



Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Countering extremism, HC 428

Tuesday 19 January 2016

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Members present: Keith Vaz (Chair); Victoria Atkins, James Berry, Nusrat Ghani, Mr Ranil Jayawardena, Tim Loughton, Stuart C. McDonald, Mr Chuka Umunna, Mr David Winnick

Questions 833 - 982

Examination of Witnesses

Witness: **Konika Dhar** gave evidence.

Q833 Chair: Could I call the Committee to order and refer everyone present to the Register of Members' Financial Interests where the interests of members of this Committee have been noted. Are there any more interests to declare? I welcome Konika Dhar to give evidence in our inquiry on counter-terrorism. Thank you very much for coming to see us today.

The Committee is interested in the narrative of your brother, Siddhartha Dhar, and you have indeed made some public statements about your concerns about him and his welfare. What happened to him that changed him from—your description—a fun-loving, normal man, into someone who has appeared on television and on videos carrying an assault weapon and threatening the lives of individuals? What do you think was the most important factor that changed him from being the brother that you knew and loved—and of course he is still your brother—to the person that you saw on these videos?

Konika Dhar: It is quite hard to say. Given the timespan that we are talking about, he has obviously been a convert for many years. It would be hard to say at what point he changed, what the reason was, and I think all I can say is that the memories that I have of him are nothing that I am seeing today, and that is what is quite tragic. I mentioned in previous interviews that, yes, he was fun-loving and very laid back, easygoing, very friendly with everyone, and I think it is quite hard for me to even know within myself what it was that triggered him to become the person that he is today. I honestly wish I knew. I think I could—

Q834 Chair: Was it over a period of time, because he started—I understand from previous interviews that you have had—following his conversion to Islam; your family is from the Hindu faith, is that right?

Konika Dhar: That is correct.

Q835 Chair: He converted to Islam presumably without anyone's knowledge or consent?

Konika Dhar: This is the problem, because everything, from my observation, was not done so much in secrecy but we were left in the dark with his journey to becoming who he is today. I myself had very little knowledge at the time and I was not really involved in the organisations that he was involved in or who we were seeing. To be honest, everything came to me as quite a shock. One of the first articles in *The Washington Post* was for me the realisation that, yes, he had been brainwashed. If you look at the circumstances around his conversion, he was told certain things at the time, for example: "Only Muslims can go to heaven and you can die at any time. There is no point in delaying converting." To me that echoed that he was put in an atmosphere of force and somebody at that time had been responsible to convert him. I am not trying to point blame at anyone.

Q836 Chair: Was it individuals? Do you think it was perhaps the use of the internet? Was it the mosque he went to?

Konika Dhar: Because this happened over 10 years ago I don't think it was the internet as such, I would say probably more the individuals that were involved. Again, I was not really told how he converted or when it happened until much later, in fact.

Q837 Chair: When did you last see your brother, Ms Dhar?

Konika Dhar: Over a year ago, September 2014.

Chair: In person?

Konika Dhar: Yes, in person.

Q838 Chair: At that stage, presumably, he was quite different from the brother that you—

Konika Dhar: Well, this is it; I think people need to understand that I do not live with my brother. He is a grown man and I have not lived with him in about seven to 10 years. I do have a lack of knowledge in this area because I do not live with him. I do not know what activities he is involved in but, yes, the last time I did see him was in September 2014 and he seemed to me to be okay. Obviously, I was always aware that he was a practising Muslim but he kept his political movements private and—

Q839 Chair: He did not discuss it with you at all?

Konika Dhar: No, no. To be honest, I was not even aware that he went by another name until he had left. My instant reaction was, "Abu who? I don't know that person." I just know my brother as being the person I grew up with.

Q840 Chair: You have said in past interviews that, when he met you, he had ordered you and your mother to cover yourselves up by wearing a burka; is that right?

Konika Dhar: He has always wanted us to embrace the Islamic faith and there have been several statements made similar to that by him, as well as others, and I think towards the end it became more jokey because—again, it has been a long time—we have remained who we are and he has been constantly trying to carry on his faith. Whatever he would say we would brush it off. I never took it seriously, to be honest.

Q841 Chair: This has obviously happened to other families, because we know that 700 people have gone from Britain to Syria and others have converted. We have had evidence from mothers, who have come before this Committee in our last inquiry, who told us that their sons have suddenly decided to go and fight in Syria. Was there anyone that you and your family could have turned to for help in those circumstances? Did you think of going to the authorities or to anyone else to seek counselling or assistance?

Konika Dhar: I think that is a very good question. This is one thing that needs to be addressed because for me personally it was very difficult to know who to turn to. I did not know whether to contact the police, whether to go via the media or speak to family members. I think that probably explains my abrupt first interview. It was a bit of a shock.

Q842 Chair: Do you think it would have been good to have an organisation—

Konika Dhar: Yes, definitely. Absolutely.

Chair: —not necessarily the anti-terrorist hotline, which exists at the moment for people to ring up, because you did not know that your brother necessarily was a terrorist? You needed some organisation to go to that had your confidence, where you could have shared these concerns?

Konika Dhar: Not only an organisation but a procedure to follow because I don't know what the steps are. I have never been in this situation before; I have never known anybody to go through this, so I think it is important for other families to know what the appropriate steps are that one needs to take in order to get their loved one back, who is the right person to contact. I thought I did the right thing. I hope it is but I am just a bit wary whether I am making things worse or not. I am not trying to. I miss my brother very much and I am trying to make him realise that none of this is him.

Q843 Chair: Of course. One final question: the Prime Minister's statement yesterday when he wanted to encourage Muslim mothers in particular to learn English, and I do not know whether you followed it—

Konika Dhar: I did, yes.

Chair: What the Prime Minister was saying was that he felt there was a lack of integration, and one of the problems was that some Muslim mothers did not speak English and, therefore, they needed to do so to try to encourage their children not to go or to encourage them to stay. What do you think of what the Prime Minister said? Do you agree with him?

Konika Dhar: I thought it was quite interesting. I did agree at first but then I also shared the view of another Member who suggested that the focus should not just be on Muslim women—

Chair: Baroness Warsi, I think.

Konika Dhar: Yes, that is right. Although I did agree with the Prime Minister's view, I do also take a balanced approach that the focus should not just be on Muslim women.

Q844 Chair: You think there is a language barrier that prevents integration?

Konika Dhar: Definitely, yes.

Q845 Mr Winnick: Continuing on that question for a moment, the Prime Minister spoke about Muslim women not speaking English; would it be right to say that that is not uncommon among perhaps elderly people from the Indian subcontinent, so it may well include Hindus and Sikhs? In your view, am I right that it is not exclusively about Muslims?

Konika Dhar: You could suggest that but I don't think I have enough knowledge in that department to comment any further. You could suggest that, yes.

Q846 Mr Winnick: I ask because earlier in the last century and the latter part of the 19th century, people who came from Eastern Europe, Russia and Poland, certainly those of an elderly age—and I have some sensitivity in speaking about the elderly age—did not speak English, and in some cases did not try and, indeed, their children and grandchildren in many instances became academics in this country and taught English. Would you agree that the trend tends to be the same with people coming over?

Konika Dhar: I am not sure if I agree or disagree with that entirely. I do think it is a bit dangerous to assume that, just because you know the language, you will automatically integrate. That would be unfair to say as well. I would leave it at that.

Q847 Mr Winnick: Coming to the more immediate issue, have you been in touch with your brother and family since the events of his moving out of the United Kingdom?

Konika Dhar: I think I did state in my previous interviews that I have made numerous attempts to contact him and I think I have only managed to have two responses. That is all. It has been very difficult to maintain a relationship and contact is virtually impossible now.

Q848 Mr Winnick: On his conversion, not only to Islam but to the most warped, poisonous aspect of that religion—as you know, the overwhelming majority of Muslim people totally denounce as heresy what your brother is doing—do you think he was influenced in any way in going down that road of treachery and murder—influenced by various people who indoctrinated him?

Konika Dhar: Sorry, I just need to understand the question. Do I think that he was influenced?

Mr Winnick: Yes, were there people in the community in the locality that influenced him in that direction?

Konika Dhar: It is hard for me to comment because I have only been aware of the organisation itself; I still did not know what the organisation stands for until now. Yes, I think it would be fair to say that he was influenced.

Q849 Mr Winnick: It is interesting that you said somewhere that at one time, when he was part of a Hindu family tradition and not particularly religious in any way, he was teasing you because you did not want to wear modern dress—whether that was justified or not—and it ended up by him telling you when he converted to the extremism of another religion that you should cover yourself up and not be dressed as you are at the moment before this Committee. It does seem a total reversion. I will put it differently; it seems a total difference from his earlier stance to what happened?

Konika Dhar: Sorry, do you mean in terms of what happened?

Mr Winnick: Yes, when he was teasing you for not dressing in a modern way.

Konika Dhar: I see. Yes, this is precisely it. I feel as though his personality does not correlate with who he is today. So, yes, when my older brother was much younger, the focus was not on, “Oh, cover yourself up.” It was more, as we said before, yes.

Q850 Mr Winnick: My last question is somewhat personal. Considering what he is doing and the action that presumably he is a party to, in your heart can you ever forgive him for what he has done in betraying the family and obviously the country in which he lived?

Konika Dhar: I am still holding to the firm belief that what I am seeing is not him and I have not had verification otherwise. I have said before that if it is then—

Mr Winnick: It is a difficult one?

Konika Dhar: Yes, it is.

Mr Winnick: In your position I would have the same difficulty as you have.

Konika Dhar: It is the realisation that: is he really my brother if he has done this? I cannot accept that he would ever do that. I cannot accept it. I still do not believe that. I don't know.

Q851 Victoria Atkins: Ms Dhar, thank you very much for coming to the Committee to give evidence. These questions are aimed at helping us understand a little more about the timeframes in the hope it will help the larger issue of recruiting to extremism. When was your brother first thinking about converting to Islam? I mean the religion, not the extreme version.

Konika Dhar: Sorry, just the religion not the extreme version?

Victoria Atkins: Yes, just the religion, so how many years roughly?

Konika Dhar: From my memory, I think he first took an interest in his mid to late teens.

Q852 Victoria Atkins: After that initial interest, when did members of your family sense that perhaps he was going on a particular path with the religion and his interpretation of it?

Konika Dhar: I do not want to speak on anyone else's behalf. I will just speak on my behalf. It is hard to say. The way I see it there was a long transition period. In the beginning for me it was nothing to be worried about because he was still engaging in normal activities. Probably early 20s is when he began to take his religion more seriously.

Q853 Victoria Atkins: To help us, between the first signs of interest and then the second stage you have just described, how long a period was that roughly?

Konika Dhar: It cannot have been that long. I would say maybe a year or two.

Q854 Victoria Atkins: This was pre social media as we recognise it in 2016?

Konika Dhar: Yes.

Q855 Victoria Atkins: From that second stage, how long was it until he became brainwashed, to use your phrase?

Konika Dhar: Again, this is hard to pinpoint. I know this may come as a shock but I remember somebody saying to me, "I saw your brother on the TV" and they showed me a picture. I said, "That is not my brother." They said, "No, it is." I said, "No, it looks nothing like him." My immediate reaction was I did not recognise him because he had changed so much; I mean physically, his speech, his demeanour, everything had changed. That happened probably three years ago. I am sorry but it is really hard to answer because, bearing in mind I have not been at home myself, I was at university for three years so I haven't lived with my brother for three years. There was a gap and he also moved out when he was 23, so I haven't lived with him in a long time. I would say there were definitely signs that maybe someone ought to have picked up on, but there was nothing too threatening to make me think, "Okay, this is on the road to something destructive," otherwise I definitely think I or someone else would have stepped in.

Q856 Victoria Atkins: I am going to come back to the signs in a moment. I just want to finish the timeframe. So three years ago, roughly, he was appearing brainwashed and you were beginning to worry?

Konika Dhar: Yes.

Q857 Victoria Atkins: When did he go to Syria?

Konika Dhar: This was about a year ago.

Q858 Victoria Atkins: Before he went to Syria, what was his day-to-day life? Was he working? Was he studying?

Konika Dhar: He was quite happy keeping his private life private and we were quite happy to respect that about him. There was very little that he would let on, to be honest. As far as I am aware—

Q859 Victoria Atkins: Did your mum not want to know what he was doing? Most mums want to know what their children are doing.

Konika Dhar: I know, but I am his younger sister and unfortunately I did not share that much of a close relationship to know that much information.

Q860 Victoria Atkins: You just said about signs. Could you help us with what you meant? You said there were signs of him going on a very dark path. What were those signs?

Konika Dhar: Maybe I should rephrase that. I think there were signs that I knew something wasn't right in his personality. *[Pause]* I don't think I am comfortable addressing that just yet.

Q861 Chair: We know that he left the country with his wife and four children. That is correct, is it?

Konika Dhar: I believe so, yes.

Q862 Chair: Were you present at his wedding?

Konika Dhar: No, I was not.

Q863 Chair: Had you met his children as an aunt might?

Konika Dhar: Yes.

Q864 Chair: You had. When you met his wife, was she someone who you felt had embraced Islam in the same way as he had?

Konika Dhar: Again, I don't unfortunately share a very strong relationship with either of them just yet but I would say from my short encounters she was definitely conservative and devout like my brother.

Q865 Chair: You did not know her before they got married?

Konika Dhar: No, I did not.

Q866 Chair: What is the age difference between yourself and your brother?

Konika Dhar: It is three and a half years.

Q867 Nusrat Ghani: Ms Dhar, it is very brave of you to come forward and it is incredibly useful for us to hear your story. It is so rare that we have sisters, mothers, people that are connected to people that go overseas and do this, so thank you so much for coming

forward. I have been reading all of the press that you have been doing and they do not always get it right. You said today to Mr Winnick that you have spoken to your brother just twice since he has left; is that correct?

Konika Dhar: Yes, I agree with that because I have been misquoted on several occasions.

Q868 Nusrat Ghani: You might have been misquoted on that, so just to clarify?

Konika Dhar: To clarify, I have made several attempts to speak with my brother. In terms of what communication, I think what I was referring to were just email exchanges, which have just been twice.

Q869 Nusrat Ghani: You have said to the press recently that you believe your brother is a good man; is that correct?

Konika Dhar: Uh-huh.

Q870 Nusrat Ghani: And that in the exchange that you had with him that he is happy with the life that he is living; is that correct?

Konika Dhar: That is right.

Q871 Nusrat Ghani: I just want to try and explore how he is living his life, as you still believe him to be a good man. As he is over supporting Daesh, he is probably engaged in enslaving, in beheading—

Konika Dhar: I hope not.

Nusrat Ghani: —and in raping. But this is what Daesh does. This is what Daesh does. Over 5,000 Yazidi women have been enslaved by them and there have been recent reports where if they are able to sell women as slaves that they do so; if they are beyond that age they tend to kill them. One of the women that was giving evidence—there is a big article in the *Daily Mail* about a number of Yazidi women that have come forward to give evidence—states, “The saddest thing that I remember was this little girl, 12 years old, and they raped her without mercy”. These are the activities that your brother is engaged in; do you still believe he is a good man?

Konika Dhar: This is quite a sensitive topic to talk about. My opinion will always be biased because he is my brother. I don’t want to believe that he is who he is today and I stand by that. I still—*[Pause]*

Chair: But of course, you utterly condemn all that you have heard Nusrat Ghani talk about.

Konika Dhar: Mmm. I mean, I still don’t want to associate the two, the activities that Nusrat has just described, with my brother. I know that may be hard for many people to believe, but that is because he is my brother and as far as I am concerned I grew up with a different person and I will remain with that belief that that is the person who I know.

Q872 Nusrat Ghani: But if young people are going over to support Daesh, that is what they are engaged in. We must make people understand that when they go over to fight on behalf of Daesh, they are involved in rape and pillage and beheading. There is nothing else over there for them apart from this.

You have also said that you would like your brother to come home. Having heard what he might be involved with, with Daesh, do you still want your brother to come home?

Konika Dhar: I think it is a bit wishful thinking, and I am aware that he may not come home, he probably won't come home, but the way I see it is I don't want to give up on him, and I think that is a mistake that many families can make—if they give up on their loved one who has gone out. I think I said that I wanted him home because I am determined to have him return home for the person that I remember, and if that can't be done then maybe that is just something I have to accept, but I feel I have not reached that point yet.

Q873 Nusrat Ghani: Do you believe he can be rehabilitated? It is important because we need to understand what family members believe, because if we do have a large number of people going over to fight on behalf of Daesh we have to understand if there is confidence that they can be rehabilitated or not.

Konika Dhar: I would like to think so, yes.

Q874 Nusrat Ghani: And you would still sit down and have Sunday lunch with him, knowing that he might have been engaged in these sorts of activities for a number of years?

Konika Dhar: I would be appalled if—do you know, this is so hard.

Nusrat Ghani: It is difficult.

Chair: If you are uncomfortable in answering a question, that is fine; we will accept that.

Konika Dhar: I would like to get right what I am saying at the same time, but I don't want my message to be misinterpreted. I know what I want; I don't know what to say. I honestly would like to see him home but I think I have accepted the reality that he won't now, so I would like to consider other options, whether he can live somewhere else peacefully and not necessarily in—

Q875 Nusrat Ghani: Maybe if I turn the question around, it may be a little bit easier. If it is difficult for us to assess why people are radicalised, do you think once they are radicalised and they are engaged in criminal activity, if they knew the damage they were doing to their family and that they would not be accepted back to a safe country, that that might deter some people from going overseas and being involved in violence? Do you think that maybe they feel that they can just come home, that they can live back with their families, that they can spend a number of years doing these horrific things and they can just return home and carry on as normal? Do you think that if people understood that that was not possible, in some cases that might stop people going away in the first place?

Konika Dhar: Yes, I would agree.

Q876 Chair: Thank you. In answer to Nusrat Ghani, let us be clear: you do not believe your brother is involved in these activities, or are you in denial that he might be involved?

Konika Dhar: I don't want to speculate, to be honest. I would rather have verification on whether it is him or not and I would prefer to comment on that once I have—

Q877 Chair: And you feel you have not had that verification yet?

Konika Dhar: Is it official? Has it been confirmed? I don't know.

Q878 Chair: No, I am just asking you. We don't know. Nobody has rung you up and confirmed anything officially?

Konika Dhar: I wouldn't know; if no—my guess is as good as anyone else's and I would like to believe that my brother is not involved in that, and if he is then—*[Sighs]*.

Q879 Chair: But you accept what Nusrat Ghani has just said—that these are the activities that we have all heard Daesh are involved in?

Konika Dhar: Perhaps, but focusing on my brother I want to know what he is involved in. I am not really concerned with anyone else. I am sorry if that sounds selfish.

Chair: No, we understand that.

Konika Dhar: Okay.

Q880 Mr Jayawardena: A quick follow-on line of questioning, if I may. My colleague, Ms Ghani, was talking about rehabilitation and talking about a deterrent and people understanding that they cannot come back and live a normal life if they do these grotesque deeds. Depersonalising it for a moment, do you believe that the authorities should look to impose prison sentences on returning jihadists?

Konika Dhar: I would prefer there to not be a prison sentence completely for the likes of my brother. The reason I say that is because then there will be no option but for them to stay there. Why would they return if they would be in prison? They won't.

Q881 Mr Jayawardena: On that basis you believe that these crimes should go unpunished?

Konika Dhar: I think this is hard for me to answer. I do not think I can answer this.

Q882 Mr Jayawardena: Perhaps depersonalising it again and not thinking solely of your brother, do you believe that it is right for the British public, the United Kingdom as a whole, to be at risk from people who are self-confessed terrorists?

Konika Dhar: No. Absolutely—I do agree that they should criminalise and punish the wrongdoers. Yes, I do.

Mr Jayawardena: Thank you.

Q883 James Berry: First of all, thank you very much for coming in and for the bravery with which you are giving your evidence. I want to pick up on a few points on what Ms Atkins was asking you about. When did your brother leave the family home?

Konika Dhar: Do you mean to live—

James Berry: Yes—move out from home. What age?

Konika Dhar: This is a bit vague, but 23 or 25.

Q884 James Berry: So he had already converted to Islam?

Konika Dhar: Oh yes, definitely.

Q885 James Berry: You are a Hindu family; even just converting to Islam is quite a big deal. Quite unusual.

Konika Dhar: That is right.

James Berry: Regardless of how radical that brand of Islam is, so that must have been quite a big deal at home?

Konika Dhar: Yes, bearing in mind I consider our family to be quite liberal, it was definitely hard to accept but we were very accepting of it at the time. I still am. I am not saying that he can't be Muslim. I just want him to be happy. I don't mind him practising what he wants peacefully, so—I still don't have an issue with it.

Q886 James Berry: Do you have other siblings?

Konika Dhar: Um—

James Berry: Do you have other siblings?

Konika Dhar: No, I heard. I just wondered what relevance it would be to answer.

Q887 James Berry: I was just wondering. I will tell you the context. We have heard evidence from previous witnesses talking about radicalisation. The way they have answered questions we have asked about how people have become radicalised, they have said things like, "There were social problems. There were family problems." But in your case you seem like a very nice young lady and I am sure you have come from a very nice family, and I am trying to work out what on earth would make someone—your brother in your household—turn out the way he has. It is very difficult for us to understand that, so that is why I am trying to ask a bit more about your family.

Konika Dhar: Yes, so I have my brother and I have an older sister.

Q888 James Berry: Can you shed any light on that? Was there anything else going on in his life that would have encouraged him to go down this path?

Konika Dhar: I would not underestimate the influence that his friends had on him, growing up. Again I don't mean to penalise anyone or put blame on anyone, but I think there is a reason why my brother is who he is and none of us are. Oh, I don't know.

Q889 James Berry: I can see what you are getting at. When did he—did he complete A-levels? Did he finish school?

Konika Dhar: I would rather not answer his private details.

Q890 James Berry: One further question, what do you suggest the Government and community organisations need to do to deter people from becoming radicalised? What could we do better?

Konika Dhar: This is a hard one as well. It is something that I have been thinking about as well.

Q891 Chair: If you cannot think of an answer now, would you like to drop the Committee a note about those thoughts?

Konika Dhar: Yes, I think that would be better.

Chair: Mr Berry has raised a very important issue and that would be very helpful if you cannot immediately give us a plan.

Konika Dhar: Yes, that is right. I think it would be better if I thought about that.

Q892 James Berry: Summarising your thoughts on how your brother became radicalised—without wanting to get into too much detail—it sounds like it was nothing to do with your family circumstances. It was perhaps more that he fell in with the wrong crowd?

Konika Dhar: Yes. I don't think that helped at all. That can be evidently shown by what he represents today and who he maintains to associate with. I am not saying it is conclusively that, I am just saying that I think that played a pivotal role in his decision.

Q893 James Berry: Was this a group of Muslim friends?

Konika Dhar: I wouldn't say a group as such; again, I don't know. I wasn't there at the time but I think he had a few.

Q894 Chair: Following on from what Mr Berry has said, there were big warning signs, weren't there? He appeared on BBC Television. He was seen to be a mentor of one of Lee Rigby's killers, Michael Adebolajo. He was a member of al-Muhajiroun. Do you think the authorities should have stepped in when these warning signs were very obvious?

Konika Dhar: I think it definitely would have helped, if anything, for anyone else to prevent it. So, for example—I mean, having said this—

Q895 Chair: This was not hidden. He was on BBC Television announcing his support for Daesh, so everyone knew this, didn't they? Should someone have intervened to

perhaps stop this going further? Hindsight is a wonderful gift but, looking back, do you think that is what should have happened?

Konika Dhar: I think it would have helped personally, because I wasn't aware of how much of a media influence he had until very late, and I think by then it was far too late to do anything about it. Yes, I do think it would have helped.

Q896 Mr Umunna: I just reiterate, thank you for coming and giving evidence. In particular, I want to just discuss with you some of the stuff that you put in your *Sunday Times* article—that was in May 2015—which must have been incredibly difficult to write. The sense I get from the evidence you have given, which in some senses tonally is a little bit different from *The Sunday Times's* article, is that you are still coming to terms with what has happened to you and your family. Would I be right in saying it is almost like you are in a bad dream from which you are hoping to be woken up?

Konika Dhar: You have put it very well. I think people underestimate how traumatic the experience is, not only for the person who has gone out there but for the families that are left behind. I think people expected me and everyone else to just get on with it but it is much harder in practice.

Q897 Mr Umunna: Would it be right to say that, in terms of what he may or may not have been engaging in with Daesh in Syria, you are still coming to terms with the fact of whether or not he did that?

Konika Dhar: Exactly.

Q898 Mr Umunna: You have just said to us that you do not believe he has been doing the things that Ms Ghani has just outlined but in the *Sunday Times* piece you say, and I will quote, “I keep wondering where this snake has come from” and you said that he had been leading a double life for years. In answer to the last questioner you said it was too late to do anything about it, so would you say it is fair that we treat your evidence that you give with that in mind, because you have been much more public than many families and you have, particularly personally, been very honest, frank and open about what you are going through? Would it be right to say that appearing in front of this Committee is part of that process?

Konika Dhar: That is right.

Q899 Mr Umunna: Can I ask how you personally feel about this? Would I be right in saying that, in some sense, you feel responsible for what may or may not have happened? You said in the *Sunday Times* article, “I will never stop blaming myself for what has happened”. Would that be accurate?

Konika Dhar: I sort of feel a sense of guilt, definitely. I feel I have lost my brother. Why could I not stop it? He is a part of me, and I do not mean to sound—

Mr Umunna: I understand.

Konika Dhar: I feel as though there is an obligation on my part, as the younger sister, to make sure that he is okay, and if he is not okay then I must have failed in some way. That is how I feel.

Q900 Mr Umunna: Picking up on Mr Berry's question just now, where James was asking you about things in your family life that may have impacted on your brother—and I don't think you are suggesting there are any excuses for committing any of these things—clearly to prevent people from doing these things in the future we want to understand what the explanation is.

One notable thing that you did not mention just now, but you did mention in that piece—and I hold my hands up, I lost my father when was 13—was the fact that you lost your father when your brother was 16. He died quite early. Do you think that could have impacted? You mentioned it as potentially impacting on him in your piece but you did not mention it just now. To me, as somebody who also lost my father at a very young age, that seems like quite a remarkable thing to miss out.

Konika Dhar: Sorry, can I just understand the question?

Mr Umunna: In terms of influences and the lack of having a father figure, frankly.

Konika Dhar: Do I feel that that has impacted on his decision?

Q901 Mr Umunna: Or in terms of the avenue that he took, this conversion, looking for belonging, identity; I don't know?

Konika Dhar: I think it is there in what I have said before. I did state that.

Q902 Mr Umunna: Let me move on to another question. I want to ask you about some of the comments you made in relation to the video that we have seen that Daesh put out earlier this year. What would be your message, or what one piece of advice would you give to families who are going through what you described seeing happen to your brother in your piece?

Konika Dhar: I would say that essentially the mistake that any family member can make is giving up on their loved one.

Q903 Mr Umunna: You have said that before but what does that mean? Do you mean giving up hope that they have not taken this awful course, or giving up hope of trying to influence and prevent them from going down that course in the first instance?

Konika Dhar: It could be both, but to me I would say that what I meant was giving up on the hope that they might return back to that person. That is a normal state, because—

Q904 Mr Umunna: Change from Abu back to Sid?

Konika Dhar: Yes, this is it. I am on a mission to bring him back to the normal state that I remember. I think the mistake that any family can make is when they give up all hope, because that is when it is doomed. It is almost as if that is it, there is no going back, and it is what it is.

Q905 Mr Umunna: One penultimate question: what you are really saying to this Committee is that you do not necessarily deny the existence of the persona of Abu Rumaysah but that was not your brother as you remember him?

Konika Dhar: Yes. I do agree with that. God, no, I do not know who that person is.

Q906 Mr Umunna: In early January Daesh released this video depicting the execution of five prisoners with a gunman apparently of British origin there. You have made some comments about this in the media. Do you believe that gunman to be or to sound like your brother?

Konika Dhar: I think it is a bit of an unfair question at the moment because I don't—I think—I hope that it's not. I think I probably—yeah, I might have said in the beginning that it sounded a bit like him and that is all I would go by, and I am happy to leave it at that.

Q907 Mr Umunna: Perhaps if I could put it another way: do you think that person could have been Abu Rumaysah?

Konika Dhar: [*Sighs.*] I dunno, I don't know who Abu Rumaysah is.

Mr Umunna: Thank you very much.

Q908 Tim Loughton: I am going to go back to the point a minute ago about your family background and your father. This is incredibly difficult for you, coming to terms with what has happened and trying to rationalise it. It is incredibly difficult for us trying to rationalise how somebody from, on the face of it, an entirely normal British family who then turns into this person that you do not recognise and you would not recognise as an average British citizen. Last year we had some witnesses, families of those three girls from East London, young girls, who have gone to Syria. We had a discussion, much as we are having with you, and I remember a cousin of one of the girls said, “She was perfectly normal. We all sat at home watching ‘At Home with the Kardashians’” and that was the sort of benchmark of normality.

I think in your case you said your brother played basketball and he was an Arsenal supporter, which apparently is normal for some people. At some point something changed. What we are trying to get to is when that change happened. Was that change always there bubbling away under the surface and likely to happen because there was a family background to it? Everything you have told us seems to suggest that there was nothing at home that could have caused that; maybe your father's untimely death had an influence there. There are potentially two other courses of action: were there malign influences that got their teeth into your brother? You suggested in that article that he fell in with some other people and his old friends fell by the wayside. Were there people targeting him? Or the other course of action, you used the word “brainwashed”, which I think is quite interesting. If he was brainwashed by these maligning influences or somebody else, why is it that he fell for it but your neighbour is still living and supporting Arsenal and not going off to Syria? You see, that is what we have to try to get to the bottom of. What made your brother different from other people of the same background, the same generation, and how do we do something about it?

Konika Dhar: I think it is important not to stereotype all cases. In my brother's case it is important to look at how powerful the influence was. It is really hard, but what I mean is I do believe the powers or whoever influenced him must have been far more dangerous and it may well be the case that that person has not yet—I don't know. Again, I don't know because—

Q909 Tim Loughton: Was he gullible?

Konika Dhar: My brother? I do think he is a bit naive, and I mean that in a pleasant way. I think he was more vulnerable than anyone else. I do believe that. At the time of his conversion he may have been more vulnerable than your average person and that may have—

Q910 Tim Loughton: For what reason?

Konika Dhar: It could have been a number of reasons. I am not sure I know the answer myself. It is just a suggestion; I am not saying that it is fact.

Q911 Stuart C. McDonald: Ms Dhar, thank you for coming along this afternoon. Earlier on you said that you weren't sure who you would turn to. If something similar had happened now, do you know how who you would turn to for help?

Konika Dhar: Sorry, would I know who to turn to now for help?

Stuart C. McDonald: Yes.

Konika Dhar: Unfortunately, no.

Q912 Stuart C. McDonald: I also want to ask you: last autumn the Government published a counter-extremism strategy; have you had the opportunity to read the strategy or any knowledge of that strategy?

Konika Dhar: I have not been directly informed of it.

Q913 Stuart C. McDonald: If the Government had come to you and asked you what should be in that strategy to help prevent this sort of thing happening, what sort of things might you suggest to them?

Konika Dhar: Knowing who to contact when somebody is under a bad influence, maybe, in a religious context. It is so hard. I might have to come back on that because it is similar to the other question.

Stuart C. McDonald: Of course, thank you.

Q914 James Berry: Mr Umunna asked you a question essentially about what is the best thing families can do in this situation, and you said not to give up hope. That is hope that they will return in a non-radicalised state—rather as a mother, whose child is kidnapped or disappears, will not give up hope that they will come back alive. But what I think we would

like to know is: what is the best thing families can actively do to stop a loved one going down the course of radicalisation?

Konika Dhar: To always remind that person that you love them. Again, I am sorry but this is another one that I will have to think on. It requires a bit more thinking time.

Chair: You are dropping a note to the Committee; perhaps you could add Mr Berry's point, in particular. We will drop you a line and tell you these things.

Q915 James Berry: What I was trying to get at was, other than perhaps contacting the authorities or someone more suitable at an earlier point in time, is there anything you think you could have done differently, or would do differently, knowing the consequences of what has happened?

Konika Dhar: If I had known before, I would have loved to have intervened and spoken to my brother personally, and understand where we had gone wrong or why he feels this way. That is just my personal view. I don't think I can properly advise anyone else. I don't really know enough families to know what they have gone through; I can only speak on it subjectively.

Q916 Nusrat Ghani: Two very quick questions, Ms Dhar. You touched on the thought that your brother may possibly have been vulnerable at the time that he decided to adopt another faith. Do you think that at the time that he was vulnerable he might have joined any other gang, but Daesh seemed to be the coolest, the most empowering element that he could join at that particular time?

Konika Dhar: Yes, I think it could have been any of them.

Nusrat Ghani: Any, it just happened to be Daesh?

Konika Dhar: Yes.

Q917 Nusrat Ghani: Do you think he was particularly vulnerable—you would not comment on his education background—maybe his emotional state of mind was not the best, maybe he thought his life chances could be different if he joined this cool gang called Daesh? There is a huge concern among the communities that their young children are being particularly approached by Daesh recruiters, because these young men feel that their life chances could be improved if they joined Daesh. They could become big men in the community and big men in their homes. Do you think your brother was thinking that he might become someone bigger than he was at the time?

Konika Dhar: I am always of the view that I love my brother and I think he is great—or from what I remembered growing up, and I think he could have had a great life. In answering that question, I don't really want to answer that in terms of—I don't want to indicate that he is not great in any way and—

Q918 Nusrat Ghani: But do you think he was in a fit state of mind? Was he in a fit state of mind when he converted?

Konika Dhar: No, I don't think he was.

Q919 Nusrat Ghani: So maybe he had mental health issues. Would you say that?

Konika Dhar: I don't want say that.

Q920 Nusrat Ghani: All right. You don't want to say if he had mental health issues.

Chair: You don't know, do you, so we should just leave it there.

Konika Dhar: Yes. I am not a psychologist.

Q921 Nusrat Ghani: A final very quick question: you said that the people that might have recruited or brainwashed him were far more dangerous than your brother. There are images of your brother now arriving in Syria and these images and what he may be up to is now recruiting other men. How does that make you feel about your brother, once being the vulnerable person being recruited and now becoming the recruiter?

Konika Dhar: Sad. It is tragic.

Q922 Chair: Thank you. Thank you very much for coming in to give evidence—this must have been very difficult for you—and for answering the questions in a very open way. Since this has come into the public domain, Konika Dhar, has anyone come to you to offer you and your family, yourself, your mother, any counselling over what has happened, or sat with you from the authorities, whoever they are—Social Services or the Home Office—and tried to get the kind of information that this Committee has sought to get from you today? Has there been any contact with people? Any counselling of any kind?

Konika Dhar: I would say formally, not really. No, I would not mind considering it but I think some sort of emotional support would help.

Q923 Chair: Would that be helpful if there was someone who was able to help the relatives of those who have gone in this way?

Konika Dhar: Yes. I think it is important.

Chair: This is something that we have picked up from our last inquiry—that there seems to be a lack of that kind of support, which clearly you need because clearly you are very distressed and traumatised by what has happened. Would that be helpful to you and other families in similar circumstances?

Konika Dhar: Yes, I think that would help.

Q924 Chair: Thank you for coming in. It has been very important for you to come and help us. It may not do anything concerning your brother but, hopefully, it will give the Committee an understanding of what is that tipping point that changes, as you have said, a normal person into someone who is involved in the kinds of activities that we know Daesh has been involved in. We are very, very grateful to you for coming in today. If there is any

other information that you want to help this Committee with, please do write to us. We will welcome it. Thank you so much for coming in.

Konika Dhar: Thank you.

Chair: You are welcome to stay for the rest of the session.

Konika Dhar: Thank you. Am I able to ask a question at all?

Chair: Of course.

Konika Dhar: Just in terms of what I can do to help my brother, is there anything I can do?

Q925 Chair: There is nothing that this Committee can suggest but we will certainly be contacting—if it is helpful to you—the Home Office to see what support is on offer for the families of those who have been left in the way in which you and your mother have been. I will do this. I will write to the Home Secretary to see what is available for you because clearly you are very upset and need all the support that you can get.

Konika Dhar: Okay.

Chair: Maybe that is one of the problems—there is no such organisation that can help you. If there isn't, this is certainly something that we would want to look at as a Committee. But thank you so much for coming in.

Konika Dhar: All right. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **David Anderson, QC**, Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, gave evidence.

Q926 Chair: David Anderson, thank you very much for coming to give evidence yet again to this Committee. We are not going to have a dry discussion about the law because, as you have seen from the last session, what the Committee is interested in, in particular, is your opinions about the counter-narrative. Of course, you deal with very important matters concerning the rights of individuals and the counter-terrorism legislation. We want to hear from you your opinion—having done this job now for five years—about what we can do to stop people going in the first place, people like Siddhartha Dhar, the sister of whom we have just heard from today. In your five years you must have met many, many members of the community. I know I have seen you at many functions concerning the Muslim community. Do you have any information to offer this Committee as to why you think normal people—whether or not they be Arsenal supporters, as Mr Loughton said—suddenly turn into

someone who is radical and wants to go to another country and kill people and rape women? Is there any information you can give this Committee about the tipping point?

David Anderson: I do not think there is a foolproof rule. There certainly is not an answer to everything but, if you are trying to analyse it, I rather like the analysis of Peter Neumann who runs the Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King's College London, and he sees basically two ingredients in pretty much everybody. The first is a grievance and the second is ideology. The grievance could be almost infinitely various. It could be someone like Anders Breivik, who has a disastrous relationship with his mother, or someone who has fallen out with his brother. It could be, as Maajid Nawaz explains in his book "Radical", racist bullying at school that gives him the grievance. It could be, one often hears, the foreign policy grievance. One hears a narrative of discrimination and I think, if we had been talking five years ago, as a terrorism reviewer, I would have been talking to you about section 44, the old no-suspicion stop-and-search power, which was very high up the list of grievances. Now gone, of course; repealed by a happy combination of the human rights Court and the Home Secretary. So there is the grievance, first of all, but it is the ideology that battens on to the grievance and provides a language that makes sense of the grievance and that makes sense of the person's life. It seems to me that there are those two halves to it.

Q927 Chair: The worry for this Committee, and I suppose those of us who have looked at these matters for years, and indeed those who practised law and other disciplines before they came into the House, is: the more laws we seem to pass, the more people seem to go abroad. It is now up to 700 leaving to fly to Syria. If you add the rest of Europe, these are going into thousands. Are we just passing too much legislation instead of working more effectively with communities?

David Anderson: I don't think we have too much. There are one or two that I would doubt how useful they are. We have to remember the law is a very imperfect instrument. It can keep a lid on things. The pursue strand of the CONTEST strategy is absolutely vital, it gives people confidence, it enables us to keep dangerous people out of harm's way but it is not a complete answer. The much more difficult issue, in my view, is the issue you have identified, Chairman—why do people do this in the first place? What can all of us do? I do not think we can just dump it on the Muslim community. It is something that all of us in our different ways have a role in. Just so that that is not a completely empty platitude, you have just heard from Ms Dhar, and of course her brother was a convert. About a quarter of terrorist prisoners are converts. So it is no good saying, "We have got to sort out Muslim families"—that might be part of the problem but it is a problem that can arise in any family, as we have heard.

Q928 Chair: Let us go back to the Dhar case for a moment, and just bring in a bit of law here—I don't want you to feel that we are not going to talk about law—and that is the situation on police bail. I don't know whether you followed the session last week with Mark Rowley and the Prime Minister's session for the Liaison Committee.

David Anderson: Yes, I did.

Chair: Mr Rowley said that the police have no powers to detain an individual for the sole purpose of obtaining travel documents, and felt that the law on police bail was toothless.

The Prime Minister followed that up an hour later by saying he was going to look again at the bail provisions. Do you think one way of stopping these people going in the first place—and I know we have had a lot of legislation on the seizing of passports, but not necessarily on police bail—is to give the police the power to seize those passports at the time of bail, when you are dealing with suspects who are involved in proscribed organisations?

David Anderson: Yes. I think it is very unsatisfactory to give the police the power, effectively, to tell someone they cannot leave the country but then be unable to put that power into effect. It is not an easy thing to do in law. There is a lot of law around police bail and you are looking at the pre-charge stage, but I have begun to think already, with my Special Adviser Professor Walker, about how we might contribute to this debate. One way to do it might be to use the equivalent power to the one you have under the search provisions of the Terrorism Act, where you can get a judicial order for certain things to be produced. Perhaps identity documents might be put in that category as well, so you can have the whole thing under the supervision of a court and are not just relying on the goodwill of the person. The other thing that plainly went wrong in this case was that the fact that he had effectively been told not to travel had not got through to the people doing the exit check at Dover.

Q929 Chair: Sure. There was an agency problem here. We were assured that all the various agencies, the Passport Office, the Border Force, were all informed immediately but, having been released from the police station, he went home, he packed his toothbrush, his wife, his family, went off and arrived in Syria and started tweeting abuse about the British Government and the British people. All that was allowed, and what the Metropolitan Police did was just write a letter saying, “You did not turn up on 3 October.” That is totally unsatisfactory, isn’t it?

David Anderson: Well, the police have to work with the powers they have. I don’t think the bail situation is satisfactory. If this person had been arrested under the Terrorism Act there is no provision for police bail at all. That might sound appropriately tough until you reflect that that means in every case the police must reach a charging decision in 14 days and, in a very complicated plot, that can be extremely difficult. Yet, arrested under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, you have the option of police bail and it does not seem that there is the power that is needed to render the surrender of identity documents a strong and enforceable obligation.

Q930 Chair: Do you feel that this is just overwhelming us—that whatever we do, whatever powers we have, we are not able to get into people’s hearts and minds? We can pass legislation in this place, you can scrutinise the law—as you are doing, and have done so effectively in the last five years—but, at the end of the day, more are going. One of the points that the Prime Minister made yesterday is that he felt that it was a language problem and that, by giving Muslim mothers, in effect, £20 million to teach them how to speak English, this would somehow have an effect on stopping people going, because it is the Muslim mothers, in particular, who seem to be encouraging people. Do you agree with what the Prime Minister has said? Do you think that that is one way of making sure that people are more integrated?

David Anderson: I can see any number of reasons for encouraging people in this country to learn English. I think it is getting more difficult. I have visited families who might have

been in the country for 20 years and still need an interpreter, because they watch television on their own channel and they talk to people mostly in their own language. I can think of lots of reasons why it is good for them to learn the language. I am not sure whether one needs to—

Chair: But this in particular, because—

David Anderson: I am not sure whether one needs to, in a sense, make that issue part of the debate on extremism and terrorism. As far as I know, people going out to Syria are not notable for their poor language skills. In fact, some of them are wanted for their propaganda skills. I can see there is an argument—and I think people like Sara Khan and Sajda Mughal, who work in this field, would probably support this—for ensuring, for example, that particularly mothers are in a good position to talk to their children, have some awareness of who their children are talking to, what they are doing on their computers, to the extent that a parent can ever know that. So perhaps there is some overlap, but I think it is unfortunate that this whole question of language learning, which is a very important part of the integration and empowerment of women, should get mixed up with the business of ISIS and—

Q931 Chair: Does that include the proposal to perhaps ban veils, and burkas?

David Anderson: Of course, they did that in France. They banned the wearing of the full-face veil in public, and indeed any covering over the face—a hoodie or something—was banned as well. The European Court of Human Rights said that was acceptable in the interests of living together.

Q932 Chair: So do you think we should do it here? Will this help in the counter-terrorism strategy?

David Anderson: I think there are some circumstances in which it is plainly not appropriate for a full-face veil to be worn. Somebody giving evidence in court would be an obvious example. I would extend that to the classroom. I don't see how classroom teaching can work effectively if nobody can see the teacher's face, or if the teacher cannot see some of the pupils' faces. Would I go further and ban people from wearing the veil on the street? Personally, no, I wouldn't. It sounds as though one could do it consistently with human rights, but that is certainly not an argument for doing it if it is not right for us.

Q933 Nusrat Ghani: Let us return to the question that the Chair raised about speaking English. It is incredibly important for mums to know what their kids are viewing online, watching on telly and reading in magazines. If you are unable to read any piece of literature that your child might bring home, you are at a disadvantage. It could be anything. We talked about Arsenal football club. It could be anything, about a football club you want to join, about a trip you want to go on overseas, a letter from the doctor, a letter from the school, so it is important that mums in this country, regardless of their background, are encouraged to speak English to help their children. Do you agree with me that if there is an issue of radicalisation in particular communities and those mums haven't had the opportunity to learn

English, because maybe some menfolk in their homes deemed it not necessary for them, that they are encouraged and supported to learn English?

David Anderson: I entirely agree that it is an important part of the integration agenda, of the empowerment agenda. It is important to help women get into work. It is important to help them to drive. I think there are all sorts of reasons why they need to speak a language, and I would apply that not just to Muslim women but to others as well.

Q934 Nusrat Ghani: Exactly. We took some very emotional evidence from Ms Dhar earlier, trying to understand why people would want to leave their home in the UK and go join a death cult like Daesh. Ms Dhar alluded to what could have been the tipping point. There was some point in her brother's life where he was particularly vulnerable. She would not confirm or deny whether he was emotionally vulnerable at the time. It could have been any gang he could have joined but he chose to join Daesh. We have taken evidence from the Muslim Council of Britain, from the Bethnal Green Academy. We have taken evidence from imams that represent vast numbers of Muslims in this country, and all the time I have asked them, "Was there a particular point that you knew that someone you were working with, or someone that practised within your mosque, was about to become radicalised? What would you have done differently?" Until I heard from Ms Dhar, I have not heard evidence from any other person representing Muslims in this country that could say they came across someone that was about to be radicalised. Knowing that, it is incredibly hard to work out how you can have a counter-narrative if people don't come forward—like Ms Dhar—and explain to us what made them radicalised in the first place. What can we do to be the counter-narrative if people always say, "It is not happening in our community. It is not happening within our mosque. It is not happening with any of our network"? How do you come up with a counter-narrative?

David Anderson: Yes. It is difficult. There is a certain amount of the taking down, the working with social media companies to take down, the banning of hate preachers and so on, which is going on. There is a certain amount of admiring the work of people—like the two women I have mentioned—but of course, as soon as the Government starts funding them, then people start objecting that they must be in some sense less than impartial, or creatures of the Government or something like that, so that is obviously a difficult thing to do. There is a certain amount to do in making the rules in public fora, whether that is a prison, whether that is a university, or indeed whether that is the media. If you are going to invite one of these characters on your show, are you going to do to him what happened to Nick Griffin on "Question Time", or are you just going to give him an easy ride? All these things could be done.

I would agree with the thrust of your question that one cannot exempt Muslim organisations from this, but I am not pointing the finger at them. In the evidence of the Muslim Council of Britain, and the East London Mosque, and the Bradford Council of Mosques, they all said, "The Government does not engage with us." I have looked at the Community Engagement Forum and there are many worthy people on it but, so far as I know, they are right when they say that. I think more engagement would be very beneficial, and I don't just mean a touchy-feely conversation. If the Government wants to put conditions on engagement, that is fine. I think some of these groups are trying, and the Chair and I both addressed the conference of the Muslim Council of Britain that they had in November. The purpose of that conference was to try to determine what they ought to

be doing about terrorism and extremism. Well, maybe they need more of a shove. I think there is a risk that, if you do not talk to these people, you end up with two dialogues of like-minded people. You get the Government talking to people who think like them. You have the mainstream Muslim community talking to each other but not really engaging with the other side. I think a dialogue could actually broaden minds on both sides and might help produce solutions.

Q935 Nusrat Ghani: We can only produce solutions if people come forward and tell us exactly how the problems occur. The evidence you spoke about, the imams from Bradford mosque, when I asked them directly, “If you feel that the Government is not speaking to you, what advice would you give them if you have come across people that have become radicalised?” every time I asked them that question, they kept saying, “We have not come across anyone that showed any signs of radicalisation,” so I put it to them, “What would you offer as advice?” They had nothing more to give. What more can we learn from these groups, who say they are being excluded, even though we are trying to communicate with them, when they will not come forward and say, “We have come across people that are being radicalised within our network”? You cannot have it both ways. You cannot say, “No one is talking to us” but when we say “Help us” they say, “It doesn’t happen here.”

David Anderson: I do understand that, but of course the point of this whole strategy is to unite the whole country—all of us—against the men and women of violence on the extremes. I do not see how you can do that without talking to everybody and making sure that everybody buys in to whatever it is you are proposing.

Q936 Mr Winnick: Presumably one wants to encourage people to speak English, which is desirable in itself. It is somewhat illogical to reduce funding to help foreign language speakers learn English, but that is somewhat outside your remit.

David Anderson: I think that is one for me to swerve, Mr Winnick.

Q937 Mr Winnick: It would also be true to say, would it not, Mr Anderson, that people from this country when there was an empire, colonies and the rest, and many went to India, for example, it was somewhat rare in many instances for those people from Britain to learn the native language?

David Anderson: There may even be some British people in Spain who are not yet wholly fluent in the Spanish language.

Chair: I think that is outside our remit.

Q938 Mr Winnick: On the subject of learning languages or learning English, which as I said is desirable, is it not the fact that those who committed a mass murder in our country—7/7, 52 people murdered, others seriously injured—spoke perfect English? That is a fact, isn’t it?

David Anderson: Indeed.

Q939 Mr Winnick: A brother of the witness that we just heard from was born in Britain. There were certainly no difficulties about his language. So, while it is desirable obviously—to repeat myself—that English is understood and spoken, those who have committed such crimes spoke perfect English.

David Anderson: Yes. I would repeat that, in my view, it is desirable for any number of reasons. I would not see this as solely, or even predominantly, part of a counter-extremism strategy but a very desirable thing in its own right.

Q940 Mr Jayawardena: We had evidence from Kingston University a little while ago, and Professor Weinberg said that the Government was putting universities in an impossible position with regard to the Prevent strategy. The Government's view is that provisions for academic freedom are part of the guidance. In your view, as an independent person, do you believe the protections are adequate?

David Anderson: I do not review the Prevent strategy and I have not talked to very many university vice-chancellors. I have talked to one or two about the Prevent duty. The best I can do is to refer to the comments made the other day by Louise Richardson, the new Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. As well as being the new Vice-Chancellor, she is one of the world's most distinguished scholars of terrorism. She wrote the book "What Terrorists Want", and she summed it up in three words: revenge, renown and reaction. I think the reason she said that people should be allowed to speak, so long as they can be challenged, is that if you start not allowing them to speak, you drive them underground and you get exactly the reaction that the terrorists want.

Q941 Mr Jayawardena: Why do you think it is that the Prevent strategy has proven so controversial to British Muslims? In the same hearing, we had the President of the NUS say that they believed that the trust in the Prevent strategy more generally, is "broken". Why do you think it has proven so controversial?

David Anderson: A lot of influential people have said that—people from the police, people formerly from the intelligence agencies. I hear a lot of stories about Prevent going wrong and I even put a number of them as an appendix to my report of last September, but, first of all, I have to ask myself, "Who is telling me this story? Are they somebody with a professional interest in fomenting grievance, or are they someone chronicling how it is?" The second thing I have to ask is, "Are these likely to be permanent features or are they teething troubles?" When you have teachers overreacting to four-year-olds who start saying they want to pray or something, well, is that something that will have been ironed out in a couple of years' time? I certainly applaud people—and I mention again Sara Khan—who work within the Prevent strategy. She is not necessarily flavour of the month with everybody, but she thinks there is enough good in that strategy to be worth working with. That is my instinct as well, although I certainly would not defend everything that goes on under it.

Q942 Mr Jayawardena: One final question if I may, Chair. Mr Anderson, do you believe that it is the role of Government to respond to non-violent as well as violent extremism?

David Anderson: First of all, we do have very extensive laws that extend already to aspects of non-violent extremism. I am wary about the proposed counter-extremism Bill—

although I have not seen the Bill since last July and things may have changed a lot since then, I just don't know—for exactly Louise Richardson's reasons, that I am concerned about the reaction, I am concerned it will be counter-productive. That does not mean I think the counter-extremism strategy is wrong to be looking at non-violent extremism. It does not mean, for example, that I think institutes of education that take people for eight or 10 hours a week should not be inspected. I am sure there are a lot of good things in there, but I am very wary about extending the law, the hard law, any further than it already goes into what people believe and what they say.

Q943 Chair: Shami Chakrabarti, who will be giving evidence after you, said that Prevent was the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times, and an affront to civil liberties. Do you agree with that?

David Anderson: No, I do not. I think there have been some mistakes along the way with Prevent. Project Champion would be the obvious example, in the West Midlands, where a network of cameras went up and the community were probably given a misleading impression of why the cameras were there. That undoubtedly fed the narrative that the whole thing was spying. I think the police have done what they can to pull that round. I would say that one difficulty has been that Prevent has been asked to bear too much weight.

I think it was anticipated in the last Parliament that the Department for Communities and Local Government would build a strategy and engagement that would be quite separate from Prevent, and would leave only the hard end to the Home Office and to Prevent. For one reason or another that did not work. We now also have counter-extremism within the Home Office but, as we heard yesterday, in relation to the way the announcement on language was treated, even that seems to be sometimes viewed very much through the perspective of terrorism.

Q944 Chair: There is a lack of co-ordination between Government Departments on this?

David Anderson: I do not say that, but I do say that I am sure everybody in this room spends a lot of time with Muslim constituents. I spend quite a lot of time with Muslims. I am not just talking about the people who foment grievance when I say this. I think a lot of them feel under siege. That makes them quite thin-skinned and quite willing to believe—even when there is no reason to believe—that Prevent is perhaps not motivated by the best reasons, and is a sort of spying programme.

Q945 Tim Loughton: Mr Anderson, you have made it very clear that you do not think a change in law is necessarily the solution, and you have talked about various spying tactics, but in your report last year you talked about the proliferation of extremist propaganda. The Government boast that they have taken down x-thousand pages, and clearly that is just the tip of the iceberg, but all forms of social media still seem to be available for people to access, for terrorists in Syria to be able to talk to family, contacts and potential recruits over here. What could the Government be doing, given that huge resource of Cheltenham disrupting social media capability and so on? Why is it not happening? Why is it not working and what more could be done?

David Anderson: I think things are turning round on social media. One difficulty of course is that nearly all these companies are based in the United States, where they have very strong free speech traditions, very strong privacy traditions, and do not particularly like kowtowing to what foreign Governments ask them to do. I know the Chairman has also met with Google and I met with Google in California. They told me about their Trusted Flagger Programme, which they operate on YouTube, where Governments and NGOs can say to them, “We would like you to take this down. We think it is fomenting terrorism.” They told me 96% of requests from the British Government for take-downs are honoured—their average is 31%—so it sounds as though the Government are basically getting what they want out of that. Even Twitter, although I think it woke up to this late, will tell you it has taken down tens of thousands of terrorist accounts and, indeed, it was recently sued in the US. I saw a few days ago that Twitter was sued for giving material support to terrorism.

I think there are things that can be done with the co-operation of the social media companies, and in the long term I suspect that is going to be the better option than covertly trying to spy on them or anything of that kind. An interesting part of this is what Sir Nigel Sheinwald recommended last year. I did my report, “A Question of Trust”. He produced one at the same time saying that we need an agreement with the Americans, so that what we ask of the social media companies is treated equivalently to what the Americans ask. We got it with child sexual exploitation very successfully.

Q946 Tim Loughton: But 4% still probably amounts to tens of thousands of pages.

David Anderson: No doubt.

Q947 Tim Loughton: What about disruptive techniques? I remember going to Dharamsala a few years ago, and in virtually every house you went into—in a fairly rural, not very sophisticated town—there was a Tibetan in front of a computer screen communicating with people in China, posing as various people, to give some very effective propaganda about the human rights abuses that China has inflicted on Tibet and various other things. Really effective. Why are we not doing something like that?

David Anderson: You mean the counterpropaganda?

Tim Loughton: Yes.

David Anderson: There are obviously risks in doing things like that because if the Government is rumbled as having been behind it, that simply increases the cynicism of people who are cynical enough about the Government quite openly giving funding to individuals, who are themselves trying to counter an extremist message. I am not able to inform you on precisely what the Government gets up to because I do not know.

Q948 Tim Loughton: The Government need not directly be doing it but it could be facilitating moderate Muslims, and people from other faiths as well, to be the ciphers for alternative messages, which could actually influence potentially vulnerable and impressionable people, that there is another side to this story. Do you think the Government has a role in facilitating, without necessarily instructing everybody at Cheltenham to get on their computers and do it themselves? That would also make the moderate Muslim

community feel engaged in a process against the extremists who are doing so much damage to that faith, let alone the rest of the country.

David Anderson: It certainly has a role in setting the rules of the game. Whether it has a role in pumping out counterpropaganda is a more difficult question. There are good examples of sites that have had support, for example, Abdullah-X YouTube channel, followed by some young people, a good counter-narrative to Isis. As far as I know, it is not funded by the Government. I think it might have had small grants from other people. The trouble is that if the people are ill-disposed to the Government anyway and cynical about the Government's motivations, and if they perceive counter-narrative work as being somehow funded or facilitated by the Government, then they are cynical about that as well.

Q949 Chair: In your report in June 2015, you said that some service providers were tipping off customers that they were under surveillance by the security services. Has that now stopped?

David Anderson: I think I said it was something that they had spoken about doing. I am not sure I had actually said that they were doing it.

Chair: They are not doing it?

David Anderson: I am not aware. Anything I said in my report I would stand by, but I am not aware of any specific example of that.

Chair: You would have no new information for the Committee on that?

David Anderson: No.

Q950 Chair: Are they co-operating fully with the various Government agencies?

David Anderson: The social media companies?

Chair: Yes.

David Anderson: I think it is an ongoing process, and you see that in the US Dianne Feinstein has put a Bill very recently through Congress that would require them to alert law enforcement when they see terrorist material on their site, so that is a problem even in the US. I know there were meetings with the social media companies at European level after the Paris attacks.

Q951 Chair: Would you support the Feinstein Bill?

David Anderson: I would not know. Politics are much too difficult for me, I leave that to those who understand it. When you talk to them—and I am sure you often have—they will always tell you, “We cannot just do one thing for the Brits because, after all, we have to deal with Russia and China and we have to treat you all the same”. I am not sure that is an adequate answer. I think, as Sir Nigel Sheinwald suggested, the starting point is an international agreement between us and the US, or maybe the other Five Eyes countries, maybe some other European countries; sort out the rules of the game and then hopefully other countries can come in and join. What we are looking at is a sort of equivalence so that, where we want things, we are treated in the same way as the American Government.

Q952 Stuart C. McDonald: Mr Anderson, we have heard from some witnesses about the importance that they would place on a counter-narrative to extremism, and I was going to ask you how the Government and civil society could best develop that sort of counter-narrative, one that would have resonance with young people in particular, but, based on your answers to Mr Loughton, I get that you are questioning whether the Government should have a role in developing that narrative at all.

David Anderson: It sets the rules of the game, as I have mentioned. If the Government wants to push universities to say, “Where is your venue hire protocol? Where is your balance protocol?” that seems to me an acceptable thing for Government to do. When it actually comes to Government providing the narrative, well, of course, every time the Prime Minister speaks about Daesh he is not afraid to say what he thinks of them. But I think it is less than optimal to have the Government as the primary producer of the counterpropaganda. It is much more effective if it comes from people that susceptible people can understand and see as some of their own. The testimony of people who have come back from Syria—and there have been some wonderful videos recently of girls who have been out there and said, “It really is not like they say”—that is likely to be much more powerful than something that the Government says.

Q953 Victoria Atkins: Following on from that, sometimes I think we place the attractiveness of Daesh, or those sorts of radical groups, on a higher pedestal than the criminal gangs that they in fact are. Just as it is much more believable for young people to listen to a former gang leader tell of his or her experiences in a gang, I wonder if that relates well across to the issue we are discussing now about counter-terrorism?

David Anderson: Yes, I think it does. We have had examples of people who have been extremists, who have come back and changed their minds and explained how wrong they were. One reason it is glamorous, of course, is that it is perceived to be exciting. It is perceived to be a place where you can have good comrades and where you can win. In a sense we see, for example, with al-Shabaab, two, three years ago everyone was going out to East Africa to al-Shabaab and that is not happening any more. Once the tide has turned and Daesh starts losing territory and losing battles and the reports coming out of there are of a miserable standard of living for people who go out there, we may find that some of that glamour melts away quite quickly.

Q954 Victoria Atkins: I want to turn now, if I may, to the draft Investigatory Powers Bill, which is obviously a draft Bill that you have spent a lot of time advising the Government on and examining once the Home Office had produced it. Just so we understand at the beginning, in principle, you are content with the draft Bill?

David Anderson: It takes on board the very great majority of my recommendations, although my recommendations occupied only about 25 pages and the Bill is 200. They have had to take an awful lot of other decisions in order to produce the detail of the Bill, and that is where the Committee is currently doing its work, to try to work out whether those decisions were good ones or not.

Q955 Victoria Atkins: Given that it is at the scrutiny stage, obviously any recommendations as to how the Bill can be improved are welcome, I am sure. Last week the

Assistant Commissioner, Mark Rowley, who is also the Lead for Counter-terrorism for the Metropolitan Police, told us that the draft Investigatory Powers Bill is extending surveillance powers that security agencies already have in relation to digital communications, which are not within the scope of existing legislation. Do you agree with that analysis?

David Anderson: Yes. He was referring to the so-called internet connection records, which some people have characterised as a log of people's web browsing history, to be kept for up to a year. That is new. That is data that is not even generated by the service providers at the moment but which, if the Bill becomes law, they would be required to keep for up to a year.

Q956 Mr Winnick: Would you agree that this Bill was bound to be very controversial, to say the least, and is there not a danger that if it becomes law, there will be a good deal of emphasis on the aspects of that legislation, which, as I say, is bound to be controversial, rather than on the need to combat extremism and terrorism? In a sense, it is rather like the wrong people being convicted, and there is so much emphasis on the wrongful conviction than on the actual crime that has been committed but not by the people who have been imprisoned.

David Anderson: People have to make up their own minds about these issues. My view is that if the police and the intelligence agencies can prove that they need those powers to do their job of keeping us safe, then the powers need to be there with the safeguards to ensure that intrusions into privacy are not excessive. Something like the internet connection records is a very good example of something new, assuming that it is feasible, and that itself perhaps is a question. It is going to be for you to decide, and the people through you to decide, whether the incursion into privacy is justified by the extra abilities it will give the police.

Chair: I am afraid we have to end it there. Thank you very much for coming in, Mr Anderson.

Examination of Witness

Witness: **Shami Chakrabarti CBE** gave evidence.

Q957 Chair: Ms Chakrabarti, thank you very much for coming in. We are looking at the counter-narrative and not the whole range of counter-terrorism legislation. As we begin, I should say that you have announced that you are stepping down as the Director of Liberty, after 12 extraordinary years as Director. You have been described on the one hand as the most dangerous woman in Britain and, on the other, as a true fighter in defence of individual liberty. I know that this Committee is extremely grateful to you and your organisation for the briefings that you have provided us with. I want to draw on that experience to ask you the first question, which is: we seem to have had a lot of legislation over the last 12 years but things seem to be getting worse; more people seem to be going abroad. There seems to be legislation that you would describe as being quite draconian in some circumstances but yet the radicalisation persists. Why is that, do you think?

Shami Chakrabarti: First, thank you, Chair, it is an enormous privilege to be here once again, perhaps for the last time. It has been wonderful to watch this Committee over the years, successive members of it, grow its confidence. I think that it is not irrelevant to this

debate that we need to demonstrate our liberal democracy in all its glory and we need to include more people in it and show them how to disagree well. That has been my privilege to watch and participate in, including in this place, so thank you. I agree with much of what has been said but not everything. I do think there has been too much law; some of it has been positively counter-productive, some of it has just been a distraction and some of it has been capable. Whatever the ins and outs and the rights and wrongs, and whether you agree with me or David Anderson on this particular part of Prevent, all that, it has been seized upon by people who don't believe in disagreeing well, by people who are not—

Q958 Chair: Are you telling the Committee that the amount of legislation that has been passed has aided radicalisation or is that process going on anyway?

Shami Chakrabarti: Yes. Not just the amount. It is not just a numbers game, it is not x-number of Bills becomes counter-productive, you understand, but some of the counter-terrorism legislation that I have struggled with over the last 12 years has been positively counter-productive; whether it has involved detention without charge or trial; whether it has involved punishment without charge or trial; control orders and then TPIMs; whether it has involved stop and search without suspicion. Now we are moving into excluding British nationals from the country; blanket surveillance; and now new legislation is pending that will touch on free speech and academic freedom and so on. Some of this we can agree or disagree with in the detail and on the merits but some of it actually undermines the liberal values of our ideology, which I will defend confidently against anybody else's ideology, that is the death cult, that is authoritarian and that is contrary to human rights. I think it is really, really important in the narrative, whether it is speeches by statesmen, Prime Ministers, Home Secretaries or whatever, or whether it is in the way legislation is framed, it is very important to get that right.

Q959 Chair: Indeed. Thank you. Let us look at a speech by a statesman. That is the Prime Minister yesterday when he talked about a country being in certain places very segregated, and he proposed an additional fund to allow Muslim mothers to be able to speak English. Do you think the lack of knowledge of English is aiding radicalisation?

Shami Chakrabarti: I am the daughter of migrants. I will speak personally. Can I say that I do not have any magic answers to any of this and I don't think anybody does? I have spoken a bit about things that I find counter-productive. I am the daughter of migrants to this country. I am a bit older than a lot of the people that we are now talking about. My parents never had a lot of money. I am a dissenter, perhaps by nature, but the one thing that I always had is inclusion. Yes, I was taught to read and write in English before I went to school and, yes, I went to university with no tuition fees and a full grant. Yes, I have had all sorts of privileges and opportunities that allow me to be sitting here. I don't personally think that radicalisation is principally about language because we have said—

Chair: Do you support the Prime Minister? I understand you are uncertain—

Shami Chakrabarti: I support the idea that the English language belongs to everyone—

Chair: You don't agree that the lack of English is causing radicalisation in some circumstances?

Shami Chakrabarti: Look, I don't know but I think my instinct is—and this is just my life experience of having travelled up and down this land and been the daughter of migrants and met a lot of people, privileged people and vulnerable people—that there is a language problem with radicalisation, but it is the language of hate rather than the language of human rights.

Q960 Chair: Give us Shami Chakrabarti's counter-narrative based on 12 years. I know you said you do not want to give us a magic solution but we are seeking solutions. What would the counter-narrative be that it isn't at the moment?

Shami Chakrabarti: Disagreeing well. For example, I think that it would be useful, wise, brave and correct for senior politicians, from across the piece and across the political spectrum, to be more honest about mistakes—Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs—and I think the kind of disagreeing well that you do, particularly in Committees like this where you are cross-party and you will disagree about things but also even in the main Chamber of the House of Commons, that needs to be more broadly extended. It is not helpful when, for example, a Prime Minister will call the Leader of the Opposition “a threat to national security” because of disagreements about policy. That is not helpful, and it is certainly not helpful when people like me are called soft on terrorism. What is helpful is when people like me get the privilege of disagreeing on national TV with senior politicians of different persuasions, and I am not censored and I am not arrested, and sometimes we go and have dinner and a drink afterwards. That is my story that I would share with any young hothead from whatever community. This is a great country, and democracy is the best way when it is founded on human rights and the rule of law.

Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q961 Mr Jayawardena: We may well disagree on this: one of the things that you have spoken about over your tenure at Liberty is human rights, and the link I would like to make is to terrorism. One of the things that most angers the public about the European Courts, in this case the European Court of Human Rights, is that it has made it much harder to deport undesirables, such as Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada. Do you acknowledge those concerns?

Shami Chakrabarti: I certainly acknowledge concerns because I hear them all the time. I think that they are often greater in places of power than they actually are. The idea that I am not an ordinary person and I don't speak to people all over the country, taxi drivers and hairdressers, and I am part of the liberal élite, that I don't buy. That is not my experience. But I do understand that a lot of people think, wouldn't it be nice if you could just deport the problem—but you cannot just deport the problem.

Q962 Mr Jayawardena: You would rather these people remained in this country?

Shami Chakrabarti: No. I think that deportation is one tool that has always been open to Home Secretaries but I do not believe in deportation to places of torture. I believe, in the end, that charges, evidence, proof and conviction—

Mr Jayawardena: In the interests of time we must move on because a lot of people want to speak, but why should—

Chair: It is just that we have a vote at 4.20 pm and we are very keen to get a quick question and answer.

Shami Chakrabarti: I am so sorry.

Q963 Mr Jayawardena: Why should European Court of Human Rights judges be allowed to overrule the will of Parliament? You rightly talk about liberal democracy and people having their say through this place; whether or not people agree is another matter but debate is important. This place has an elected mandate. Why should they be able to overrule the will of Parliament, particularly as they have done in those cases and, indeed, the case of prisoner voting rights?

Shami Chakrabarti: Except prisoners don't have the vote. Clearly, what happens is there is a dialogue between courts at home and abroad, between Governments at home and abroad, and we end up with a negotiation. The prisoner voting judgment started a decade ago and prisoners do not yet have the vote.

Q964 Mr Jayawardena: We have had a lot of agreement here. On the basis that you believe that Parliament should be supreme—

Shami Chakrabarti: I believe it is.

Mr Jayawardena: Thank you—and that it is, why are you objecting to the Human Rights Act being repealed and the new creation of a British Bill of Rights?

Shami Chakrabarti: Because the content of the so-called British Bill of Rights, as I understand it, as it has been mooted and briefed and leaked from time to time, is neither British nor a Bill of Rights.

Q965 Mr Jayawardena: But if it is the will of Parliament, surely that is something that you would support if Parliament is supreme?

Shami Chakrabarti: But am I not allowed to engage in the debate with Members of Parliament about what should be—

Mr Jayawardena: But Parliament should be able to introduce that then, shouldn't it?

Shami Chakrabarti: I think it would be a mistake for Parliament.

Mr Jayawardena: But we should be able to do that.

Shami Chakrabarti: We live in a system that has parliamentary sovereignty as its ultimate constitutional principle. That is protected by The Human Rights Act. Bills of Rights all over the world—

Mr Jayawardena: Well, hang on—

Shami Chakrabarti: —allow Supreme Courts to strike down Acts of Parliament, but not here.

Chair: Order. This is a fascinating discussion, but could we bring it back to counter-terrorism?

Mr Jayawardena: Yes. I was about to do that exactly now, Chairman.

Chair: Excellent.

Q966 Mr Jayawardena: The British Bill of Rights, as I understand it from conversations with many colleagues here, would redress the balance and provide trust for the people that those terrorists who wish to do us harm will not be protected by the law that is actually there to protect us all. Do you not agree that that is the right principle for the way forward?

Shami Chakrabarti: Of course I don't, because I don't believe in torture, and if I don't believe in torture at my own hand, I don't believe in sending people to torture either. It is neither British nor does it belong in a Bill of Rights.

Q967 Mr Umunna: Since this may be your last appearance in front of the Committee, I want to ask you a few valedictory questions. I really hate myself for asking you this question but I feel duty-bound, Chair, that we should ask it, given we spent three hours debating this issue in Westminster Hall yesterday, and the author of a certain phrase is on this Committee: do you think or do you agree that the petition to ban a certain presidential candidate from coming to this country is appropriate?

Chair: A quick yes or no would be fine.

Shami Chakrabarti: No. It is good there is a debate about it but I don't—

Mr Umunna: We disagree in a nice way.

Chair: Order, order. We have a very short time.

Q968 Mr Umunna: You said that politicians need to be more honest about their mistakes and I agree with you, and I have to say that probably applies to me too, personally.

Tim Loughton: It does.

Mr Umunna: I will ignore what Mr Loughton just said for the benefit of the record.

With hindsight, in relation to an approach to a policy area or with regard to a particular piece of legislation, looking back on your 12 illustrious years in charge of your organisation, where do you think you got it wrong?

Shami Chakrabarti: Goodness me.

Mr Umunna: In the spirit of admitting to our mistakes.

Shami Chakrabarti: I think I will write to the Committee on that. Perhaps I will let my successor write that note.

Chair: Let us move on.

Q969 Mr Umunna: I am really looking forward to your note on that. My final question is: you are always sat over there and we pose questions to you but I suppose, for the benefit of the Committee—can we have an (a) and a (b)—how do you think we could be more effective as a Committee in the way we operate in terms of scrutinising those who appear before us? Secondly, and it is like “pick your topic”, what pressing issue do you believe we should be holding an inquiry on right now that we are not holding an inquiry on?

Shami Chakrabarti: I think that this has been a very important Committee and it has grown in confidence and reach over time, and I hope that will continue.

On the topic you have been engaged in today, on the counter-extremism narrative, there has been a lot of, “Should Government do this? Should Government do that?” and this is a serious point. I understand the instinct but it isn’t all for Government. We need Government; we need spooks; we need cops; we need surveillance; we need civil society; we need educational providers and sometimes we need not to cross-dress. Obviously, I am a bleeding-heart liberal, and everyone should be able to do what they like at home, but sometimes you need the separation and the definition between the roles. If you want to prevent extremism and terrorism, it is a bad idea for people to feel that their teachers will report on them or their social workers will report on them. Somebody should report on them, but you need some separation in all these confidence spheres of a democratic society. It is not the underlying aspirational things like the Prevent agenda that I have a problem with; it is the blurring of the lines, so that people do not feel that school is a safe place, that university is a safe place, which will fuel the kind of grievance that Mr Anderson spoke of.

Q970 Nusrat Ghani: You mentioned that we are all privileged to be here, you to be giving evidence and us to be representatives of our constituencies. We can engage in debates and we are quite robust, we can hear two sides of the argument, but with that privilege comes a huge responsibility. I would argue that your comments on Prevent are hugely irresponsible when we are dealing with parents who feel that they are under siege; we have taken evidence of how imams are coming from overseas and making them feel under siege within their mosques. It was incredibly brave of the parents of the Trojan Horse scenario to come forward constantly and try to get some support from the community to tackle the issues within that school but if we do not support people who do not have our luxury and our privileges to come forward, then we are doing them more harm than good. Do you agree?

Shami Chakrabarti: I think people should have support, but we need to make a distinction between support and surveillance. I heard the witness earlier—the very brave witness just before Mr Anderson—and she was asked, “Who would you turn to for help?” and I was thinking about her reflection and her answers. If I had a child who I was worried about, whether it was in terms of substance abuse or whether it was in terms of any of the dangers that are out there for young people, I would want to feel that there were places that I could go that were not going to necessarily get my child in trouble with the authorities. That is my concern: that we need safe spaces that people can go to without feeling they are literally reporting on their loved one. Now, sometimes you would report on a loved one and I would. If I thought that a family member or a friend, however dear, were about to kill people, then I would take that pill and I would go to the police, but

before that you want—so, forgive me, I don't think I am irresponsible and I don't think it is necessary to treat dissent as disloyalty. That is one of the things that ultimately will fuel the threat of extremism.

Q971 Nusrat Ghani: I am not talking about the dissent that you and I might feel, but if other people in authority who feel that they are experts in the area say that every space that is created is some sort of spying or a Government initiative, there is nowhere for parents to go. You said that school should be a safe space and university should be a safe space. Parents feel that it is difficult; the kids could be radicalised online, they could be radicalised at school, they could be radicalised at universities, but every time we create a safe space, if we knock it down, there is nowhere for those parents to go, and I think that is hugely irresponsible.

Chair: Thank you. May we have a quick answer, Shami.

Shami Chakrabarti: Of course you are entitled to call me names, but I have spoken to teachers and university lecturers and vice-chancellors, and parents and young people all over this country, and my best attempt—it is just my opinion, it wasn't intended to be irresponsible—is that we need to keep a distinction between the security state and the police on the one hand and civil society, the educational world and social services on the other, and that will be better for counter-extremism than Prevent.

Q972 Mr Winnick: The Assistant Commissioner, the Metropolitan Commissioner, told us last week how, from the point of view of the police in combating terrorism, it is necessary to have what is now being considered in Committee—the bulk emails and mobile phones, and he told us no one need worry, they would not be read, but it was necessary for the reasons he gave. Does that remind you of when the police were actively lobbying for pre-charge detention of 90 days and saying that, without that, terrorism could not be challenged effectively?

Shami Chakrabarti: Of course, I have always expressed my concerns about political policing, about the senior police officers lobbying for law on the one hand, but also politicians interfering with operational policing on the other hand. It is not cut and dried because, of course, there is expertise so I am not claiming this is easy. I have significant concerns with the draft Investigatory Powers Bill and no doubt I can be called irresponsible for that too, but in a democracy dissent is not disloyalty. My view is that I do not want to live in a society where everybody is suspect, where we have moved from a democratic tradition of targeted surveillance of people or places who have come under suspicion, to the mass collection, retention, hacking of people's communications, so that nobody feels that they are entitled to their intimacy and their dignity.

Chair: Mr Winnick, yes, one question.

Q973 Mr Winnick: You were present listening in when the former editor of *The Guardian* was asked about Edward Snowden and the disclosures published—in my view, rightly—in *The Guardian*. What has been the impact in the United States? Is it not the case that when so much came out that was not known to Congress beforehand, action has been taken to curb the excesses of the authorities?

Shami Chakrabarti: In my view, there has been a humbler and more democratic response to the Snowden revelations in the United States than to some extent there has been here.

Q974 James Berry: First, congratulations on your tenure and two questions or areas, if I may. First, Ms Ghani was asking you questions about the Prevent duty, and how those who quite bravely come to give evidence to our Committee have been demonised for their, in fact, only partial support of Prevent, but I think it goes a little further than just people like yourself expressing your views in dissent. This has been systematic undermining of their position in the community, having expressed their views.

Shami Chakrabarti: I have not undermined any individual—

James Berry: I am not saying you have.

Shami Chakrabarti: —who has participated in the best way that they can within the framework that there is. My disagreement is with a framework that blurs education and welfare, on the one hand, with surveillance and policing on the other. I want all of these things to happen. They are all necessary. I would just like them to be in separate boxes.

Q975 James Berry: Turning to the message I think we have had from the large mosque organisations we have heard, their complaint is that it is a top-down imposition from Government. It is not a bottom-up approach, which they would like to see. Yet when we asked, “What are your policies and procedures for dealing with radicalisation?” there are none. If we ask, “What would you do if you identified a family that might be at risk of radicalisation in your congregation?” they have never had that experience, so they do not know what they would do. How can we make it not seem like a top-down approach when there is nothing being done at the bottom?

Shami Chakrabarti: I hear that frustration and that concern, but maybe there is a way for the top to stimulate debate at the bottom and create space to stimulate the debate without legislating and without creating duties on people to act in a certain way. In a healthy democracy for me, whether you are a lawyer or a doctor or a cleric, if you really thought somebody was about to go and plant a bomb, you have an ethical duty to go and report on them, but you need to trust people and empower them to make ethical judgments and not make them feel that they are subject to more and more law.

Q976 Tim Loughton: You wax lyrical about the rights of everybody in a liberal democracy, but you are light on the responsibilities of people in a liberal democracy as well. You talk about differentiating different agencies, different authorities and creating safe spaces, but don’t you think that a situation as we have at the moment, we are at war with a terrorist organisation, which does not respect the Geneva Convention or any of the niceties, and at a time of war—if you go back to the Second World War—there is an expectation that it is the responsibility of everybody who prides living in such a liberal democracy that they should defend it, and should take every opportunity to share information to make sure that people are not undermining it. Isn’t that a fair assessment of what a liberal democracy stands for?

Shami Chakrabarti: The best way to achieve this is by encouraging and empowering ethical behaviour. The war narrative is sometimes just a matter of fact. We are now at war in Syria and so on, but at home, among our own people, our fellow Britons—people as

British as me—the war narrative can sometimes be frightening, exclusive and divisive at a time when we want to unite the population.

Chair: Thank you. I am sorry to press you, but there is a vote coming up and I want to get everyone in.

Q977 Stuart C. McDonald: It was interesting to have your own version of the counter-narrative, but I am interested also in whose role it is to try to produce a counter-narrative and how, if at all, we can make sure that is heard by as many people as possible.

Shami Chakrabarti: I think it is all of us. Again, we were talking about the Government this, the Government that. You are all independent parliamentarians from different political parties; you give speeches, you write articles, you engage with young people. You can do it in your individual voices. You are all great examples of democracy in action, and it does not have to be this thing about the Government and legislation and this agenda and that Bill. Sometimes it can just be the way in which you are prepared to take on a debate in a school or a mosque or a community centre and who, to some extent, you find you will or will not engage with.

Chair: Thank you. I think the Committee welcomes flattery.

Q978 Victoria Atkins: To whom are judges accountable?

Shami Chakrabarti: To the law.

Victoria Atkins: In reality, to whom are judges accountable?

Shami Chakrabarti: To the law.

Q979 Victoria Atkins: Who sacks them if they get the law wrong?

Shami Chakrabarti: If they get the law wrong?

Victoria Atkins: Yes.

Shami Chakrabarti: Because we have parliamentary sovereignty, if Parliament—you—ultimately think that judges are not interpreting a particular statute appropriately, you can clarify the statute. That is our constitutional principle in this country—not everywhere in the world but here.

Q980 Victoria Atkins: Ms Chakrabarti, you are a barrister, I am a barrister. You know as well as I do that that never happens.

Shami Chakrabarti: I disagree. It has happened many times: I have seen a judgment go a certain way and Parliament respond with an Act of Parliament.

Q981 Chair: Let us close with this: the Director of Public Prosecutions last week announced that the phone hacking inquiry is over. *The Times* allege that the Government has decided to shelve Leveson 2. You served on Leveson 1—that very important report—and they cited concerns about the possible costs. What is your view? Do you agree with Hacked

Off and other organisations that we should also have a Leveson 2? That was the promise made by the Prime Minister.

Shami Chakrabarti: I have watched for some years—with some sadness—the demise of legal aid and the interference with judicial review. Politicians critique lawyers and judges, but when there is a political crisis, goodness me, “Let’s call a judge and have an inquiry.” I hope that we will not end up in a dystopian future, where the only law is political and it is inquiries into political and media scandals and not the rule of law and access to justice for ordinary people.

Q982 Chair: So you support a Leveson 2; you want this to start?

Shami Chakrabarti: I don’t know. I think Sir Brian could probably do with a rest from inquiries.

Chair: Let me say this finally: you have appeared before this Committee on numerous occasions and, on behalf of this Committee, I want to thank you for all the work that you have done, not just as Director of Liberty but also in providing so many very useful pieces of information for this Committee.

Shami Chakrabarti: Thank you.

Chair: What is your next job?

Shami Chakrabarti: I will write to the Committee about that in due course.

Chair: Ms Chakrabarti, thank you so much for coming in.