you any idea about how powerful the dark net is and what role it plays? We heard of a case today of somebody being stopped from travelling abroad and a few months later not being stopped. That sounds like good old-fashioned policing and somebody slipping up on simple technology. If these sites are so difficult to get on to, how can they become major recruiters? Isn't the major recruitment done in the mosques and elsewhere?

Jamie Bartlett: I have not suggested at all that the dark net is the major place for recruitment. Social media, generally speaking, has become a very valuable place for propaganda to be shared, and of course terrorists and the human rights activists and journalists are all using, and are going to continue and probably increase their use of, browsers and encryption. This is very hard to monitor. At the moment it is a relatively small amount. My strong suspicion is that in five or ten years' time, a far greater proportion of the use of the internet by groups like IS and others will be using these type of very difficult to monitor and track web services, and that is going to make the intelligence agencies' job more difficult.

Q170 Paul Flynn: The final question: the question about the information released by Snowden. There were benefits in this to many people, because it revealed to us the extraordinary amount of surveillance that is carried out, not on criminals or terrorists, but on ordinary citizens who are watched 24 hours a day. Was that your view?

Jamie Bartlett: The intelligence agencies would say that there is a difference between bulk access and surveillance—so, they have access to everyone's data, but they don't surveil it because they are not accessing it. The distinction there, many people would say, is blurred. Generally speaking, it is incredibly important for the public to be able to collectively determine what the correct balance is between security and privacy. It is very hard to do that when you have no idea whatsoever about what is being done and what is the extent of the terror threat to us. Therefore, to have a more informed debate, which we need to as we share evermore about our personal lives online, the more openness and transparency, both in terms of understanding the threat and the surveillance, is a good thing, provided that can be done without doing undue damage to national security.

Paul Flynn: I am very grateful to you, thank you.

Tim Loughton: That is very clear, Mr Bartlett. Thank you very much for that and, again, apologies for the late start. As you have heard it said to the witnesses before, if there is further information you think you would like to put before the Committee, please, write to us as quickly as possible, as we will be producing the short report before too long. Thank you very much for your evidence today.