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Combating Extremism and Terrorism

Learning from Casework and the Literature

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This article sets out what we have learned about pathways into terrorism from casework with those convicted under terrorist legislation and from research with extreme right wing individuals, triangulated against the terrorist literature and prison behaviour.

Theories of 'radicalisation' suggest that terrorism is the end point of a number of changes that take place over time that are the product of an interaction between personal dissatisfaction and social and political influences. Stages correspond with increasing identification with an in-group to the detriment of an out-group, the members of which are de-humanised to the point that violence against them is legitimised. Horgan[1] calls this process 'socialisation into terrorism' and Richardson[2] identifies three essential factors in the making of a terrorist: a disaffected individual, an enabling group and a legitimising ideology.

These theories assume that all terrorists are politically motivated and that 'radicalisation' is a necessary pre-cursor to involvement in terrorist violence. Our casework confirms that this applies to a proportion of terrorist offenders, but not to those with a criminal history who are motivated in part by criminality. For offenders with criminal motivation and attitudes supportive of violence there appears to be a non-linear pathway into extremism which by-passes radicalisation.

Early casework with terrorist offenders did not reveal a single profile or pathway, but a number of needs and susceptibilities that were not abnormal or particularly uncommon but which, in the presence of a radicalising environment and in the absence of protective influences, were sufficient to engage some individuals with an extremist group, cause or ideology. The first to engage in casework were more followers than leaders, and we have since hypothesised that the motivation and characteristics of leaders, followers and those with criminal backgrounds may to some extent diverge.

We were helped in building our evidence base by the work undertaken by Alyas Karmani, who completed a project for London Probation that identified the radicalising influences in the background of a dozen terrorist offenders sentenced to short periods who had been released on licence.[3] This work, undertaken independently of ours, provided the opportunity to cross validate our findings. This article describes the early trends and themes that were identified from casework, prison behaviour and the literature, grouped under engagement influences, objectives and intent, opportunistic involvement and failures of protection.

Engagement influences

Threat and grievance: personal and global

In casework, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the loss of life were widely referred to as a source of grievance, as were the displacement of religious governments by secular governments in Arabic and North African states and the perceived victimisation of Muslims in the former Soviet Union and the Balkans. The 'single narrative' interpreted all these events as evidence of Western imperialism and hostility towards Islam. The cognitive distortion of the single narrative was reinforced by attention to those aspects of current affairs that reinforced a belief in the victimisation of Muslims and the moral failings of the West.

Many referred to the injustice and violence inflicted on fellow Muslims as a key factor in mobilising their support. Pictures of the abuse, humiliation, oppression or victimisation of Muslims evoked a strong desire to protect them, avenge injustice, show they were not powerless and restore Muslim pride. *'I was watching these things going on, the helpless suffering, my fellow Muslims being killed and oppressed by outsiders. I felt like I could not control this suffering, I could not stop this. I needed to do something, not just sit back and do nothing.'*

'I hate seeing people bullied. I know how it feels to suffer alone and no-one helps.'

We cannot be sure whether those who moved on from feeling compassion to engaging with the rhetoric of vengeance were particularly sensitive to injustice, but our experience has been that the single narrative has been adopted where it resonates with personal experiences of injustice and grievance.

1. Horgan, J. (2005) *The Psychology of Terrorism*. Routledge. p 101.
2. Richardson, L. (2006) *What Terrorists Want. Understanding the Terrorist Threat*. John Murray.
3. Alyas Karmani (2009). Reducing the Influences that Radicalise Prisoners Research Project. Final Report, unpublished.

Some terrorist offenders recounted experiencing racism and discrimination. One Asian offender described growing up in 'a very white area' of the South-East with childhood experiences of *'..being thrown into walls, bashed, spat at, beaten up, people kicking and punching you. It's weird as a kid to be hated. Part of you hates those doing it and the other part is eager to please'.*

Other antecedents concerned disappointment, disempowerment and humiliation: feelings of inadequacy when faced with the freedoms of University life after the restrictions of home, loneliness in the wake of relationship failure and resentment and boredom as a result of failing to secure employment. One offender qualified as a motorbike mechanic but was unable to find paid work in this area. The short time he spent in unpaid work experience he claimed were the happiest of his life, but it did not lead to paid employment.

Special status

Another feature of some Islamist extremists has been an apparent need for status, to be recognised as someone special. This has also been found in the background of extreme right wing (XRW) offenders and some animal rights offenders, particularly in those who take a leadership role. Whether this is the product of a gap between normal aspirations and a failure to achieve or a particular feature of personalities attracted to extremism, or both, is as yet unclear. But our experience so far indicates that many wanted to make a difference, to make a mark in history, to live notable lives and to be revered, but encountered a wide gap between their aspirations and reality.

One had a desire to join the SAS ('special' forces) in the British army but believed that he would be rejected as a black Muslim and aspired instead to become an insurgent abroad. Another described the buzz he got out of being looked up to as preacher, teacher and leader. Another told us how he had wanted to be an Islamic hero and how being part of a global movement made him feel special. His group came to believe that they were the chosen sect as prophesized by Mohammed who would be guaranteed a special place in paradise. *'We thought we were special, we thought we were better than everyone else…Everyone felt that they were in a privileged position…There's a lot of*

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narcissistic self-serving amongst followers. I used to lie in bed at night, thinking why I am so special to be involved. The sense of belonging and identity was very important. I was never bullied or a misfit, but my status took me to another level. I wanted to help society in a big, big way, living with principles, living with morals. You build this picture in your mind as a hero, someone that you only saw in movies or books'.

Karmani points out that the few Islamic heroes there are concern violent jihad, past and present[4]. He used the word 'vanguardism' to describe the belief that their group is the only one championing the cause of Muslims effectively.

Geographical displacement and cultural dissonance

Migration from the developing world and from conflict zones can create feelings of dislocation, isolation and alienation. In June 2009 most (58 per cent) Islamist extremist offenders in custody were minority ethnic British; either born in the UK, naturalised British or asylum seekers with leave to remain. Many had experienced geographical displacement, moving between countries or continents sometimes more than once in their lifetimes, adjusting and re-adjusting to different cultural demands. Dissonance between their heritage and host cultures contributed to identity and status issues. Some had experienced trauma from living in conflict zones, and others from mistreatment in custody.

One terrorist offender born in Britain was captured in Pakistan and subjected to rendition and water-boarding. He continued to reproach himself for succumbing to this mistreatment. Another, also British born, was taken back to his heritage country in Africa by his mother as a teenager when he started truanting from school and getting into trouble. He was told that the trip was a holiday but his mother returned without him. Two years later, having settled into a new boarding school, his mother returned to take him back to the UK, again without any warning or explanation, necessitating another major re-adjustment. Another Indian offender was born in Africa, moved to the north of England as an infant and from there to London as a boy. He subsequently returned to his family in India several times during his adolescence for months at a time. A third was born in Africa but was taken by his

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4. Ibid.

father as a boy along with his four older brothers to a European country and left there. He was told he was going on holiday and would return to his previous home and school, but he has not seen his father since, nor returned home.

None of these experiences would necessarily have caused difficulty if these men had been adequately protected by a secure relationship with their parents, had been helped to understand what was happening to them and why, and were confident about their cultural identity.

Guilt associated with a hedonistic lifestyle

Several Islamist extremists experienced a period of aimlessness, without a clear focus and enjoying what they described as a Western lifestyle characterised by sexual promiscuity, use of drugs and alcohol, regular frequenting of nightclubs, a preference for 'Western' music and a love for designer clothes. Part of the attraction of fundamentalist Islam in these circumstances was a clear moral framework for clean living that assuaged guilt associated with un-Islamic behaviour.

One who had led a life of sexual promiscuity and hedonism was attracted to the structure of fundamentalist Islam and specifically to the opportunity he believed it afforded of having more than one wife, as he did not think he would ever be able to achieve sexual fidelity to one woman. He had indeed 'married' for a second time in Saudi Arabia during his pilgrimage to Mecca. Karmani[5] points out that 'Dar al Harb' jihadi groups permit the taking of girlfriends outside of marriage, which makes them attractive to Muslim men otherwise denied extra marital sex.

Another Islamist offender had lived a delinquent and hedonistic lifestyle as a young man and served two prison sentences twenty years earlier. He became a cocaine addict after his marriage collapsed. Spending time in India allowed him to de-tox and regain his self respect and the custody of his children. Adopting Islam and a zealous proselytising style became his protection against relapse. A younger extremist offender

experienced guilt following a sexual relationship with a non-Muslim woman at University and subsequently assuaged this by adopting a fundamentalist Islamic identity and lifestyle.

Many of those who had reverted or converted prior to adopting an extremist identity seem to feel a need to make an outward show of their changed identity, adopting Arabic dress and appearance. As well as demonstrating difference, and possibly superiority, this may fulfil a need to protect against relapse to a Western identity and way of life.[6]

Need for stimulation and excitement

Several Islamist extremists were thrill seekers, bored with their lives and attracted by the chance to travel abroad to attend training camps to fight as mujahedeen. Susan Stern, a member of the Weather Underground group, stated that *'Nothing in my life had ever been this exciting'*. Similarly Eamon Collins, a member of the IRA recalls *'I had spent six years leading an action-packed existence, living each day with the excitement that I was playing a part in taking on the Orange State. At the very least, such activity gave a strange edge to my life: I lived each day in a heightened sense of awareness. Everything I did, however trivial, could seem meaningful. Life outside the IRA could feel terribly mundane'*.[7] A former Italian terrorist when asked what he missed about being a terrorist replied: *'The fact of being totally at risk'*.

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Warriors, heroes, legends

Many of the people from the tribal regions that make up present day Pakistan place great value on valour and the protection of honour. Mahmood, a military historian, has pointed out that many from these regions volunteered to fight alongside British conscripts in World War II, and that a 'warrior script' finds contemporary expression in the concept of military jihad.[8] Karmani[9] referred to an obsessive focus on stories, symbols and heroes of jihadi past and 'delusions of grandeur' — *'a sense of greatness and doing great*

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5.   Ibid.
6.   As with many of our findings this is of course very tentative, and it is important to stress that for the majority of people changes in appearance, such as growing a beard, do not necessarily reflect the presence of extremist sympathies.
7.   Collins, E. (1997). *Killing Rage*. Granta: London, p363.
8.   http://www.britainsmuslimsoldiers.com/#/about-author/4554737755
9.   Karmani (2009) see n.3.

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things; that they are on the level with great Islamic heroes of the past and that their actions will make the difference and establish justice and freedom for Muslims…The radicalisation process reinforces the view that 'once we were kings' and this appeals to individuals who have internalised their oppression'.

One terrorist offender was preoccupied with what he perceived to be his responsibility to protect his family by preparing for either fight or flight. He believed in the imminent second coming of 'Mahdi' when Muslims would be avenged, and that they needed to prepare for this through discipline of the mind and body. He encouraged British Muslims to attend camps in the UK where they could practise a regime of building fitness and resilience. This group was described by an Oxford Professor of Islamic Studies as '*a group of zealots traumatised by the sufferings of Muslims worldwide and developing a program of **spiritual knighthood** in defence of the oppressed'.*

The element of fantasy and the role of emotional rhetoric have been highlighted by the Eidelsons: *'Research psychologists have found that fictional narratives can be especially powerful vehicles for persuasion. Even when we know that the stories are untrue. Drawn in by our emotions, we're simply 'transported' by the setting, the plot, and the characters — in part because a well-told tale helps us make sense of our own personal experiences'.*[10] A communiqué from the ETA leadership illustrates the power of the Basque separatist narrative in linking personal sacrifice to a nationalist cause. '*We have saved our people from the threat of imminent extinction and we have brought them this far …. We have paid dearly for this, we continue to pay for it dearly, but we cannot deny that it is worth it to participate in this struggle, bitter yes, but also wonderful. Because the Basque Country deserves it!'*

Sprinzak[11] described the fantasy world that extremists inhabit: *'Although most of the participants in the process are capable of preserving their sense of reality, a few cannot. They imagine a non-existent 'fantasy war' with the authorities and expend*

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themselves in the struggle to win it. Ideological terrorism in the final analysis is the simulated revolution of the isolated few.'

Over-identification with group, cause or ideology

Most terrorist offenders have been convicted with co-defendants with whom they shared a group identity. Social psychological research indicates that over time individual identity can become synonymous with group identity such that a threat to the group is experienced as a threat to the self and group success is experienced as personal success. Thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour all become increasingly controlled by shared standards, norms and rules.

A Special Branch officer referred to the passion with which Islamist extremists identified with the cause as '*a love affair with Islam'*. Ballen[12], a former US state prosecutor who spent two years at the Saudi Rehabilitation Centre for former terrorists suggests that many are sexually repressed and thwarted in love. '*These are people with no kind of outlet. If you can't find love from your fellow men and women, that human connection, and the only way is through God, then you become more and more fanatical and more subject to manipulation by others.'* Being prepared to die for the group can be seen as the ultimate act of sublimation to a group, cause or ideology.

This state of mind and lifestyle amounts to 'over-identification' in which individuals are prepared to go to extremes to preserve the group, cause or ideology that defines them. The more distinct a group is (by means of beliefs, symbols, values and behaviour) the more attractive it is to those who seek confidence, esteem, direction and meaning[13].

Objectives and Intent

From casework there was wide variation in terms of what Islamist extremists wanted to achieve and what they were prepared to do to realise their objectives. These have ranged from wanting to demonstrate against British and American foreign policy (the most commonly articulated motive) through wanting to assist Muslims

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10. http://www.eidelsonconsulting.com/blog/2008/09/martians_and_election_day.html
11. Sprinzak, E. (1998) *The psycho-political formation of extreme left terrorism in a democracy: The case of the Weathermen*. In Reich, W (Ed). *Origins of Terrorism*. Woodrow Wilson Centre Press.
12. Ballen, K. (2012). *Terrorists in Love: the Real Lives of Islamic Radicals*. Northtown Books.
13. Hogg, M.A., Sherman, D.K., Dierselhuis, J; Maitner, A.T. & Moffitt, G. *Uncertainty, entitativity & group identification*. J of Experimental Psychology, (2007) 43, 135-142.

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under attack abroad, to wanting self-determination for Muslims to reinstate Sharia law in their own countries. Although the desire of al-Qaeda to remove all American influence from Arab lands has some symbolic resonance, very few have articulated support for al-Qaeda.[14] Karmani[15] also notes that none of the twelve terrorist offenders he interviewed expressed adherence to extreme 'Harbist' views and none were formal members of jihadist groups. One Islamist offender in custody objected to our use of the word 'extremist' because it ignored the differences between them in respect of aims. This man in particular did not have extreme aims, though he was willing to fight as an insurgent abroad to support fellow Muslims who he believed were being victimised because of their faith.

In fact, contrary to our expectations, many of those we worked with did not appear to have any extrinsic motivation for their involvement at all, being unable to articulate any changes they wanted to see in British society or elsewhere. Karmani[16] also observed that jihadist methodology was *'unable to be proactive and solution driven'*. In this respect Islamist extremism reflects that of loyalists in Northern Ireland whose motivation was reactionary to the clearly articulated goals of the Provisional IRA.[17] We have concluded that most of those we have worked with have wanted to signal their opposition to Western values but have not been clear what they would have in its place. Indeed several have appreciated the freedoms afforded by living in the UK even where they have opposed Western values.

Apparently, for some Islamist extremists, adopting the extremist identity is an end in itself. It allows them to assert their Muslim identity and express their dissension from Western values. Again, this does not necessarily mean that they were not capable of committing a terrorist act, but it helps to explain their motivation.

Opportunistic involvement

Our initial assumption that all extremist offenders moved through a process of conditioning to arrive at a point of readiness to offend has not been totally supported. As casework progressed we encountered several offenders convicted of serious terrorist offences who had only a limited identification with ideology and whose involvement appeared to be opportunistic and self-serving. They were violent criminals with anti-authority attitudes supportive of violence; two had committed serious violent assaults in custody and were being managed centrally through the Managing Challenging Behaviour strategy. They had not adopted the usual Islamic extremist appearance or dress. On this basis it was easy for them to deny being extremist as they did not share the same appearance, belief system or religiosity as other Islamist extremists.

Assessment identified a high level of social dominance, aggression, intimidation and exploitation of others through fear, as well as narcissism and sensation seeking, suggesting that they were violent offenders motivated by the exercise of power and control rather than a 'noble cause'. Others whose motivation was political and moral were disparaging of them, recognising that their motivation and values were at odds with their own. Criminal opportunism, influence or protection have all been identified as motives for adopting Islamic extremism, confirming that not all those who adopt an extremist cause necessarily identify with it or subscribe to its ideology.

Prison behaviour has also identified a new hybrid group of Islamist criminal/terrorist prisoners, some volunteers and some coerced by staunch terrorist offenders who have established a power base and reputation for serious violence, either personally or by delegating this role to enforcers. These offenders have involved themselves in typical subversive mainstream prison behaviour such as bullying, drugs and mobile phone trafficking. Recruitment is effected through shaming, bullying, threatening, assuming the moral high ground and/or persuading those from a criminal background that Islam is a means of laundering their criminality, assuming status, gaining protection or simply pursuing their criminal activities. Some prisoners

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14. It should be noted that those who have been willing to work with **may be** those who are less committed to the AQ cause, and those interviewed by Karmani were those serving short sentences for less serious offences who were already released into the community. As such they **may also** have been less committed to jihadist ideology.
15. Karmani (2009) see n.3.
16. Ibid.
17. Personal communication with paramilitary prisoners in the Maze prison in 1998.

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have also spontaneously begun to show interest in Islamist extremism without any direct contact with terrorist offenders or recruiters, underlining the vulnerability of those with a criminal background to engagement in extremism.

Failures of Protection

Self evidently many share the vulnerabilities associated with extremism, but only a few go on to become terrorists. The few who cross this threshold of willingness to use violence appear to have lacked protective influences that might have prevented this. Jacobson[18] explored the reasons why some of the 9/11 plotters did not go through with the attack. These were:

☐ the influence of family members who promoted alternative views and lifestyle or intervened in more direct ways (such as removing a passport)

☐ removal from the fanatical environment such as a training camp

☐ loss of respect for or disillusionment with the leader

☐ feeling disrespected or treated poorly.

Limited understanding of Islam, history and politics

Most of the Islamist extremists we have worked with have been relatively recent reverts or converts to the religion. Without a developed understanding of the peaceful nature of the faith they are easily more persuaded that it is a political ideology. Aside from a simple lack of knowledge, when people adopt an identity and affiliation they also take on its associated beliefs, values and goals in order to gain its benefits. In these circumstances there is little motivation to question the belief system. Bartlett et al[19] identified a developed understanding of Islam as a factor that

separated his samples of Young Muslims and those whom he termed Radicals who subscribed to a fundamentalist version of Islam.

Many of those in custody have confirmed that lack of knowledge about Islam made them vulnerable to indoctrination. They said the questioning of beliefs in the groups to which they belonged was actively discouraged or punished. One suggested there should be a helpline where you could seek anonymous advice to check out whether what you were being told was true.[20] A juvenile offender said that he was unable to seek guidance about the chat room contacts he had made with extremists via the internet at home as such views were totally unacceptable to his parental family. *'I couldn't talk to my family about what I was going through in my life; they just would not be able to understand me and they were not supportive.'*

Karmani[21] noted from his study: *'The level of knowledge for many of the offenders was basic and acquired through self study, attending occasional Islamic study circles, listening to tapes and viewing CDs of Islamic Daee's (preachers) and not Islamic scholars. Only one individual had a more robust and advanced level of Islamic knowledge, however this was self-acquired (there is an Islamic principle that the one who learns from books alone always makes more mistakes than the one who learns from books and a teacher). This is significant as none of the individuals had a correct and true understanding of the position of jihad and bearing arms in Islam.'*

Similarly many had not shown any previous interest in current affairs, history or foreign policy and were therefore a blank sheet for others to write their own version of Muslim history and conspiratorial politics. This points to the importance of education in general and in the Islamic faith in particular as protectors against radicalisation, and the protective role of opportunities in custody to discuss current affairs,

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18. Jacobsen, M. (2010). Terrorist Drop-outs: Learning from those who have left. *Policy Focus*, 101. Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

19. Bartlett, J, Birdwell, J, King, M (2010). *The Edge of Violence. A radical approach to extremism*. Access at: www.Bartlett et al (2010).co.uk

20. There is now an internet advice line managed by Al Azra University in Cairo that allows individuals to ask questions anonymously of Islamic scholars and to receive a reply within 24 hours.

21. Karmani (2009) see n.3.

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politics and world history in multi-ethnic groups where a range of perspectives can be accommodated.

A poor relationship with father

This has been a common feature of the backgrounds of terrorist offenders from casework. One did not believe that his father was his real father. He described keeping himself physically and emotionally apart from other family members and not entering into family life. Another felt he was an under-achiever and 'black sheep', not respected by his father. Another was abandoned by his father as a boy and has not seen him since. Yet another identified that failure to fulfil his father's wishes to become a doctor left him feeling without worth or status. His motivation since that time had been to become a better Muslim than his father in order raise his status above his father's and reverse his humiliation. In another case extremism was specifically adopted as a way of thwarting a father who was vehemently opposed to Islamist extremism and who the offender claimed he hated.

There is little comment on this in the literature, though Bollinger[22] examined the background of Red Army Faction terrorists in the 70s and found that a quarter had lost one or both parents as children and a third reported severe conflict at home, describing the father, when present, in hostile terms.

Such a vacuum in their lives may have rendered them vulnerable to the influence of charismatic preachers who provided them with powerful male role models with whom they could affiliate. Karmani[23] argues that attachment to violent jihad bolsters masculinity and compensates for feelings of being dominated and emasculated by authoritarian fathers. He notes from his interviews: *'In many cases family relationships are strained. In particular there is an absence of emotional openness in the family, in particular with the father. In many cases the father is very authoritative or was absent.'*

'The emir ran the circle and we were told he had fought in Afghanistan; he told us we had to make our faith strong and prepare ourselves; I did look up to him

and, yes, he was like a father figure especially since my father and I were not close.'

The characteristics of extreme right wing offenders

A study of a dozen young people in Holland[24] who had disengaged from right wing movements identified that gatherings around a particular music and style of dress operated as 'gateway' movements from which recruiters gradually introduced Extreme Right Wing (XRW) rhetoric. This gained a hold where it resonated with personal prejudice often based on previous negative experiences of foreigners or ethnic minorities. They identified a failure to fit in and lack of success at school as risk factors, together with an absence of engagement from parents at a critical period of adolescence when the allure of such groups was at their strongest.

An unpublished study in the UK[25] suggests that there are commonalities with Islamist extremists in terms of grievance, threat, sense of injustice and need for identity, meaning, belonging and status. Some are susceptible to indoctrination by virtue of their lack of knowledge about world affairs, many use violence and have a propensity to dominate others, and some have mental health problems that contribute to their vulnerability. Group identification also appears to confer a sense of identity and status, provide comradeship and excitement and legitimise and promote violence.

As with Islamist extremists, there is no single profile but a number of characteristics in common. They are mainly white males, often unemployed with friendship and group membership in common, they display rigid narrow minded thinking, lack of empathy for others and ignorance of world affairs, they have poor family relationships often marred by bereavement and loss, high levels of criminality, and a significant proportion have mental health problems and misuse alcohol. At an emotional level they are angry and frustrated and harbour a sense of injustice that is expressed in poor attitudes to women often including violence, and

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22.   Bollinger, L. (1982). In *Analysen Zum Terrorismus 3: Gruppenprozesse* (Darnstadt: Deutsher Verlag, 1982).
23.   Karmani (2009) see n.3
24.   Van de Valk, I. & Wagenaar, W. (2010). The Extreme Right: Entry and Exit. *Racism and Extremism Monitor*. Anne Frank House.
25.   Knight, S. (2011). The Personal Characteristics Of Individuals Linked To Far Right Extremism. Unpublished.

feelings of superiority and hatred towards minority groups who are blamed for their situation.

Five themes emerge from in depth examination of six offenders convicted of XRW offences, all of which resonate with the backgrounds of terrorist offenders reported above:

❒ *mental health issues including depression, personality disorder and suicidal tendencies (OASys assessments show that terrorist offenders have high levels of emotional wellbeing needs and relationship problems),*

❒ *rigid bi-polar thinking, ignorance, denial (many terrorist offenders have similarly shown bi-polar thinking, dividing the world into worthy and unworthy, with only a superficial understanding of Islam and world affairs)*

❒ *significant events, trauma, family traits (many terrorist offenders have experienced psychological challenges in terms of geographical displacement, inadequate parenting, bereavement, victimisation)*

❒ *frustration, grievances, under-achievement (many terrorist offenders are preoccupied with issues of justice and fairness and have under-achieved)*

❒ *self esteem, belonging, identity (many terrorist offenders have identity and status issues).*

These commonalities suggest that there may be a common psychology generic to extremism at the emotional level that allows those who feel unhappy and thwarted to tell themselves a story about the world that projects blame for their failures on to a victimising out-group who are perceived as less worthy than themselves.

Products of this learning

This learning, confirmed by ongoing casework, has informed the development if the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+, a framework for the assessment of engagement, intent and capability in extremist offenders. This methodology has been independently evaluated and endorsed by international experts in the field of risk assessment. It identifies treatment targets for intervention and provides a framework for the assessment of risk across police, prison and probation services. This methodology and the Healthy Identity Intervention (HII) derived from it are now being mainstreamed within NOMS so that terrorist offenders can be offered intervention and case management to address their offending behaviour and prepared for their safe return to society. The methodology has also been adapted to provide a framework for the screening of risk and needs in those about whom there are radicalisation concerns in prison.

An undertaking has been given to Ministers that all terrorist offenders will be assessed by means of this methodology by April 2013, and to this end a number of prison psychologists and offender managers have been trained to complete these assessments and to offer intervention where this is indicated. Additional input with Islamist extremists is also available in the form of Al Furqan.

The ERG methodology has also been adopted by the Channel project run by the Police in the community to divert those attracted to Islamist or XRW ideology from a possible terrorist pathway. Those selected for intervention are assessed by means of the ERG as a baseline against which to map progress over time and the implications for risk.

This surely represents a breakthrough: the development of evidence based products that have received international endorsement and been adopted across criminal justice agencies to screen, assess and manage risk in terrorist offenders.