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Witnesses

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Professor George Joffé, Research Fellow, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge

Professor Mark Sedgwick, Arab and Islamic Studies, Aarhus University, Denmark

Chair

Welcome to everybody. Welcome particularly to our witnesses. Thank you very much for coming to the Committee here, such as we are today. We have got quite a few apologies from people, but people possibly may be coming in and out as we go. So there may be more people. There is also the danger of a vote in the Commons. I am not quite sure when it is, but it may be in the next hour or so, in which case we will have to dive out and then come back, but I am sure we will manage that.

We have two hours, but we will see how things go. We may not need two hours or we may. This is our first formal session of the inquiry into extremism and radicalisation, although those terms are something that we will be discussing, because they may not be entirely appropriate, or perhaps they may be the most appropriate options.

What we are going to do to start with is if each of our three witnesses – thank you for coming again – could give a little summary of their situation. That can be as long as you like, but I will perhaps introduce you as well before you do that, so that that goes on the record. I should say that all the minutes will be public; it will all go on the website which is already up and running and will form part of the final submission when we make it.

We will start with Professor Tahir Abbas, who is Senior Research Fellow at RUSI in London. Prior to that, he was Professor of Sociology at Batir University in Istanbul, Reader in Sociology at Birmingham University, and Senior Research Officer at the Home Office and Ministry of Justice

here in London. You have been research and writing on ethnic relations, Islamophobia and radicalisation since the mid-90s, writing numerous books, articles, and a great deal more. Welcome, and over to you.

Professor Abbas

Thank you, Chair. Thank you, colleagues, for the opportunity. In these few minutes, I just want to talk about the idea of radicalisation and some of the implications it raises for intellectual development and, obviously, policy questions, given that the work we do at RUSI and also my historical interest in radicalisation. What do we mean by radicalisation? Radicalisation itself is not necessarily a major concern. The problem is when it leads to violence. Violent extremism is what we are really interested in when we think about radicalisation. If we go back historically to late 1960s, it was the radicalisation on university campuses that led to various social reforms that we are still seeing being implemented a generation later.

In my own work, which has been sociological in the main, I have tried to look at radicalisation as something that is based within the social context of the lived experience of people's lives and the realities of their socio-economic existence. This goes, to some extent, to explain why we have similarities between those who are far right extremists and Islamist extremists. One is a form of cumulative extremism in relationship to the other. The idea of 'counter-jihad' works for groups like the EDL, Britain First and so on, where their particular gripes are anti-Muslim and, as part of that, anti-immigration, anti-diversity and anti-multiculturalism. Their concerns tend to be local area in design and impact, whereas when we look at Muslims, particularly in the Western Europe framework, but also elsewhere, which I will move onto, we are looking at a global venting of frustration based on localised experiences. These *takfiri* jihadis have no interest in the local. Their concerns are global and, beyond that, the eschatological dynamics of their anger and frustration.

A lot of my work is focused on British cases, but I have also done some work in Turkey where I have looked at families and members of families who joined the PKK, where obviously it is a terrorist organisation. There are many similar dynamics affecting people who might be radicalised to join the PKK and people who might be radicalised online and carry on to join the Islamic State. We are looking at vulnerability, alienation and disenfranchisement. These people tend to be at the bottom of society, falling out of the cracks, often with a history of falling out of the education system, into criminality. For them, the idea of Islamist violence is as a form of redemption, or salvation in some cases.

There are also other issues, such as mental health issues. The Munich shooter, the Nice attacker, the case of Anders Breivik, and the Germanwings pilot all have one thing in common. They were all suffering various mental illnesses and were on anti-depressants. That seems to be another issue we tend to overlook. There are sociological factors around the lived experiences, feelings of isolation and alienation, and feeling vulnerable and exposed because of a lack of meaning to their lives. There is a disconnect, when it comes to Muslim minorities, with the parents' generation in terms of cultural norms and values. There is a disconnect with the majority of society due to patterns of exclusion and marginalisation. They fall through the cracks. In this regard, it is more a question of push rather than pull.

When it comes to pull, recruiters are able to take advantage of the situation facing young people who are seemingly lost and confused, especially in the diasporic space. In the MENA region, there are existential issues with regard to corruption, tribalism, uneven economic development, limited

education and employment opportunities, and a lack of adequate challenges to the call to violent Islamism, especially this notion of *takfiri* jihadism.

How does ideology impact? It does play a role, to an extent, whether it is ultra-nationalists or the TAK which is a more revolutionary wing of the PKK, and in the case of far-right individuals and groups. There is a political agenda under the veneer of what seems to be religious ideology, but in fact it is more the case that it is political. The tipping points are difficult to try and work out, as obviously we are very interested in terms of policy as well as trying to understand this from a psychological, criminological and sociological perspective. There are theories here around hyper-masculinity, where it is challenged by the state. Radicals respond to the masculinity of the state with hyper-masculinity. It is violence that breeds violence.

Interventions need to be early. Our research and our projects are telling us that if we can intervene it needs to be early, but it is difficult to know what to look for precisely. An individual may be angry or disillusioned and they may even be beginning to peruse radicalising literature on the internet, but it does not mean they would be motivated enough to become a violent extremist. Other strategies include education, including Islamic education, which is quite ironic for those who place religion at the centre of this. Outreach by the police is helpful as it build trust and facilitates engagement on all sides. Channel, in part, serves its purpose and Home Office officials are adamant it is working, irrespective of the general community resistance to Prevent, which is born out of fear and distrust. There is also ample recognition that the Prevent training is the problem, if anything.

In the context of challenges facing young people in the MENA region, there are issues of high birth rates, social immobility, cronyism, in some cases despotism, which have led to a sense of hopelessness on the part of many. We are also looking at conflict-affected fragile situations. There are generational issues of traumatisation, particularly when we look at Afghanistan, for example. We need to appreciate that there are all sorts of concerns affecting groups in the MENA region – IDPs, (internally displaced persons), refugees and host communities are also involved in this. We are also dealing with PTSD when it comes to communities in the MENA region. We need to work with those who are pre-traumatised, but then that is not always so easy. It is a resource question and it is a planning and practice question. We also need to work in locations that are not entirely overwhelmed by the conflict because it is impossible to engage with people in deeply affected areas. Therefore, research is telling us that we need to work in locations that are close enough, but not so directly involved in the actual violence, so that we can begin to bring people together and try and build those methods as opportunities for trust and peace-building.

All in all, what I wanted to say is that we are looking at social context. We are looking at the issues in relation to a sense of identity loss or identity confusion or misplacement. We are also looking at other factors, such as mental health, as well as structural concerns around education, employment and the ongoing effects of violence upon communities, societies and nations, generation on generation, specifically in the MENA region.

Chair

Thank you very much. We will stop for questions after we have heard from each person, but that is wonderful. Thank you very much for that. Professor Joffé is a Research Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Studies at Cambridge University, and Visiting Professor of Geography at King's College London. He specialises in the Middle East and North Africa and is currently

engaged in a project studying connections between migrant communities and transnational violence in Europe. He also lectures in international relations. I will hand over to you.

Professor Joffé

Thank you very much. That project was some years ago.

Chair

But no less valid.

Professor Joffé

Basically, I am afraid you are probably going to hear very similar views from all of us. I fear I am going to repeat quite a lot of what Professor Abbas has just said. Let me begin by trying to make a distinction. You are concerned here with radicalisation. I am not sure that is an appropriate term. I think basically one needs to make a distinction between radicalisation or radicalism and extremism. I would make the distinction by suggesting that radicalism, or the process of becoming radicalised, is a process of entering into contention with the hegemonic discourse of the state. You are challenging the state. You may even want to replace the state. You may wish to do so through a social movement, even through legal channels, but you are not actually engaged in trying to destroy it. Extremism is concerned with destroying the state, destroying social order and political order, and I think that distinction is really quite important to make.

Having said that, let me turn to look a little at the issue of terrorism as well. We all tend to think that the terrorism that we experience today is in some way unique. We tend to forget that actually, if you look, even during my lifetime, terrorism has been a component concomitant of social order ever since I became conscious of the wider world. It has been suggested for example, that terrorism in its current form is a phenomenon that goes back at least to the 1880s. David Rapoport has suggested that there have been at least five different forms of terrorism over that period, involving different ideologies, but in all cases it is challenging the state to replace it and destroy it, so that terrorism becomes a form of extremism. We are all familiar, I am sure, with the old adage that it is the weapon of the weak, because they lack the means to actually challenge the state. That is not necessarily true.

The point is that terrorism is nothing really new. It is a concomitant of modern life. It has been for as long as anyone can remember, probably, even going back before the 1880s. As such, it is not actually an ideology it itself. It is a technique that can be used to serve a series of ideologies, each of which challenges the idea of the state. The techniques it uses are very similar. One should not forget, for example, that suicide bombing, which is seen as a speciality today of extremists from the Middle East, was first imitated by the Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Ceylon, and had no religious connections at all. Up until, I suppose, the events of 2001, the majority of suicide terrorists were themselves secular in the Middle East. Again, one needs to be very careful about what it is one is really talking about.

Let me say a word or two about the actual drivers. The drivers, it seems to me, are very complex. I do not myself consider ideology to be significant in itself, except in so far as it becomes a mechanism for legitimising terrorist action. You find a way of explaining why it is you do what you. Actually, the drivers are very diverse indeed. Marc Sageman, who is an American psychoanalyst, has suggested that terrorism arises from peer pressure. Groups of people in

alienated communities tend to push each other towards a goal like that. Then again, one needs to be careful about what it is one is actually looking at. If I take the example of the Algerian war of independence, people who are regarded as terrorists by France were seen in Algeria as heroes of a revolution. Therefore, it is very difficult to actually allocate responsibility at status in these circumstances.

Quite apart from the issue of peer pressure and the networks that may develop within societies that generate violence of that kind, there are some other very general points that I think one needs to bear in mind. Terrorism, or rather violence of this kind, tends to be the result of resentment. That is important. If you think about the situation in France at the moment, it is no accident that you have seen there the worst examples of terrorism inside Europe in recent years. It has to do with the complicated relationship between France and its former colonies, particular Algeria, and the way in which populations in those colonies have moved into France itself, and formed, as it were, enclave communities, which are isolated from the mainstream. Indeed, even in this country similar things apply. During the Troubles in Ireland, I remember the way in which in parts of London there were almost no-go areas, unless you were Irish. There were similar examples and cases in Southall, west London, of other sorts of terrorism. Again, the actual complications here are the diverse number of causes that actually drive terrorist activity.

One fundamental problem is a sense of alienation amongst minority communities, particularly in Europe – a sense of anomie, of having no purpose. Terrorism, or extremism of this kind, in some respects can give purpose and that is one of the reasons why it can be so attractive. However, there are other factors quite different from that, such as factors that drove the move of people on the left in the 1930s towards the civil war in Spain and issues, strangely enough, of homoeroticism as well. There is a very famous statement by Osama Bin Laden of a visit he paid in Afghanistan to Ahmad Shah Massoud, in which he describes his journey in terms that would almost be a piece of love poetry. It is quite striking that that sense of bonding together provided a driver and a justification for the kinds of actions that he later became engaged in. I myself have looked a little at the psychology of terrorism. There it is extremely interesting to note that very often the violent component is a consequence of the inadequacies felt by individuals that then are externalised, and they are redeemed, as it were, by acts of violence themselves. So, again, it is a very complicated phenomenon, in which ideology, in and of itself, really does not play a very large part.

What can one do to remedy it? I think it is extremely difficult. One thing that is very clear to me is that the idea of imprisoning people who have drifted off towards violence of any kind, as we tend to do with young people trying to go to Syria, is not a very good idea. I do not think that serves any useful purpose. There is a problem of education. That is quite clear. There is a problem over certain types of education as well. It has been said that the people who are most prone to becoming violent and extremist tend to be those who studied the STEM subjects – scientific subjects, in essence – where they are said to expect a kind of exactitude and precision that normal life does not provide. They are therefore attracted by the simplicities of ideology in explaining the justifications for violence. I am not certain that is true either, but again it is a division that is quite often made.

What is certainly the case is that the process of de-radicalisation is slow and extremely complex. It may involve issues of ideology, but often it does not. It nearly always involves of reacceptance or reintegration in some way, of persuading people to become members of a majority society, rather than feeling themselves isolated at the margins. In those circumstances, it seems to me this is an extremely complex subject in which many of the current approaches are simply misguided, because they do not take into account its complexity, and they do not allow for the fact that those things that appear to be the most important drivers, actually probably are not.

Chair

Interesting, if somewhat depressing.

Professor Joffé

Well, that guarantees me a job.

Chair

Absolutely. Thank you very much. Professor Mark Sedgwick is professor of Arab and Islamic studies at Aarhus University in Denmark. He is a historian and you focus on the modern Middle East and on the history of terrorism. He taught for 20 years at the American University in Cairo, having studied history at Oxford. Your PhD subject was Sufism at the University of Bergen in Norway. That is plenty of background there, so over to you.

Professor Sedgwick

As Professor Joffé said, we are probably not going to disagree with each other very much. I am actually going to disagree with one minor point that he made to provide a bit of variety. My starting point is with the terms radicalisation and extremism. These are useful terms for denoting a particular phenomenon that we are all familiar with, and which is what we are here today to discuss. However, they fail to delimit that phenomenon and this is what tends to happen with very complex phenomena I think. This is something we have to understand. Radicalisation and extremism are extremely complex phenomena.

When we are talking about radicalism, radicalisation and extremism in the context of Western Europe, which is what we normally are at present, even there I think there are problems. There are multiple conceptual problems. We can see that there is a lot of disagreement amongst people who are using these terms – experts, various different states, and even different departments within the same state will sometimes define things very differently. This is not quite the same thing, but I think there are risks associated with using the term, because once one identifies a particular activity as being involved in counter-radicalisation or counter-extremism or something like that, for certain communities this can label it as somehow being involved with police, security and so forth. Therefore, the use of the term can prove counterproductive in certain cases.

I said something about the conceptual problems in my written submission. If you are interested in those we can come back to them. The point where I am going to disagree with Professor Joffé is that whilst the distinction that he made between radicalism as challenging hegemonic discourse and extremism attempting to destroy is quite a satisfying distinction intellectually, once you start trying to apply it you can get yourself into dreadful difficulties. If we are talking about the reform of the Houses of Parliament as opposed to the destruction of the Houses of Parliament, that is really quite straightforward. We can see which the good one is and which is not. However, once we move into the Middle East, one of the best things that has happened in recent years in my view is the destruction of the old Tunisian state system and its replacement by a system which is moving, albeit bumpily, in the direction of democracy. I am not quite sure what one does with that, so that is the point where I disagree slightly. My first point then is that the terms are problematic and although we all know in general what they mean, they do not help us.

My second point is that it is very important to delimit the phenomenon that one is talking about, because if one is not careful, in the Western situation as well, the whole concept of radicalism and radicalisation tends to expand to include more and more things and more and more activities somehow get brought into the concept of counter-radicalism, and more and more human activities risk being labelled as radical in one way or another. This is a problem even within the Western context. When one moves from the Western context to the MENA context, the problem gets more and more difficult. If one approaches the situation anywhere in the Middle East equipped with a binary pair of radical and moderate and then tries to apply this it can easily become absurd. If one looks at the situation in the Yemen at present and tries to work out who the various forces at work in the Yemen are and then classify them as radical or moderate, the whole thing collapses. There are governments with which we are on good terms whose educational and religious establishment promote understandings which, in a Western context, would probably be classified as extremist or radical or something like that, but in the local context they are unproblematic.

My third point then is: what alternative ways can we use to look at things? To say that the concepts of radicalism, radicalisation and extremism are problematic is fine, but the next question is where do we go from there? One can go in two directions. One is to move away from this concept of radicalism to look concretely at the root causes of the problems that we are looking at, which some of my colleagues have already mentioned here. This is important because there are many problems of various sorts with states in the MENA region. In some ways, what we are calling radicalism is the consequence of these problems. It is not the problem itself; it is the consequence or even the symptom of many other problems. These problems, as I say, are many, deep-rooted and very old, and they are extremely difficult to solve. If they were not difficult to solve the states in the MENA region probably would have solved them by now.

This brings on a second point. If we are thinking in terms of what we can do, what the British Council do, and what similar bodies can do, faced with these problems, the answer is that, yes, various people can do various thing but only some things. It is important to target very precisely, to look carefully at the concrete circumstances in a particular country, to focus on those, to think about those and to be realistic. A very broad attempt at this and that and the other is going to get nowhere, or one can try and target one's resources very precisely on things where some difference can actually be made. I think that is quite an important point.

The other thing one can do is to focus on groups and individuals. If you ask me to classify the various actors in Yemen, Syria or Iraq in terms of radicalism, extremism and moderation, I would have an extremely hard time. However, if we look at a particular group and say, 'Fine. What is this group's attitude towards the West? What is this group's attitude towards certain propositions, towards pluralism, towards liberalism, towards the United Kingdom?' These are question which are actually very easy to answer. If you take a particular group, we can see the answer to those questions. That is another way in which one can usefully get concrete and not say, 'Are they radical or moderate?' but say 'What do they think about Europe? What do they think about the United Kingdom?' Then instead of saying, 'Is this individual radical or moderate?' one can say, 'What relationship does this individual have with this particular group? Are they actually a member of this group? Are they sympathetic, a sort of fellow traveller? Are they tending towards accepting the narrative of this particular group?' If one looks at things in these very concrete terms rather than worrying about the difficult and problematic concepts of radicalisation and extremism, it is probably much easier to make progress, once again looking at the very concrete circumstances of each particular country in the MENA region. That is my submission.

Chair

Thank you very much. We have four broad headings, one of which we have now covered to some extent, which is terminology. I think there is probably more to be said there. Then perhaps we can talk about push and pull factors towards radicalisation, or whatever term we decide to call it by that point. Then building resilience and resistance against, what actions we should be taking and then future challenges, and the future context that we might find ourselves in. I think the terms probably still need some time.

Lord Purvis

My apologies to the panel and yourself. I have to do 20 minutes of chairing a meeting in another part of the building. It has been in the diary for a long time and I regret having to go, which is a real shame because this has certainly been absolutely fascinating so far. I would like to start by asking – and it is not directed towards any individual member – are there any international universal norms now in the world where one can consider that there is extreme activity against? Rather than us making a judgement about what are Western values or certain values against the prism of either radicalised or extreme views, is the 21st century sufficient now with global norms, with UN declarations AND with the longstanding concept of international law, that we can consider that there are actually global norms where we can start to become more objective? If the response to undermine those is a violent response, can that be categorised as extreme activity?

Professor Joffé

I do not think you can talk in terms of global norms being consciously established as yet. To a great extent, many of the norms we normally espouse are still seen to be the consequence of the Enlightenment and the European experience. They may be acceptable as such, but they are not necessarily internalised inside the societies concerned. There are also disagreements about them, disagreements about what should be covered, disagreements about how what is covered is interpreted, and so on. So there is a very large discussion still to have to establish what might generally be considered to be adequate global norms. Most people would agree that individuals look for security, be it political, be it economic, or be it social. They want to feel safe. They want to feel secure. They want to be able to lead a life. In a way that provides a basis from which you can begin to construct a set of norms. How do you actually construct societies in which those things can be achieved? You need to bear in mind, all the time, there is an unfortunate historical factor at play, particularly in the Middle East.

One thing that we do not understand very well is the very long experience of European intervention, interference, often very brutal, inside Middle Eastern countries. That is something which is still much more alive in those countries as a sentiment than it may be amongst people in Europe or even the United States. We still have a job to do to understand our own past, and our own past engagement to see why it is that many of the things that we hold to be self-evident may not seem so self-evident in the Middle East, for example, or indeed elsewhere. We are not quite at the level yet of there being global norms, although you are right, in the degree to which the United Nations Human Rights Charter is accepted or the Declaration of Human Rights, those sorts of things begin to construct general norms. I do not think we are there yet.

Professor Sedgwick

Basically, I agree. That would be a very nice way, if it works, to understand these things. The trouble is even if one looks at some of the most basic norms that officially everybody accepts, including the norm that one should not deliberately target civilians in warfare, which in principle everybody has agreed to for hundreds of years; it is one of the most international accepted norms there is; however, if you look at the Middle East at present, everybody's targeting civilians. One of the most basic human rights is freedom from arrest without due cause and not torturing people. These very fundamental norms are being ignored everywhere in the region, and they are being ignored by every type of actor.

Professor Abbas

I concur. To try and establish something that is globalising, to the extent that it involves every single actor and individual on the planet as a higher goal is to ignore so many local issues going on which have their own characteristics, which have their own historical precedents in the actions of one part of the world in relation to another. We cannot ignore historical consequences. We are dealing with consequences in many respects. When we think of people in Afghanistan who are now in their third generation of war, conflict and trauma, we cannot begin to imagine what is going on there.

Lord Purvis

The reason I ask is what came through all of your thoughts, and perhaps Professor Joffé was the closest, to show that there is a base point of activity or a relationship with others against which you could judge what is considered a radical or violent extreme, so that there can be something on the scale. Other evidence suggests that the reason why we have difficulty with terminology is because this will be a perpetually pragmatic question. Therefore, without knowing what the basepoint is we can never judge the response to that basepoint. What we are starting to consider is how we manage that, giving recommendations to either governments or to others. I guess it is trying to find whether there is either neutral terminology, if it is purely pragmatic, or can we look for some norm activity of which we can say, 'If people are to be responsible, peaceful, active citizens then this is the norm'? Where are the norms that we need to search for?

Professor Joffé

The problem is that that assumes that we also act out those norms. From the point of view of people, say, in the Middle East, we do not. They would consider that we breach the norms of which we are so proud time and time again. Therefore, what relevance do they really have? One of the longstanding complaints in the region, and one of the most profound complaints, is the Palestinian issue. Western states have done literally nothing about it for generations. People in the Middle East are well aware of that, and not just in the Middle East, and they see that as a standing reproach to Western states who then claim to be able to suggest what standards of behaviour should be and how other people should act. Against that sort of problem we really have a major difficulty.

Lord Purvis

Does that not undermine part of your evidence Professor Joffé? If people are judging their own individual actions they can self-redefine that by saying, 'I am not extreme because the UK and

Americans have never criticised the occupied territories; therefore, I am now elevating my activity up on the basis of someone else's activity'. That moves away quite dramatically from what we need to be at the core of it which is this is, at the heart of it, unacceptable violent behaviour.

Professor Joffé

Yes I understand that. The problem is from their point of view – and it is an enormous irony that many people engaged in extreme violence will argue that they are the moral component and we are not. The problem is all the time you are engaged in an engagement, you are engaged in a dialogue where there are no absolute standards by which you can judge the quality of the dialogue. That seems to me to be a fundamental problem of understanding here. I do not see how you get out of that particular difficulty because we cannot unilaterally establish a code that others will automatically accept as being legitimate. It is something that has to be negotiated and we have been very bad at negotiating.

Professor Sedgwick

One also has to consider the very varying circumstances in different Middle Eastern states and the concept of being a responsible, peaceful, active citizen. It is not too hard to be a responsible, peaceful, active citizen in the United Kingdom. There are many countries in the MENA region where the government really does not want people to be active citizens at all, and uses all the resources of the state to stop people being active citizens. Under those circumstances, fine, you have a choice whether or not to be pacific. However, being responsible and active in those circumstances can point in opposite directions. Even if one tries to establish baselines that would work very well under one set of circumstances, in another set of circumstances they may just not work at all.

Chair

Thank you.

Rehman Chishti

A lot of the questions I was going to ask you have answered already. Coming back to the definition, we have talked about radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. What other key definitions should we be aware of?

Professor Abbas

In the field I work in we use CVE (countering violent extremism), so we have an existing, predetermined notion of what we are trying to deal with. We want to deal with the problems of violent extremism. So we find ways of understanding and then instigating various policies and practices to try and help them out. We work with different agencies and institutions across the world now. CVE is a globally recognised brand. We understand from what we think can work and then run with this and hopefully we can deliver the solutions. For all the very useful discussion around terminology, I think we need to work with what works.

Chair

So overlook the terminology to some extent.

Professor Abbas

Yes. We have been doing this terminology discussion for at least a decade since 9/11. We have been on panels talking to each other about definitions. So there is no point in going over the same ground again and again. We have problems out there; we have to go and find solutions.

Professor Sedgwick

We have indeed been discussing this for a decade. The fact we are still discussing after a decade indicates that we have not solved the problem. During that decade things have not actually got better; they have got worse. We clearly do need fresh approaches. My own suggestion would be that we have to keep the term. It is well-established. However, having left that there as the title, we have to worry about the subtitle.

To the question of whether there are other concepts that you should be thinking about, I would suggest the concept of polarisation, which is a very important concept that is rather lacking. If you look at the theory of political violence, which exists and has been developed over 100 years or so, one of the things that a terrorist is trying to achieve with their political violence is polarisation. It is something that we have seen happen very successfully, from the point of view of the users of political violence in Iraq, where there were problems, but the polarisation has been very much increased by the strategic use of political violence, with the consequences that we see today. Given that one of the things that the terrorists are trying to achieve is polarisation, we should have that in mind and try and counter polarisation. I think that is a concept which probably needs some thought in these conversations.

Professor Joffé

I am not really concerned with definition as such, because do not forget the word, 'terrorism', has been in use since the French Revolution. It still has no specific definition. We all know what it is when we see it, even though we cannot actually find words that encapsulate the phenomenon. It does not seem to me that actual definition as such is important. What seems to me more important is to appreciate the factors that go into build up the general picture of the phenomena that we are trying to deal with.

I am sorry to repeat what I have said before, but one of the things that I find most depressing is the lack of historical perspective on this. We do not seem to be aware, not only of the pattern of political violence as it has existed over many years, not just in Europe, but elsewhere too, or indeed of the causes of those patterns. I am always struck by the fact that Western politicians seem to be completely unaware of the role of colonialism in engendering the kind of resentments and frustrations that even today re-emerge, or indeed the role of phenomena such as globalisation and the way in which those affect individuals, and predispose them, or even very mundane things. I do not suppose it has occurred to you that a large number of the people who have gone from Tunisia to join Daesh in Libya, for example, have done so because it pays a salary, and they do not have a salary. There are often very mundane causes to [inaudible] extreme violence that can be justified either by ideology or by memories of the past, past events and so on. Understanding those concepts would probably serve us much better than trying to define too precisely terms that we cannot define.

Chair

You have taken us, Professor Joffé, very nicely onto the second subject. Welcome to Stephen, I should first say.

Stephen Kinnock

Thank you. Sorry I am late.

Chair

We have been talking about terminology up until now for the most part. Push and pull factors are next. What are the key factors that drive it? We have heard about vulnerability, fear, mistrust, identity loss, confusion, displacement and so on. I wonder if we can perhaps hear a little bit more from anybody. This is a big question.

Professor Joffé

It is an extraordinarily complex question. There are just so many causes, so many factors that play into this. One underlying one that we tend to ignore is the economic factor. I do not mean that simply in terms of the example I just gave, but the way in which people who do not have adequate employment, who live below the poverty line very often, are simply driven to frustration and anger because of that, and then will engage, if they can, in extremism because it may give them some sense of rebuilding their own sense of identity. It may also give them economic benefits. It may also give them status. Those sorts of factors are probably very important in terms of being push factors in this.

The second thing is we really should not forget our own engagement with the region. One of the big drivers for violence inside Iraq, for example, was undoubtably not just the invasion in 2003 but the immediate aftermath of that, the first two orders of the coalition provisional authority, which were a complete disaster and could have been designed to produce exactly the outcome that we now see today. Engagement is another thing that we need to really understand. What do our actions do? For example, the drone policy inside Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria and elsewhere, is probably something that is going to store up an enormous resentment against people who feel they have been unfairly victimised by that sort of remote action. In a way, we build the problem that we then subsequently suffer from.

I could go on to go through the list I gave you before. I just would like to conclude by saying one should not be deluded by ideology. I really feel very strongly about that. You can, for example, look through events in the Middle East since 2001 and find a pattern of development of the justification for extremism and violence which is really very interesting. One of the reasons for the attacks in Europe recently is not just to punish European populations. It is to create a division between minority communities and majority communities inside Europe, so that the minority communities in the end feel they have nowhere to go except to their own majority environment. It is a policy known as clearing the grey zone, the zone of interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, put forward long ago by a theoretician of extremism. That kind of pattern is something we need to understand because that gives us a clue to a large number of the drivers that have produced the current situation.

Professor Sedgwick

Clearing the grey zone is of course another way of saying 'polarisation'.

Professor Joffé

Yes, it is.

Professor Sedgwick

We have ideology, deprivation, economics and demography, if you look at what has been going on in the region demographically. To that, one also needs to add plain, ordinary politics and the way that that is working. As far as our own intervention in the region over the years is concerned, that is part of the problem but it is not the whole of the problem. Frankly, the Ottoman Empire was going to collapse at some point anyhow. The age of empires was over. Once the Ottoman Empire collapsed, some other structure was going to need to emerge in the region that was going to need to attract popular support. It still has not happened. There are some very fundamental issues that need to be worked through in the region that were not created by the West and cannot be solved by the West. We should remember the straight political reasons not involving us, as well as the ideology and deprivation.

Chair

The local political situation.

Professor Sedgwick

The local political situation, which is different in each country. Some countries have issues with tribalism, some countries have issues with sectarianism and some have issues with weak government that becomes brutal government in order to compensate for its weakness. There are many definitions but straight, old-fashioned political analysis can play a very useful role as well.

Professor Abbas

I just have some remarks on the contextual issues which can act as important drivers. If we think in the British context of the different waves of jihadis, I can identify at least five waves – first, in the 1980s with the guys who joined the Afghan resistance against the Soviets, then the Bosnian generation, followed by those going to Afghanistan at the end of the 1990s, then Iraq and now Islamic State. We have had this problem for at least a generation. It is five different waves of UK-born, British Muslims joining these efforts beyond their countries of birth. So what is going on? Why do we keep going back to these same problems? Part of it is to do with the restructuring of society, the restructuring of certain local communities in the context of post-industrialisation, and people feeling left behind. This is why we are also seeing in more recent periods the rise of the far right, and far right populism amongst political actors in Western Europe, but also the emergence of the far right, which has become more of a security concern in many ways. Examples tell us that threats from the far right are often greater than we are led to believe.

It is a similar situation of people feeling left behind, people feeling they have no stake, that there is no sense of purpose and there is no self-realisation or self-actualisation, to think of status and needs

and so on, as Professor Joffé was stating earlier. The push factors are very powerful, systematic and they are generalizable across vast time periods. We are seeing it again and again because the same factors are being played out again and again, magnified by problematic foreign policy interventions, which have led to catastrophe, disaster and the further breakdown of societies. We are somehow blinded to think that it is nothing to do with what is happening here. We have to think about our actions and our own society. Dare I mention it is more and more the phenomenon of Islamophobia. It is a crude term, but it has some purchase. It has grown systematically and, again, it makes people feel that they are not wanted, they are not desired and the country of their birth is somehow alien to them. While that is not necessarily a precursor to radicalisation or violent extremism it means that people feel, on the margins, frustrated, voiceless, disillusioned and are very vulnerable.

Chair

Is religion itself a red herring in all this?

Professor Abbas

In some respects yes, in some respects no. We have got violent jihadi takfirism going back to the origins of Islam itself. There is nothing new about the call to violence in Islam. My eminent colleagues will have a lot to say on this, but what we have here is the emergence of political Islam, colonialism and its on ongoing development in the post-colonial context. It is framed in that respect. We can explain a lot of this without religion entering into the picture. That is the most important thing. The idea of religion opens up so many other cans of worms. It creates so many more questions than answers. We need to think of the structural, the political, and the cultural dynamics here. It gives us far more of a purchase. This does not mean that there is not a solution in terms of de-radicalisation which is not an allusion to Islam or Islamic education. The Germans tried to introduce a policy to bring Islamic education to the Turks in Germany in the 1980s. It was a massively developed project that was canned for political reasons.

Professor Joffé

[Inaudible]

Professor Abbas

For political reasons it disappeared of the map, but there is recognition that Islam can be a tool for empowerment and engagement where being a good Muslim is analogous to being a good Briton, a good European or a good human being.

Professor Sedgwick

Religion can be used for all sorts of things. Certainly in the MENA region, religion on its own does not cause anything. In combination with other things that are going on, religion can be used by various people to legitimise all sorts of things. States try to use it as well as non-state actors. In a European context there is a slight difference because what distinguishes a German Turk from a regular German in many cases primarily is religion. As an identity marker in Western Europe, perhaps, yes, it is slightly significant, but less so in the MENA region. Even if we look at what is going on in Iraq at present with sectarian conflict, are Shias and Sunnis fighting each other because of theological differences or because of something else? Cleary it is something else.

Professor Joffé

I completely agree with that. Can I just remind you of something that it is not just Islam that can be used in this particular way? I am always reminded of a statement made during the Cathar crusades in France, when, after taking the town of Béziers the knights accompanying the crusade on behalf of the French king went to the Papal legate who was there and said, 'Who shall we kill?' He said, 'Kill them all. God will know his own'. That is an exact parallel of what is said by Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and so on. Religion can be mobilised in all sorts of ways.

The emphasis on religion that pervades an awful lot of official thinking is completely wrong. It is not that it is not relevant. It is relevant in two respects. One is the ideology to legitimise political actions that you wish to undertake. Two, as Professor Sedgwick has just said, in terms of providing identity. The great problem is Europe is that minority communities very often do not have a sense of identity with the country in which they reside, partly because of social tension, partly for other reasons, and religion can give them that sense of identity. Again, it is serving a purpose rather than being the cause.

Stephen Kinnock

Thank you very much. That is very interesting. When you look at these factors you understand why religion comes to the fore, because the scale of the challenges that you are talking about in terms of the underlying factors – poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, marginalisation, discrimination, poor governance, the list goes on – they just look unsolvable. The conclusion seems to have been drawn that it is unfixable or certainly not something that is going to get fixed from this side of the table. The focus on radicalisation and the role that religion plays becomes a kind of easy target because people feel they can perhaps get their arms round it. They can say, 'Well, we have identified such-and-such a radical preacher' and we can take action to identify that person and deal with it. Of course, we know that it is just touching the tip of the iceberg. Do you think that is why there has been such a focus on this issue of religion, simply because it is an easier thing to talk about and deal with than this vast array of deep-seated problems?

Professor Abbas

It also takes attention away from the fact that there are pretty problematic foreign policy interventions that are going on which are making Muslims around Western Europe angrier, and that there is an ongoing process of left-behind communities which requires massive investment to create those jobs, those opportunities, the growth of communities that are needed in order to have a more equal society. We are having the opposite, more and more unequal societies, with greater divisions with an even greater number of people left behind. These are big problems. How are we going to fix them?

Professor Sedgwick

You probably are right. The extra thing that I would say – I was talking before you came in about polarisation – is that certainly in the Western context, when one looks at the results of polls about asking Western European populations in various countries what they think about Islam and so forth, one gets astonishingly high percentages of people saying that they think Islam is an existential threat to the country they live in, and things like this. What we have is a process of polarisation and we are getting a problem of sectarianism in Western Europe, not just in the MENA region.

Chair

Is that part of the intention?

Professor Sedgwick

Yes it is, and time and time again we are walking into the trap.

Chair

So we are falling exactly in line.

Professor Sedgwick

Yes, we are doing exactly what they want us to do.

Chair

Yes. The obvious natural question is then what should we be doing?

Professor Joffé

I am tempted to say that my job is not to provide solutions, but simply to comment on the mess. It is very difficult to actually construct a viable way forward. You need to divide the measures to be taken into two groups. There are certainly quite specific things that one needs to do in response to specific circumstances and actions. Then there is a group of general issues that need to be addressed. You have just heard some of them from Professor Abbas. We do need to consider, as part of this phenomenon, the general problem of increased separation in terms of wealth, benefits and engagement. The growing marginalisation of people in Britain, or anywhere in fact in Europe, is a really worrying feature. One needs to bear in mind the way in which that can in itself radicalise people.

There is a whole general group of issues that need to be considered. There are very specific issues that do deal with things like education, that do deal with issues such as the role of religion in public life, the way in which we engage with that, that also need attention. It is not simply a one-way street. You need to have a menu of issues that you can attack and deal with. That perhaps is the mistake that we have made so far, that we do not think in those broad terms. I saw a letter today in the *Guardian* from the Minister who is responsible for the Prevent strategy, complaining about the way in which an article that was published yesterday had attacked it, and saying that actually they had misunderstood the problem. What was striking about that was the letter simply considered that strategy, directed at so-called radicalisation in religious terms as being the only viable necessary policy. It is not. It is much more complex than that.

Professor Sedgwick

What we can do about this in the Western context is that perhaps politicians need to think a bit more carefully in response to terrorist outrages because as far as I can see at present, people tend to be thinking about the reaction of the majority community, and the need to reassure the majority community. For example, certain countries like to put heavily armed soldiers on the streets which

they seem to think will reassure the majority population. The majority population is not really the issue. Perhaps it is the issue because they have an awful lot of votes and we live in democracies, but the people who really need to be thought about at this point are not the majority population, but the minority population, and how they feel about this, how they are reacting to this, and how they are reacting to the soldiers on the streets and so forth.

Chair

How does one address that minority population?

Professor Joffé

By engaging with their institutions and their organisations and actually listening to what they have to say which is something we do not do terribly well.

Professor Sedgwick

This is not really your direct problem, but it is about remembering the minority population when one is making an address to the nation. When one is making an address to the nation, it is about remembering the reactions of the minority population as well as the majority.

Stephen Kinnock

One of the challenges there is, as we were just saying, that the root causes of the problem are what really need to be addressed, growing inequality and polarisation. For a governing politician to go onto the TV and say, 'This problem is not caused by Islam. The people who have done this do not in any way represent the true interpretation of Islam' I think does happen. Generally speaking, mainstream politicians at least will tend to do that, but what they will not then say is, 'This problem is actually caused by the deep fractures in our society, by the huge and growing levels of inequality, eroding community cohesion, by much broader socio-economic factors', because you are then critiquing your own performance.

Professor Joffé

That is certainly true.

Stephen Kinnock

That is always the bit that is missing for me. Politicians stand up and say, 'This has got nothing to do with Islam', but they never say –

Professor Sedgwick

What it has got something to do with.

Chair

We are onto the factors that might help in this situation. Are there specific organisations or initiatives either here or locally in the MENA region that are effective, that do produce results, which perhaps we ought to be encouraging?

Professor Joffé

There certainly are organisations that seek to engage with these sorts of issues, both in the MENA region and indeed inside minority communities in Western Europe, but it is a very slow process. They first of all suffer from the fact that they can then be distrusted by the very people that they want to address. That poses a problem in its own right. They secondly suffer from the fact that they do not feel that they receive the kind of support from the majority communities and the representatives of the majority communities that they need to be able to begin to penetrate the problems that they face.

I do not know whether you are going to be talking to them – I imagine you will – but the Muslim Council of Great Briton, for example, or other similar organisations that actually very often would like to engage. One of the areas in the past has been to consider that specifically religious organisations as such, rather than community representative organisations, were the ones with whom one should engage. It may be a statement about the general lack of understanding of the complexity of society of minority communities in Briton and in other countries that brings this about. I am not quite sure how one would address that, but it seems to me that the organisations exist. They need support, they need encouragement. They need to believe that they are actually acting in what is a general purpose to achieve an outcome. That is what has been missing so far.

Professor Abbas

There has also been a level of politicisation in this engagement. I recall back to the mid-2000s when New Labour were at one point speaking with the Muslim Council of Briton, and the next day they were not. They were speaking to the Sufi Muslim Council. Various other organisations were invented overnight to replace the ones that were out of favour. The other important element is that government is only engaging with Muslim communities through the lens of terrorism or fighting terrorism. There is no sense of, 'Let's talk about being a good Briton' or, 'Let's talk about citizenship', or other things that are part of this society. That is an important factor.

Chair

So there should be ongoing dialogue as a matter of course?

Professor Abbas

I think so, for sure.

Professor Sedgwick

If one is thinking about the MENA region, the first thing is to recognise that most of these causes we can do absolutely nothing about, but there are some areas. Education is one very important area because it is hard to go wrong with that one. With many other initiatives they can very easily prove

counter-productive, but with education you can improve the skills of future leaders, you can contribute to economic growth and the other thing you can do is build up a legacy of positive feelings towards this country, because somebody has benefited a few years doing an MA here will remember that for the rest of their life. That can be very useful in the long run. There are a number of areas, and that is one of them. That is an example where it is possible to do something.

Chair

Which means the British Council has a particular role to play?

Professor Sedgwick

Given what this group is interested in, yes.

Stephen Kinnock

There is always a risk, of course, that that raises expectation and aspirations, so you have got to connect it somehow to having a labour market that can deliver for people when they leave school.

Professor Sedgwick

Yes, demography is one of the major problems that is being confronted. Demography means unemployment or underemployment. However, it is not necessarily about educating the entire population. It can be about educating certain key individuals in key areas within a population who are going to be important in later years.

Chair

So get involved in the local community, know the local communities and connect with them in a supranational way. The British Council has a role to play in that, obviously, or has been doing so.

Professor Joffé

I remember when I first began research in Morocco. The British Council then had a programme teaching English that was immensely popular. It was later cut back, I think, for reasons of cutback in government expenditure. As such, it was staggeringly effective. It was the sort of thing that really should be expanded. The idea of soft power being used in that particular way is really something that the British Council should be directed towards and encouraged to engage in and not see its resources marginalised because they are the most effective way of breaking through to large parts of the populations of these countries.

Professor Sedgwick

As you mentioned in your introduction, I taught for many years at the American University in Cairo. In the classes that I taught there, we could have really serious discussions about politics and history and all sorts of things. Some of the students who engaged in those discussions have since been moved on to do things where they are influential, and that is something where you can get an awful lot of value out of really very little.

Stephen Kinnock

In terms of your experience of spotting young people who you think do have the potential to move into leadership positions and influential positions, do you have any insight or experience to share in terms of whether there is a formula? Have you noticed any patterns or anything that would help an organisation like the British Council to target and pick those potential future leaders?

Professor Sedgwick

One has to be honest about the sorts of societies that one is dealing with, and recognise that children of the elite are likely to be the ones who are going to be influential in future, which rather goes against the grain because we generally say, 'Okay, they have got it all and let us look at the marginalised groups, ethnic minorities etc'. These are people who do have problems which can be addressed, but in terms of the agenda that we have here it can be useful to focus on the elite.

Professor Joffé

I slightly disagree because one needs to be careful. These societies are changing. They are not simply frozen in a social pattern. They are often changing rather rapidly and there are new groups beginning to emerge. I remember perhaps a person that I thought would be most appropriate in those terms was a young woman at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco who came from a little town, a dreadful little place I knew quite well. Yet she was extraordinarily bright, interested and engaged. She was, of course, part of one kind of elite, but she was not kind of the elite in Morocco. One needs to spread one's feelers quite widely to sample different levels inside society. That requires resources. It seems to me that one of the problems is the resources have not been made available, yet the return on those resources could really be significant. One might take a leaf out of the French book there because the French, and indeed Germany to some extent, have been much more prepared to engage on that sort of level, and make resources available.

Professor Sedgwick

I agree. Exceptional individuals are exceptional individuals wherever they come from. Perhaps what I was saying there is not that we should focus on the elites, but we should not be afraid of engaging with elites. Perhaps I need to express it like that.

Chair

I was interested in what you said about the STEM subjects.

Professor Joffé

Yes, science, technology, engineering and mathematics. There is a very strange phenomenon that has been observed. There have been people who have actually tried to look at the backgrounds of people who become radicalised. There are two aspects to this. One is you discover at the beginning of a process of radicalisation that people who are most susceptible tend to be those who are best educated, particularly in the science subjects. Those are the STEM subjects. Then over time you find that the level of education and the age at which people become engaged tends to decline. That is simply because people get dragged into a process which appears to be successful and gives meaning to their lives.

The issue with the STEM subjects is very interesting and rather contradictory. It is argued that those who engage in the science develop attitudes of mind that require firm answers, and that the sciences provide exact answers to problems. They then become engaged with radicalism because life is much more complex than that and they become frustrated. Those who have been educated in the STEM subjects will tend to be much more prone to that frustration than others will. It is of course a very general argument, and I am sure in many cases it is not true. The only problem with that argument is that if you come from a scientific background, and I happen to originally, you know that the sciences are based on the idea of scepticism. There are not precise answers and everything is there to be falsified or disproved, which runs directly counter to the assumptions behind that particular argument. So maybe that is a statement about the need to make a much more precise analysis of the way in which people's education is linked to the process of radicalisation.

Chair

It is a very interesting point though.

Professor Joffé

Not mine originally, I am afraid.

Professor Sedgwick

If I can add something to that, there may be two things going on here. The pattern is very clear. Of course, as somebody from the humanities I think that the humanities teach you to think about things in shades of grey and therefore the humanities is a perfect antidote. The other thing that may be going on as well as this is the selection of people who go into these subjects because in Arab countries you go into subjects depending on your school leaving average. The brightest, keenest most active people go into the STEM subjects. What we may simply be seeing is not that it is people from STEM subjects, it is the brightest, keenest, most active. It is probably actually a combination of these two.

Professor Abbas

As an additive to that, Diego Gambetta, formerly at Cambridge, has done some work on this, and found that it is unemployment. Engineers just cannot get the jobs.

Professor Joffé

That is also true, yes.

Professor Abbas

So now we have IT graduates who cannot get the jobs and they join Daesh.

Professor Sedgwick

But neither can anybody else get the jobs.

Chair

If we can move on to the future, what are key challenges in the region, or that the region will be facing in years to come?

Professor Joffé

How long have do you have?

Professor Sedgwick

Do you want new ones? We have enough existing ones.

Professor Joffé

Number one is employment. There just simply are not jobs. The Middle East is unfortunately very badly located in terms of access to employment. It is one of the reasons why the current attitude of the European Union towards migration is so unfortunate. Employment is one thing.

Another thing – and this is something that I do not think is fully appreciated – is the nature of technological change does not encourage employment. It is capital intensive. It minimises the use of people. Yet what these countries need are labour intensive activities and industries. That needs to be taken into account. Beyond that, there is a major problem of investment. There just is not sufficient investment. Look at what has happened over the last five years, since 2011. There has been the collapse of the tourist industries, for example, in several countries, partly of course because of extremism, but partly for other reasons too.

A fourth factor is political. You really do need to encourage these countries to undergo change, and we are very bad at that, strangely enough. Despite the fact that we all claim that we wish to encourage democratisation and so on, we do not do it. Tunisia is, after all, the only country that has been relatively successful as a result of the events of 2011, and that is quite a condemnation of the kind of support that we should have provided and just did not. Those economic and political challenges are the really key ones. They are not issues of religion; they are not issues of extremism as such. Those are things that stem from the lack of attending to those issues. I could add to that the fact that maybe the attention paid to Saudi Arabia by European governments is a mistake, but I will leave that one to hang.

Professor Sedgwick

Just to add a little variety to what you are hearing from us, we have actually seen quite a lot of political change in the region in recent years. It just has not been in the right direction

Professor Joffé

That is true.

Professor Sedgwick

I am not sure what we can do about solving the problems of the region. We might be able to do something about improving the perception in the region of the West. Perhaps we have tended to be a tiny bit too pragmatic in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. There are certain regimes with which we are happy to work with whom, perhaps, we should be slightly more cautious about working, and we should be aware of the fact that, although there may be immediate advantages in maintaining good relationships with certain governments, there are long-term costs in terms of the way that people in the region view us from maintaining that sort of relationship. If you want to know which governments I am taking about, I will tell you afterwards.

Professor Abbas

Just to add to these very important comments, it is the foreign policy; our foreign policy in relation to the MENA region. The implications of dipping in and dipping out and leaving a mess behind are too great to try to summarise in a quick sentence here. We need to be very sensitive to what we are doing. No wonder the Muslim community in that part of the world looks at us with quite a degree of scepticism. That will help to reduce the problem of extremism there, but also here, in this part of the world.

Stephen Kinnock

You talked about what more could have been done, or what could have been done differently, in the wake of the Arab Spring to support the transition in the right direction. Could you say a bit more about that?

Professor Joffé

Yes, I can. It goes much further back, and it has to do with common foreign and security policy, and particularly the variant of it which we know as the Barcelona process. That was, in fact, a process of engagement to achieve economic, political, and social change – not just within the MENA region, but also inside Europe itself. Different parts of that policy received different weights, in terms of the attention paid to them; the economic dimension, being the easiest, received most weight. However, none of it actually attended to the conditions in the region itself. The result was that the policy simply was a failure, replaced in 2004 by the European Neighbourhood Policy, which equally well has failed.

In 2011, there was an opportunity to engage very directly in helping complex transitions: particularly in Tunisia, but also in Morocco, and it also could have been the case in Egypt. We did not. We were not prepared – and I am talking about 'we' as Europe, and, indeed, the United States too– to make available the resources that were necessary to make any real change. Let me give you a few figures. Overall, through the Dover Programme, the European Union and the United States, we coughed up something like $10.5 billion of additional aid, which sounds a lot. In one year in that process – in 2012, I think it was – the region is estimated to have lost something like $160 billion of GDP. $10 billion is great, but it is not really very much when you are thinking in terms of figures like that. Then, of course, you need to think of the knock-on effects. If you lose $160 billion of GDP in one year, it carries on over a series of years, and at the end of that there is a lot more people out of work. The demographic factor comes into play; conditions become worse; poverty increases, and then you have begun a whole new round of radicalisation. It is really as simple as that.

Stephen Kinnock

It is about investment.

Professor Joffé

I am afraid it is, to a large extent, or at least that is one of the main things that we can really do.

Chair

It would be colossal investment, though.

Professor Abbas

But it would not be without payoffs.

Professor Joffé

No, it would have enormous effects, but you are right: it would be colossal.

Chair

It would involve an entire shift of thinking in the West.

Professor Joffé

It would indeed.

Chair

It would involve an enormous amount of effort coordinated across many countries.

Professor Joffé

However, that goes back to Mr Kinnock's point, about the fact that you cannot expect politicians to actually, as it were, condemn the system over which they rule. I understand that, but unfortunately, that is the sort of initiative that one needs.

Professor Sedgwick

I am slightly sceptical, because apart from the enormous scale, there would be –

Professor Joffé

Corruption, too.

Professor Sedgwick

Precisely. I do not think one should underestimate the power of bad governance to destroy wealth.

Chair

As they have done.

Professor Sedgwick

As they have done. Some of these countries have a good supply of clever, keen people who would do a lot of good if they were allowed to – economically, politically, or whatever. However, the systems conspire to defeat every effort, more in some countries than others – or less in some countries than others. Let us be positive here.

Chair

I do not think I have any more on that. I wonder if you could perhaps tell us two things: firstly, what you think that we should be achieving with this inquiry, and secondly, who we should speak to during the course of it. You mentioned the Muslim Council, but are there any others and what do you think we could best get out of it that would help us?

Professor Joffé

In terms of the people to whom you should talk, there is a series of organisations that would like to engage, and would have some useful things to suggest to you. In terms of what the approach should be towards the British Council, I am rather loath to comment on that, because I am not sure that I know enough about what the British Council has as its policy objectives. All I can say is the more engagement that the British Council can provide in these countries, the better the results will be in terms of Britain's relationships.

I know North Africa better than the Middle East, and I remember that in the 1960s, for example, North African governments were very anxious to break away from the Francophone dominance from which they suffered, and they were very anxious to send people to Britain and America. The Fulbright programme in America provided a means by which that could be done there, but we never really engaged, and it was a great pity, because people wanted to come here to study. If we could make access through the British Council easier, that would be an enormous help. Access to Britain, and access for the British Council in the countries concerned through resources, seem to me to be the two things that are really crucial.

Rehman Chishti

In terms of the overall engagement strategy, one sees reports that there are certain organisations that want to engage with the government, but the government does not want to engage with them for one reason or the other. You may have mentioned some already. How does one overcome that? Unless you engage with all sections and hear what they have to say – you do not have to agree with that, but you have to look at where different components are coming from – there may not be an effective strategy at the end, because you are maybe hearing the same voices and not engaging with

a component that needs to be engaged. How do you overcome that, and how do you bring those people together?

Professor Joffé

You use the universities to actually find out for you. That is one thing that government in this country is not very good at: engaging with the university sector. If you want to act at one remove, that is one community, or one particular scientific community, that could do that. The London think tanks, who engage a lot in this sort of activity, are another. The opportunity is there to deal with things at one remove; to find out; to build up an information base, and then you are in a position to decide whether or not you wish to engage with certain organisations or not, or whether you should.

Rehman Chishti

How would you rate the current Government's community engagement programme?

Professor Joffé

I know very little about it, so I am probably going to be quite unjustified in what I say, but my impression is that they actually are not very good at it. I remember one occasion, many years ago, when the Home Office decided to get some advisors and employ them. They all came from one particular aspect of the Muslim community, and it was a waste of time.

Professor Abbas

The idea of outreach on the part of government is something that is very important here. Governments should not just wait for things to happen, obviously, in a sensitive area like this, so it has to be very proactive in reaching out. These advisors that were employed by various New Labour ministers towards the end of their time were problematic on some level, but on another level, they kept the ball rolling. They were constantly out there; there were workshops, roundtables, different meetings, Ministerial visits, and so on. That mode of engagement was an ongoing process, however effective it was, but at the moment, there seems to be nothing. If anything, there is a lot of defensiveness on the part of government. We need to move beyond that.

Professor Sedgwick

Since we are talking about the British Council, the British Council has certain advantages, because it is not actually a government organisation in the same way that the Home Office is. Presumably, the British Council can talk to people that government cannot talk to directly. This may be a possible function for the British Council, but they are freer-acting than government departments.

Rehman Chishti

Just to clarify that, I think, Professor Joffé, you mentioned the Muslim Council of Britain earlier.

Professor Joffé

I did mention them.

Rehman Chishti

From the reports that one sees out there, they want to engage with the Government; the Government does not want to engage with them. It comes back to the point you made earlier: if you have a community engagement panel, but it is made up of all people with the same view, in terms of getting the cross-section of the issues, you are not going to be able to have an effective policy. I am just trying to get clarification, as someone with an open mind, about how you address that, and how valid is that aspect of non-engagement with certain organisations? Are you saying that there needs to be a better method of engagement, rather than simply a cut-off and not engaging with some? How do you deal with that?

Professor Joffé

I am not sure I can give you an answer, but I would suggest, as a first stage, simply the idea of acting at one remove. Whether you use the British Council or whether you use the academic sector direction, that is one way in which you could find out how you could be engaged. Do not forget: we have done this in the past. We did it over Northern Ireland. It took a very long time, but there was engagement then with people who we really did not like, and yet, in the end, we were able to engage with them. We have done it before in many other circumstances. After all, multiculturalism in this country has a very long tradition, and all sorts of communities have been communities with which, in the end, we have been able to engage. It is probably about identifying the field that you wish to deal with, and then seeing how you can best overcome distaste, anxieties, or whatever it is to engage with those who are really relevant.

Professor Sedgwick

One of the issues here is this issue of the majority community and the minority community, which we mentioned before. Originally, government, or various bits of government, was talking to absolutely everybody, and that was quite good, actually. Then, the majority community said, 'Hold on a second, who on earth are these people who the Government is talking to? They have extremely problematic views. We do not like this.' To which the Government responded, 'Okay, fine; we will only talk to people who appear nice'. That was responding to the majority to the disadvantage, in fact, of relations with the minority. It is the same mechanism.

Professor Abbas

To counter that, you have to engage with all groups. Just bite the bullet and keep going, because that is the only way you are going to try and normalise things in the long run. In the short run, you cannot play politics with who is in and who is out. That has been tried and tested; it does not work. The more you do that, the more you lose people in the long term.

Professor Sedgwick

Coming to the question of what one could hope to see coming out of this, one thing I would hope not to see coming out of it is the rebranding of the British Council as a counter-extremism

organisation. That would be a complete disaster. Another thing that one could possibly see coming out of this is a coordination of government understanding of radicalisation in a domestic context and in an international context, because the phenomena are related. It is actually a trans-regional phenomenon, and there is a tendency to think about them separately and attempt to deal with them separately, whereas perhaps that needs to be coordinated. The third thing, perhaps, is that in my view, the British Council does an awful lot of good things in the MENA region, but perhaps does them a tiny bit randomly. This might be an opportunity to rethink, in very broad terms, how the Council prioritises things in a new age and a new environment, or something like that, so that we can re-target a little bit.

Professor Abbas

Just to enhance that, outreach is for the British Council, but also for the British Government. The idea is to spread the wings far; to maintain this level of engagement; to bring people on board so that they are part of the understandings of the problem, and also part of the solutions. People need to have that ownership at the level of the community, and they are completely distanced from any of this. It is all top-down, centralised, and completely removed from any input they could potentially make. Engagement is key; outreach, particularly with British Council focus, and getting people – Muslim communities – to be part of the solutions.

Rehman Chishti

In terms of engaging with Muslim communities and being effective on that, in the United Kingdom, it is important to not simply go to the large umbrella organisations, but smaller organisations as well; the whole range. However, in terms of the key organisations who have real grass-root connections, who would you say they are? Say, the top three. Is there a top three?

Professor Abbas

The problem is that the MCB is the one that we talk about, but it was created in the last year of Michael Howard. New Labour gave it a certain dynamism, but whether it is entirely reflective of the range of different Muslim voices out there is another question – for example, the Ahmadi question. That is something that the MCB have not quite resolved internally. There are all sorts of other political questions; for example, Holocaust Memorial Day was something that the MCB were avoiding for a very long time, to their disadvantage. It is an organisation that is still under development, if you like, and yet it was given a tremendous platform at the time. There have to be some learnings from that. The idea of 'We do not like the MCB today; let us invent another organisation tomorrow' has not worked, either. It has to be far more organic, a bit more open-ended, and less driven by the need to have some kind of politicised impact from it.

Rehman Chishti

Which other organisations? We have talked about one, but are there others that you would say have credibility?

Professor Abbas

The British Muslim Forum started something in the mid-2000s, bringing together over 500 imams, but I am not sure of it is current status.

Professor Joffé

The majority, actually, are not national; they are local, and so it is very difficult to give you an actual list of organisations.

Stephen Kinnock

Trying to pull some of those strands together, I suppose what you are saying is that there needs to be a strategy for how we might, as the British Council, successfully engage and get some results. That means you have to set out what your aims are, and also who you are targeting. That seems to be absolutely critical. On that second point, in terms of targeting, I am interested in this elite/non-elite question. You mentioned the language courses in the British Council. I do not know how it works, but I worked for a number of years for the Council, and certainly my experience was that in most countries, it was top-dollar to go and do a British Council English language course. If you are picking people out of that basket, by definition, you will be picking the [inaudible] coming up through the system.

Professor Joffé

That is certainly true.

Stephen Kinnock

However, if they are subsidised courses, you are offering to a much broader range of people.

Professor Joffé

There is also the question of outreach, because the British Council tends to be in the capital, and ignore other population centres. It is probably a question of planning much more carefully the way in which we engage. You will, then, begin to overcome that problem of [inaudible].

Stephen Kinnock

Yes, and there is maybe something in that. Opportunities like that are a huge draw to young people of a different culture. The draws of speaking English and associating with many aspects of British culture are hugely interesting to young people all over the world. That may be an opportunity to connect some of this work into that, so that you have the draw. You have people coming in; you have almost a self-selecting audience, but you really democratise it as much as you can. Then you build programmes in on, say, active citizenship; giving people a sense that they are actually playing an important role in the community; and getting communities to work together. Often, it is a drop in the ocean, but on the other hand, clearly the British Council is not going to do a kind of Marshall Plan – which was actually what was required after the Arab Spring – but it can work in communities, doing quite a lot of local outreach, and being really in the grassroots.

Professor Joffé

There is another dimension to this too, which we have not really talked about at all. How do you make the majority community in Britain aware of the world with which they should engage? I do not know whether it would fall within the British Council's remit to actually provide access to that,

but there is a very rich culture out there. There is a very rich life, and people in this country generally know very little about it.

Stephen Kinnock

Absolutely.

Professor Sedgwick

It is the sort of thing that the Council has been doing since forever: culture and exchanges.

Stephen Kinnock

My personal view is that it has been one-way traffic. It is great to see Martin there; he has reminded me of the debates we had many, many years ago about exchange, and what exchange really means. If you are delivering English language learning in an Arabic-speaking country, a real exchange would be facilitating the delivery of Arabic back home. Doing that sort of thing could score hugely with communities on the other side of the table

Professor Joffé

I was thinking more in terms of familiarity; making people aware of the way in which people in, say, the Middle East actually live. What actually interests them? What do they watch on television? What are their cartoons like? What do they discuss in the press? Although there is an awful lot of repressive governments, not all governments are repressive, and there is quite an extraordinary range of expression that does take place

Stephen Kinnock

However, it stays there. It does not come here. It is interesting to look at China, for example.

Professor Joffé

Occasionally, things do, a little bit. You will get, say, music from North Africa suddenly emerging, but generally speaking, people are completely unaware.

Stephen Kinnock

If you look at a country like China, which has created the Confucius Institute and invested millions in doing that – promoting Chinese culture – you can see that that is something that would be, clearly, hugely beneficial if some of these countries were able to do that

Professor Joffé

[Inaudible]

Professor Sedgwick

A strategic plan has to recognise difference, as well. There cannot be one strategic plan for the MENA region, because the MENA region is so varied and so multiple. Also, yes, absolutely: English language teaching is the way in, and things can be attached to that, but they have to be attached to that extremely subtlety.

Chair

Thank you. I do not know whether anyone has anything else to add?

Professor Joffé

I do not think so.

Chair

Say now, or forever hold your peace. It only remains to me to say enormous thanks to you for coming. It has been enormously fascinating and hugely valuable to us, so I really do appreciate it. We are off to a flying start, and thank you to my Committee for coming, and on we go. Thanks very much indeed.