

## **Press Statement 2013**

It is well-known that Australian government counter-terrorism policy primarily targets Muslims. Over the last decade, government, both state and federal, Labor and Coalition, has developed and implemented a broad range of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies that target the Muslim community.

This report outlines in great detail what these policies are, what is intended from them and how they target Islam and Muslims. It demonstrates a number of key points.

### **1. Government policy in this area is informed by a particular narrative about terrorism that is deeply flawed.**

A narrative that relies on a politicised definition of terrorism. Violence perpetrated by Muslims finds cover under the definition; the same from western states does not. A narrative that ignores the role of western foreign policy as a root cause of terrorism, instead disingenuously sourcing the problem in Islam. A narrative that presents western states as bastions of freedom and justice fighting terrorism, whereas humanity has seen no worse violence in our time than that perpetrated by these very states.

The Australian Government defines 'terrorism' as, "use of violence by groups or individuals pursuing political objectives" and it defines 'violent extremism' as, "the use or support of violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals". Evidently, both these terms, by these very definitions, apply to the actions of the Australian Government abroad, such as its participation in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is clear then that government counter-terrorism policy is not a genuine fight against terrorism. It is rather a political agenda which takes terrorism as a pretext to pursue the political, ideological and economic interests of the state, and the corporate interests it represents.

This is not about terrorism at all. It is about quashing resistance, of whatever form, to the West's violently exploitative order. Interventionist and brutal foreign policy is characterised as a necessary solution instead of a fundamental problem and thus perpetuated. The ideas that oppose and challenge secular liberalism are characterised as extreme and radical and thus challenged in the most insidious of ways.

### **2. This is precisely what we see in the specific policies implemented.**

The government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies represent social engineering of the worst kind. A social engineering unfathomable and unacceptable to any other community, were it not for the overarching anti-Islamic sentiment perpetuated so deeply by successive governments.

The fundamental objective of these policies is to change Islam; to secularise Islam; to produce a so-called 'moderate Islam': a state-sanctioned version of Islam that is secular, politically-impotent and localised.

The means adopted to achieve this are so-called 'hard-power' measures, which seek to intimidate, and 'soft-power' measures, which seek to fashion and mould. Both the carrot and the stick are being used with the Muslim community.

The intimidatory measures include draconian anti-terror laws, excessive surveillance and underhanded intelligence tactics by the likes of ASIO. The anti-terror laws in particular represent a two-tier legal system with one set of (very low) legal standards for Muslims and another for everyone else.

The soft-power measures, implemented under the rubric of 'counter-extremism', include ideological, political and social measures designed to promote this 'moderate Islam', in two ways: i) through attack, critique and demonisation of those aspects of Islam deemed problematic (dubbed 'radical Islam') and ii) facilitation of integration of Muslims through promotion of state-sanctioned secular liberal values through education and civil society, a tougher conception of citizenship tied to the adoption of these values, and various social initiatives wherein these values are promoted.

Here we find the most insidious strategies employed by government.

We see the purposeful targeting of Imams and community leaders with the aim of creating an artificial community leadership that works in line with government agenda.

We see purposeful targeting of Muslim youth, through schools, universities and community sports and cultural activities.

We see provision of large grants for community organisations to implement 'counter violent-extremism' projects through leadership programs, workshops, social and cultural activities.

We see 'engagement' with the community by law enforcement, security agencies and bureaucrats to sell the government's policy, and the recruitment and use of Muslims for this purpose.

And we see the attempted polarisation of the Muslim community into 'moderates' and 'extremists' with the former being co-opted to implement the government agenda in countering the latter.

In all these considerations, the Muslim community is dealt with, not as citizens, but as a national security consideration - purportedly representing a primary security risk.

### **3. Government policy directly targets Islam.**

Australian leaders have repeatedly made the claim that the fight against terror is not a fight against Islam, as have western leaders more broadly. However, the truth is revealed by the actions the policy mandates and implements, not by the words used to sell it.

Various aspects of Australia's counter-terrorism policy comprise direct attacks on Islam and objectives that target it.

On the ideological front, the work to counter extremism targets many Islamic ideals, beliefs and practices. Although the target is said to be 'radical' Islam and although the values said to be promoted are at times expressed in supposedly neutral language, such as equality and tolerance, they in fact target Islamic positions deemed to be discriminatory, intolerant or extreme. This is nothing more than seeking to fashion Islam through the prism of secular-liberalism whilst adorning oneself in the garb of neutrality.

For instance, the current Counter-Terrorism White Paper (2010) mentions some of the 'extreme' ideas the Government has in its sights. It mentions four ideas as part of what it calls the 'distorted narrative' of the extremists. One of these is the idea that "governments in Muslim majority countries are illegitimate, corrupt and un-Islamic"; another is that "the solution is the removal of Western interference in Muslim majority countries and the establishment of 'truly Islamic' systems of governance." Thus, we're told that calling out the despots that rule in the Muslim world as despots is extreme. That wanting to remove neo-colonial interference is extreme. That wanting the establishment of an Islamic polity is extreme. Yet these are all fundamental Islamic ideas carried by Muslims globally.

On the other hand, this counter extremism work, which adopts and promotes 'moderate Islam', expressly promotes secularism, democracy, and liberal values, all of which are unIslamic, and seeks an 'enlightenment' in Islam on the model of Christianity.

On the political front, one of the undisputed objectives of government foreign policy implemented in the Muslim world is to prevent the establishment of an Islamic polity. Secular forces, regardless of how repressive or corrupt, are supported by the Australian Government, against those working for the establishment of Islam. We've seen this, in recent times, quite vividly in Syria as well as in Egypt.

What this report reveals, on the whole, is that the policies of the government represent social engineering of the most nefarious type. They entail interference in the intimate affairs of a community that no community should have to bear. They comprise meddling with that which a people hold dearest to their hearts of beliefs and values. Indeed, the distinction between values and law is entirely eroded. Values are being imposed by stealth under the pretext of creating harmony, social cohesion and national security. Government claims to want harmony yet is decimating people's closely-held beliefs, imposing values, creating fake leaderships, polarising and demonising...is that how they expect to achieve harmony?

Let us be abundantly clear. The government is not seeking to criminalise terrorism, for when it is politically expedient, terrorism of the worst kind is enacted, supported or woefully ignored.

What the government is seeking to do is to criminalise a Muslim's principled opposition to its policies at home and, more importantly, abroad. The government is seeking to criminalise any opposition to its brutal and colonial intervention in the Muslim world. To criminalise any opposition to western occupation. To criminalise any opposition to tyranny in the Muslim world. To criminalise any effort, political or otherwise, that seeks to free the Muslim world from colonial subjugation. And that is why the government is working so hard, at home and abroad, to remove the religious underpinnings that make a Muslim's principled opposition possible.

A warning to government is in order here: because of your policies Muslims are being disenfranchised twice over: first by constant demonisation of their faith generally and then again by counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies which target them specifically. This approach is calling, nay begging, for reactions. One must ask: is this being done with intent? Is this being done to solicit a reaction in order to justify the government narrative and policy?

Government whose Orientalist narratives, concocted to justify interventionist foreign policy, about backward Muslims, prone to violence, unable to manage themselves, needing the intervention of the white man...are the same narratives which inform domestic opinion against Islam and Muslims. Government which has created the political space for Islamophobia to thrive. Government which has created the political space for the far-right to rear its ugly head, only to then position itself as occupying the middle ground between a so-called Muslim extreme and far-right extreme. No! The greatest extremists are the policymakers themselves.

In light of these realities, demonstrated in great detail and evidence in this report, we make certain recommendations to the Muslim community. These centre around understanding and exposing the counter-terrorism policy of government for what it is, challenging and critiquing it, along with the flawed narrative on which it rests, propagating a counter-narrative reflective of the truth; and, more broadly, adopting an independent agenda instead of falling in line with the government agenda.

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