



Collaboration over Imposition

BEST PRACTICES FOR DIPLOMATIC
ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES
IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

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PUBLISHED ON 3 JULY 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was written by a team of Oxford University students, to whom we owe much gratitude: *Jonny Brown, Trisha Islam, Ty Joplin, Saira Khan, Iftikhar Latif, and Natasha Somi*. We are especially grateful to our two project advisors *Lalita Kapur, and Sarah Firestone* who provided guidance throughout the project and invaluable feedback on the content of the report. Operational support was provided by committee members, *Zachary Parolin, Cristian Leata, and Timothy Yap*. In addition, we thank the Oxford Hub for their continued support of OxPolicy.

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COLLABORATION OVER IMPOSITIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report evaluates best practices and new programmes with which the British diplomatic service can engage Muslim communities abroad. It identifies effective policies of NGOs and other Western countries in engaging with religious organisations in Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and South Asia.

The key finding is that cultural engagement with religious communities can both prevent radicalisation and cause radicalisation. In order to prevent radicalisation, the UK should demonstrate that the West and the Muslim worlds are not inherent enemies. We argue that the only way to achieve this is through cultural engagement. Cultural engagement, however, must be sensitive and inclusive as engagement that clearly imposes Western values can precipitate an environment conducive to the perpetuation of radicalism.

The West can challenge this dichotomous narrative by connecting British Muslims with Muslims abroad and by persuading Muslims abroad that the UK does not have animosity towards Islam. Such programmes build trust by bridging the gap between British and Muslim identities, by showing that the identities are not inherently at odds with each other.

Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service (HMDS) can create a narrative of compatible identities by:

1. Promoting greater representation of Muslims in HMDS
2. Creating partnerships and conversations (via video-conferencing) between Muslim-majority schools and after-school madrassas in the UK and madrassas abroad
3. Facilitating delegations of British Muslims to other communities in the Muslim world
4. Instituting exchange programmes that target students from Muslim countries to come to the UK for leadership training and education, returning to their home countries with more positive views of the British system and British people.

In completing this project, the team experienced many challenges. For one, the UK is unclear about its policy towards engaging religious communities abroad. Furthermore, little data are publically available. Still, the report pulls together academic literature, conversations with policy practitioners in anti-radicalisation, and existing evaluations of programmes to propose methods towards creating a proper system of engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Religious identity in contemporary Muslim societies, as with other religious societies, can be a powerful tool or a dangerous weapon. In some cases, Muslims, feeling that their identity is threatened through global injustice against their co-religionists, are more susceptible to arguments by radical recruiters for violent, anti-Western ideas. The British government recognises that change must occur in its policy on preventing radicalisation because the policy's previous ineffectiveness is dangerous (HM Government, 2011: 3.15, 3.11, 3.17, 3.19, 3.26). In order to engage with the roots of radicalisation, we will argue that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service (HMDS) must address issues of threatened Muslim identity.

Whereas identity can cause radicalisation among many ethnic and religious groups, the focus of this report will be on Sunni Muslims because academic research and existing policies almost exclusively consider this population.¹ Specifically, we will highlight British diplomatic efforts to limit anti-Western radicalisation among Muslims in Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East and South Asia.

Recent events, such as ISIS's violent attacks, have brought religious identity's role in radicalisation to the forefront of British attention. Last summer, the FCO working group on Freedom of Religion or Belief held its first meeting (HM Government, 2014), signalling recognition of religion's new role. We hope to contribute to the new conversation on this aspect of diplomatic engagement.

We will explore how engagement with religious communities currently occurs and how it can be improved. We will posit that certain effective policies of other countries (such as the U.S. and Canada) and of NGOs should be further explored by the British government on a country-specific basis for Muslim nations in the Middle East and South Asia.

The report will suggest that cultural diplomacy be employed without imposing Western, Christian, or secular ideals on communities in Muslim-majority countries, as such impositions could threaten religious identity and reinforce the political space already primed for radicalisation. In particular, we suggest achieving this through cooperation with Muslim communities abroad and emphasising diversity within British society by connecting Muslims abroad to British Muslims.

A. Research Method

To assess possible British actions, we first reviewed policies in a variety of countries. We searched government documents, news, and academic articles about policies in France, Belgium, Australia, the United States, and Canada, because these countries have recently been in the news for their anti-terrorism policies. As Belgium, Australia, and France adopted policies that focused on domestic issues, we concentrated on evaluating American and Canadian policies. We compared American and Canadian actions to British actions by conducting parallel research on British policies. After assessing the current policies that

¹ Terrorism is saliently different between Sunnis and Shias. As Sunnis make up the vast majority of Islamic extremist terrorist groups, we will focus on these. For more information on the differences between Sunni and Shia, see: Lynch, T. 2008. "Sunni and Shi'a Terrorism: Differences that Matter." Brookings Institute.

these countries pursued, we identified questions that underlay the ideas in this report. Subsequently, we conducted a review of scholarly literature that dealt with these questions. The results of this research are found in the [Project Justification](#) section of the report. Afterwards, we revisited diplomatic actions identified in the first section of research, evaluating these programmes through governmental and independent assessments.

Unfortunately, data from assessments of programmes are limited. So, we supplemented available research through interviews. We spoke with Mohamed AlQadhi, chairman of the Renaissance Project, an NGO, and a student in the Masters of Public Policy programme at Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government. AlQadhi has analysed anti-radicalisation policy in the Middle East. We also interviewed Jourdan Hussein, a Louis-Dreyfus Weidenfeld Scholar also at Oxford's Blavatnik School, who has briefly worked on anti-radicalisation policy in Indonesia. This final product is the compilation of theories, practices, and their experiences, transformed into specific policy recommendations.

B. Limitations

Our main difficulties revolved around accessing reliable, well-defined, and relevant sources. This was especially true because of definitions, measurement, government secrecy, and limited resources.

Religious identity and community are complex topics to address. Definitions in the literature often are inconsistent. A glossary of the definitions used by this report is available as an appendix. The challenge of definitions also relates to that of measurement.

Religion and identity are two of the most difficult concepts to measure (Geislerova 2011, p. 120), in part due to disparate definitions. There is also the problem of sensitivity. Religious identification is rarely properly measured, as related opinions can be too sensitive to survey or results too risky to publish. The challenges of measurement are detrimental to establishing diplomatic programmes which engage with religious identity. The lack of immediate and obvious results makes these programmes easy victims of budget cuts. As we will demonstrate below, these programmes are necessary, despite the lack of obvious measurements.

Furthermore, British positions on working with religious groups abroad are unclear because this information is either not available or classified. The FCO's report on religious freedom, for instance, is more of a brief outline rather than a detailed report. Little information is available elsewhere.

Another limitation is the project's scope. This project does not address country specifics. Initiatives that may work for one Muslim country will not necessarily work for another. Rather, we try to identify common themes of effective policy.

1. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

1.1 SHOULD BRITISH DIPLOMATS ADDRESS RADICALISATION?

In order to justify the importance of this project, we must establish the veracity of some of the underlying points. This section will show that public diplomacy efforts to limit radicalisation are crucial to British interests. It will not belabour the clear interest that the UK holds in limiting violent and destabilising anti-Western radicalism. Rather, it addresses the question of whether British diplomats can make a difference by exposing the potential impact of public diplomacy on identities.

To determine ways to prevent radicalisation, we must first establish the causes of radicalisation. There are two main categories of precipitants, macro-level causes (global or widely applicable ‘problems’ such as Western foreign policy and the growth of modernity) and micro-level causes (such as social context and group identities). Within micro-level causes, social and identity factors interact to create in-groups and out-groups. When the West is considered the out-group, anti-Western radicalisation can more easily occur.

Matthew Francis, a scholar at Lancaster University who focuses on the role of religious belief in encouraging risk, created a model, which (as seen below) focuses mostly on macro-level factors, but includes an important micro-level, situational factor, the motivation. [Table 1: (Francis, 2012)]:

Category	Sub-Categories	Examples
Situational	Pre-conditions	Enabling Developments within modernity, for example the internet.
		Motivating Racial and religious discrimination; economic and social exclusion.
	Precipitant	Foreign policy, e.g. the Iraq war.
Strategic	Long term	Defeat of Western modernity/morality.
	Short term	Attention for aims; fear; etc.
Ideological		Non-negotiable beliefs about what is good for society.

Macro-level factors are difficult, if not impossible, for countries to change. Some macro level factors cause radicalisation but should not be changed, such as the internet and its enhancement of the flow of information (Francis, 2012). Other macro-level factors might be desirable to eliminate but are beyond the scope of the diplomatic service. These include a

sense of global injustice, such as a London bomber's cited motivation of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (BBC, 2005), or a frustration with economic inequality.²

Diplomats cannot affect macro-level causes, but they can address certain root causes at the micro-level (the social level). The micro-level constitutes the social situation that allows actors to interpret macro-level factors in a certain way (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009, p. 36). Diplomacy can create a counter-narrative at the social level through religious actors to limit radicalisation.

Identity informs interactions at the micro level. By establishing in-groups and out-groups, identity can serve as a powerfully divisive force (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009, p. 40). Violent anti-Western radicalisation in Muslim communities can occur when "Muslims" are created as the in-group and "Westerners" as the out-group. Research has shown that people who observed an in-group member being victimised or treated unjustly responded more angrily and aggressively (Gordijn, Wigboldus, and Yzerbyt, 2001; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice and Stucke, 2001; Yzerbyt, Dumont, Gordijn, and Wigboldus, 2003). Given significant violence against Muslims by the West and around the world, this can be problematic. Although HMDS does not have control over this type of unjust treatment, it can challenge whether the West is part of the non-Muslim out group. HMDS can and needs to challenge the in-group/out-group narrative by demonstrating the role of British Muslims in society and by including Muslims abroad in cultural exchange.

1.2 CURRENT BRITISH POLICIES

This section will outline current British policies on engaging with religious communities. The FCO is beginning to consciously and carefully engage with religion. This new approach involves a focus on religious freedom and an effort to provide training.³ Both of these areas are beneficial but neither is sufficient, as neither of these categories deals directly with radicalisation.

The government reportedly prioritises religious freedom as an essential element of peace (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2005). According to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, the ideal of freedom of religion has informed British policy in its successful effort to secure seats on the board of the new anti-extremism fund and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2014-2015, 2015, p. 17). Still, as will be explored below, religious freedom is not a direct way to counter radicalisation.

Training has also been a major objective of recent British policy on religion. In the past few

² There is mixed evidence for economic inequality's role in causing terrorism, as extremism spans socio-economic classes both in the UK and abroad (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009; Hasan, 2014).

³ In addition to the main FCO work on anti-terrorism, some other government policies address anti-radicalisation and may work with communities. Some of these other policies are too oblique to analyse. The Prevent strategy, for instance, claims to try to implement some of its domestic policies abroad by working "closely with countries where those who support terrorism and promote extremism are most active" (HM Government, 2014). This information, however, is not clear or specific enough to be analysed here.

years, the FCO has begun a variety of training programmes. A training centre for the FCO, Wilton Park, recognises that religious engagement requires a highly developed understanding of the faith-based world (Wilton Park Conference, 2014). Trainings are being introduced that show diplomats the role of religion in foreign policy (Wilton Park Blog, 2013). Still, religious awareness, religious literacy, and relevant skills for religious engagement are not routinely part of the training of diplomats (Wilton Park Conference, 2014).

The FCO has acknowledged a problem with its religious engagement despite the positive impact of its efforts towards change. Training is recognised by scholars as important preparation for diplomats (Mandaville and Sivelstri, 2015). Certainly, any of the recommendations this report makes must be backed by religiously knowledgeable diplomats. Furthermore, the focus on religious freedom begins to acknowledge the importance of religion in foreign policy. The foci of training and religious freedom, however, are only a start to proper engagement with religion by HMDS. Both types of engagement do not directly affect radicalisation. The report below will offer suggestions towards this end.

The FCO has addressed some issues of bridging identity, such as through publishing a well-designed pamphlet on “Muslims in Britain” (FCO, 2006). While this pamphlet is an important step in the right direction, there is no evidence that it was widely distributed (it is posted in few places online). Furthermore, bridging identities may be better done through inter-personal interactions.

1.3 HOW CAN BRITISH DIPLOMATS LIMIT RADICALISM?

Public diplomacy gives British diplomats the tools to influence the motivational aspect of radicalisation abroad. From her experiences as a senior U.S. diplomat, Helena Finn argues that military action is insufficient for combatting radical Islam and that a compelling counter-narrative must be created (Finn, 2003).

Public diplomacy, through the bottom-up tactics of engaging civil society, is appropriate for creating a counter-radicalisation narrative because it mirrors the process of radicalisation (Atran, 2010). Radicalisers try to persuade a public to accept their message. They engage community leaders and individuals rather than engaging directly with government officials. Public diplomacy, which similarly engages directly with the public, must be employed to limit radicalisation (Kilcullen, 2010). This includes engaging with Muslim religious communities. While a bottom-up approach may be slow, it has the potential to counter radicalisation and create long-term peace that a top-down approach does not have (Taylor and Williams, 2002).

1.4 PROJECT APPROACH

The central topic in this report is that of cultural engagement. This section will justify our focus on cultural diplomacy because other reasonable forms of diplomatic engagement do not prevent radicalisation as directly or effectively.

Religious freedom can have an indirect impact on political stability through changing the cultural context (FCO, 2013). Religious freedom may, in turn, impact a variety of types of religion-based violence, including radicalised violence. Cultural engagement is more

straightforward in preventing radicalisation because it allows diplomats to work on changing the cultural context which creates in-groups and out-groups. Changing patterns of injustice, of which religious freedom is a small part, is much more difficult and is less likely to effectively prevent radicalisation. Furthermore, religious freedom has already been thoroughly explored elsewhere (such as in Thomas Farr's writing, including Farr, 2008) and pursued as the main policies of the U.S. and Canada through their foreign offices' religious freedoms departments (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2014). This project will forgo further exploration of religious freedom in order to examine more direct methods for de-radicalisation.

The literature also discusses whether foreign aid would be a useful tool for limiting radicalisation. This proposal is more directly problematic than engagement with religious freedom. Modernisation can precipitate radicalisation when radicalising agents present modernity as antithetical to Muslim identity (Lewis, 2001). This suggests that international aid may be seen as threatening to an Islamic way of life and thus could be counterproductive to deradicalisation. Rather, collaborative cultural engagement may more effectively show respect for Muslim communities. Although economic factors may cause radicalisation,⁴ international aid is not necessarily an effective antidote.

1.5 POLICY APPROACH

Our policy suggestions aim to undermine the narrative of the West versus the Muslim world and the radical, violent context that this narrative creates. This report focuses on cultural diplomacy through engaging co-religionists abroad. This section will first show that cultural diplomacy can help prevent radicalisation. It will then focus on our particular approach to cultural engagement: using coreligionists to bridge the gap between identities.

A. Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy can change social contexts to be less receptive to radicalisation. Cultural diplomacy is a type of public diplomacy that includes the exchange of "culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Waller, 2009). This understanding is needed, as current negative perceptions of the West allow for an easy in-group/out-group dichotomy which contributes to radicalisation. In a Gallup survey, 68% of Pakistanis and 64% of Saudis reported viewing the United States, an exemplar of a Western country, unfavourably (Wolf and Rosen, 2004). In order to change public perception, cultural diplomacy works through cultural authorities rather than political authorities (Cull, 2008). The method of cultural diplomacy, which is employed to change social contexts, works with religious leaders as important cultural authorities. Thus, cultural diplomacy's methods reflect best practices supported in the literature on radicalisation.

Public diplomacy initiatives are effective in limiting radicalisation. The U.S. Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, Tara Sonenshine commented, "Public diplomacy is a smart, strategic, – and cost-effective – chess move towards enhancing our national security and building prosperity" (Sonenshine, 2012). A 2011 review of public diplomacy by the U.S. State Department, found that nearly 80% of participants in public diplomacy programmes reported positive changes in their communities (Sonenshine, 2012).

⁴ Please see end note 2 for more information.

Public diplomacy has been successful historically and can have even more success today. In the Cold War, the U.S. funded many cultural exchanges, which may have had a significant impact on maintaining national security (Finn, 2003). The non-state nature of Islamic radicalisation and the organisational structure of religious institutions make cultural exchanges an even more viable approach today. For instance, whereas the Cold War threat to the U.S. was the existence and expansion of communist *states*, the key threat from Islamic extremism to British interests are from non-state actors. This makes cultural diplomacy even more powerful because, as a bottom-up approach, it is one of the few ways in which Britain can interact with foreign nationals directly. In addition to the non-state aspect, the importance of religious identity may actually favour the success of British cultural diplomacy. Religious, transnational identity factors can be used to bridge gaps between the U.K. and nationals of Muslim countries. While the U.S. would never have been able to say to Communist countries, ‘we accept Communists in American society,’ British diplomats can say to Muslims, ‘we accept Muslims in British society.’ Cultural diplomacy can, perhaps even more than before, undermine the false dichotomy between the in-group and the out-group.

B. Engagement through coreligionists

The most effective way to use identity as a bridge is to engage Muslims abroad with British co-religionists. Western groups which engage Muslims in Muslim-majority countries have found that initial engagement is most successful when similarities between the actor from the West and the actor from the Muslim country are emphasised (International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, n.d.). While Islam as a transnational identity has typically helped radicals push their message, British Muslims can use the transnational aspect of Muslim identities to bridge differences between Muslims in Muslim countries and British nationals of all faiths.

This report will suggest three main ways of incorporating co-religionists: (1) increasing diversity in HMDS, (2) engaging Muslim schools abroad with Muslim schools (or schools with large Muslim populations) in the UK, and (3) through exchange programmes.

2. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

2.1 POLICY SUGGESTION: DIVERSITY IN THE FOREIGN SERVICE

Diversity in the diplomatic service is important to demonstrate that British and Muslim identities are not antithetical. The focus on diversity in HMDS has been on the proportional representation of British minorities in the Foreign Service, as exemplified by the Diversity in Diplomacy programme through the non-profit organisation Humanity in Action (Humanity in Action, 2015). This general focus on diversity for purposes of fairness, however, may inadvertently allow HMDS to overlook diversity's operational utility. This section will show that a diverse HMDS, which includes more Muslim diplomats, could limit misunderstandings and help bridge British and Muslim identities. As a result, the effectiveness of HMDS may be enhanced when Muslim diplomats engage with Muslim communities abroad.

British Muslim diplomats can enhance cultural understanding. Cultural awareness is recognised as important and valuable by foreign offices around the world, as negotiations inherently intend to identify areas of common ground based on mutual understanding (Casterphen, 2004). With greater cultural knowledge, diplomats can better cooperate with communities. Religious understanding may be particularly important within the realm of cultural understanding. Academic studies have recommended faith sensitivity because radicalisation often stems from crises of identity, which can be caused by insensitivity towards faith groups (Tufyal, 2007). An understanding of Islam as a religion is instrumental to understanding the cultural context of Muslim countries. While each country engages with Islam differently and has different traditions, an understanding of Islam is a good baseline for later gaining specific knowledge about a country. Muslim diplomats are more likely to be, although are not necessarily, more knowledgeable about Islam than other diplomats.

Canada has applied the policy of cultural understanding to its engagement in Afghanistan. In working with important religious practices, Canadians have adopted local customs and modified their dress (Geislerova 2011). However, this type of policy may appear disingenuous when diplomats are non-Muslims. As prominent cultural scholar and activist Bell Hooks explained, "when the dominant culture demands the other be offered as a sign that progressive political change is taking place, it invites the resurgence of essentialist cultural nationalism" (Hooks, 2009). In the context of Muslim politics, a more essentialist view can better define the boundaries of in-groups and out-groups that are so conducive for radicalisation. The policy of respectful dress may be more effective when employed by Muslim diplomats who may share similar modesty codes. They may be able to achieve respect without essentialism, because they can avoid imitation. While respect of cultural norms must be an operative principle, this respect should aim to be achieved with as little imitation as possible. Muslim diplomats, who sometimes already share similar customs, may be able to make cultural engagement a more natural, less imitative process.

At present, HMDS is likely not diverse enough to bridge the identity gap. Unfortunately, statistics are not available on the religious composition of HMDS. However, as British Muslims are typically ethnic minorities,⁵ we can extrapolate about religious diversity through ethnic diversity numbers. Ethnic minorities constitute 10% of FCO civil servants and only 4% of those in senior roles (HM Civil Service, 2015). In the total British

⁵ 92% of British Muslims are not of White ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2011)

population, minorities comprise 13% (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Lack of diversity among the general ranks of the FCO may cause only moderate alarm among those worried about fairness. Nevertheless, in terms of utility, especially when considering low leadership rates, these numbers should cause significant concern. When Middle Eastern Muslims see that only four out of one hundred diplomats in senior roles are ethnic minorities and even fewer senior diplomats are Muslim,⁶ the narrative that HMDS values diversity ceases to be credible. A critical mass of co-religionists is not available currently in HMDS to use to bridge the identity gap. For purposes of utility as well as diversity, HMDS should attempt to recruit more British Muslims into the Foreign Service.

Efforts to increase diversity in HMDS should be strengthened to create a better environment for identity-bridging engagement. Current attempts to promote diversity under the FCO, such as the Summer Diversity Internship programme, which requires a minority ethnic background, have helped increase diversity over the past 10 years (HM Civil Service, 2014). These efforts should be increased. Furthermore, efforts should be made to place bright British-Muslim diplomats in countries where radicalisation of Muslims may be a concern.

2.2 POLICY SUGGESTION: ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Engagement in schools abroad can prevent radicalisation by challenging the West-versus-Islam narrative at a formative age. In this section, we will highlight successful school engagements that use the structures of Madrassas, Islamic religious schools, to bridge identities. We show that HMDS can emulate these programmes. Specifically, we analyse the effective work of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD). This section will also detail practices which can be improved by an increased focus on collaboration. We use this information to propose a system that would better encourage cooperation to prevent radicalisation.

A. Review of the ICRD programme

The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) programme in Pakistan is one of the prototypes for engagement rather than imposition. Beginning in 2003, ICRD fostered relationships between teachers/administrators and itself (Patterson, 2011). ICRD has a spokesperson who is as close to the cultural segment of the Pakistani Muslim community as possible. Azhar Hussain, who grew up in Pakistan, led the “Madrasa Enhancement Program.” Furthermore, ICRD engaged in dialogue with religious leaders and encouraged the incorporation of their values, avoiding hostility (Tanenbaum, 2015). The role of non-imposition and a Muslim representative in bridging the trust and identity gap is what HMDS should try to emulate with its programmes.

The ICRD is a programme that the UK should examine because it achieves the goal of creating a social context in which radicalisation is less likely to take root. An independent evaluation found 98.3% of teachers who participated in ICRD sessions said they “better understand the role of Islam in promoting religious tolerance” and a majority said the programme caused them to teach and encourage others to teach “Islamic principles in support of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue” (Salam Institute, 2008; ICRD, n.d.).

⁶ The British Muslim population, make up only 3-5% of the British population (Office for National Statistic, 2011).

The ICRD programme can be implemented by foreign governments, as demonstrated by the U.S. experience. In 2011, the U.S. asked the ICRD to use a similar programme in Saudi Arabia (ICRD, n.d.). The expansion into Saudi Arabia was likely beyond the initial funding capacity of the ICRD, so foreign government support was imperative. The programme is still relatively new and no evaluations are yet available (ICRD, n.d.). However, with the best practices that ICRD uses and its success in Pakistan, we believe that this approach is likely to lead to effective cultural engagement.

B. Engagement with Madrassas: More Cooperation Needed

Other practices have had some impact but can become more effective through better cooperation. In Indonesia, the U.S. partners with Madrassas to bring students to an American cultural centre in a shopping mall as a field trip. The emphasis in these “@America Centers” is on Muslim communities in the U.S. and the U.S.’s acceptance of diversity (Onishi, 2011). There has been a mixed response to the cultural centres (Onishi, 2011). Some were convinced by the narrative of diversity. A 23-year-old Islamic law student said, “this shows that America is an open place because they invited us, students from an Islamic school” (Onishi, 2011). One of our interviewees, Jourdan Hussein, also had heard general positive comments in Indonesia during this project. On the other hand, there were also some negative reactions to the high level of security at the centre and one cited participant said she continues to believe that the U.S. hates Muslims (Onishi, 2011).

Some reasons for the limited success of a project that emphasises diversity may be a lack of collaboration, a limited timeframe for engagement, and a lack of personal interaction. This effort was characterised by a one-time visit, which can do little to change culture. Furthermore, although the U.S. convinced madrassas to get their students to attend, the programme was not made in collaboration with madrassas. Finally, students engaged with material, for the most part, rather than directly with American people. This programme was a step in the right direction, but there may be better ways to engage students.

C. Engaging Madrassas More Collaboratively

A possible, more collaborative alternative to the cultural centre form of engagement is to create school-to-school partnerships which would increase personal interaction and allow for dialogue rather than imposition. The Tony Blair Faith Foundation has started cross-culture dialogue through the Face-to-Faith programme (Tony Blair Faith Foundation, n.d.). The Face-to-Faith programme connects students at different schools via video-chat with regularly scheduled conversations. The partnership proposed here would be similar in that it consists of a partnering of schools in long-term dialogue; however, based on the effectiveness of engaging with co-religionists to bridge the identity gap, the proposed project would be intra-faith.

UK schools in these partnerships would either be after-school Madrassas⁷ or state schools with large Muslim populations. The UK has previously held successful domestic partnership programmes with British madrassas. One programme, the Islam and Citizenship Education (ICE) project, may be directly applicable. This programme was tried in 30 madrassas but

⁷ In the UK, Madrassas usually refer to regular after-school religious programmes where students age four to age 14 learn about Islam (OSI 2005). Madrassas are prevalent in the UK with about 2,000 madrassas known to local councils (Eason 2009).

was found to be successful enough to expand to 300 British Muslim schools and madrassas (ICE, 2015). The British government could build on the positive relationships that it has to add an international element to the programme, by connecting these students to students in Muslim schools abroad. This may help bridge the identity gap by showing that Britain accepts Muslims and that a significant Muslim population engages positively with the government. The voices of young British Muslims are likely to be seen as more reliable than any government official among Muslim communities abroad.

2.3 POLICY SUGGESTION: EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Exchange programs may be another way of engaging credible co-religionists with Muslim communities abroad in order to counter the anti-Western narrative. In exchange programs, Muslim students from Muslim-majority countries would have the opportunity to travel to the UK to study. Although this initial engagement is inter-religious, these students would become credible, co-religionist, intra-cultural representatives for UK diversity upon returning home. The UK should sponsor exchange programmes that target students from Muslim countries where the Muslim-versus-West narrative is prominent. This section will first show how such an exchange program can be successful by offering opportunities beyond cultural exchange. It will then show how successful engagement can prevent radicalisation.

Exchange programs offer educational benefits to participants, and can incentivise participation by students who are not already enthusiastic about inter-cultural tolerance. An educational opportunity that has been successful in creating a social context more amenable to tolerance of the West is the Kennedy-Lugar YES Program. YES provides scholarships to high school students (ages 15-17) from 41 countries with significant Muslim populations. Students receive funding for one academic year in the United States and live with host families, attend high school, engage in activities about American society, gain leadership skills and help educate Americans about their country of origin and cultures (YES Program, 2015). The program evaluation found “that participants gained a deepened and more nuanced understanding of the United States, their own countries, as well as the roles and rights of individuals in society” (AFS Intercultural Programs USA, 2015; YES Program, 2015)⁸

The goals of the YES program are related to anti-radicalisation efforts. It was funded, following September 11th attacks, to engage Americans and Muslims in countries with high Muslim populations (AFS Intercultural Programs USA, 2015; YES Program, 2015). The program is, in a way, a special form of engagement by co-religionists. By persuading these students that the U.S. is open to engagement with them and their countries, it creates effective, credible cultural ambassadors for accepting America. As is clear from the evaluations,⁹ shown in the tables below, participants gained increased understanding

⁸ It is important to have well selected candidates in order for these students to gain the most out of the programme and become effective cultural ambassadors. YES describes its criteria as “merit-based criteria including personal qualities such as adaptability, leadership potential and motivation for an intercultural experience. (AFS Intercultural Programs USA, 2015)

⁹ The Evaluation of the YES programme assessed the effectiveness of the exchange experience to create understanding between Americans and countries with significant Muslim populations. The evaluation assessed 4 groups of participants (making up thousands of students), starting with 2004’s participants (U.S. State Department, 2009).

of U.S. culture and increased tolerance for Americans (AFS Intercultural Programs USA, 2015; YES Program, 2015).

*Table 6: Increased Understanding of the Culture of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and 3 respondents with “a lot” and “a little better” understanding*

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	97%	98%	98%	99%	98%
Survey 3	94%	100%	99%	100%	98%

*Table 8: Views of the American People by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 3 respondents with “a much more” and “a more favorable” view of people from the United States*

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 3	84%	96%	97%	96%	94%

*Table 7: Increased Understanding of the People of the U.S. by Cohort
Percentage of Survey 2 and 3 respondents with “a lot” and “a little better” understanding*

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 3	Cohort 4	Average
Survey 2	99%	100%	98%	98%	99%
Survey 3	96%	100%	100%	100%	99%

The program gives students the tools to turn their newfound understanding of American culture into a message that they can share with family and friends. Before the program, only 6% of participants rated their public speaking ability as ‘excellent.’ After the program, 66% agreed with this same statement (U.S. State Department, 2009). This translated into real engagement when students returned to their home communities, as eight of every ten students gave a presentation at school about their experiences, seven out of ten presented at a communal event, and five out of ten spoke in a religious setting (AFS Intercultural Programs USA, 2015; U.S. State Department, 2009).

These positive interactions, by student self-reporting, seemed to have had a positive impact, as nine of ten said family members and friends now “understand American people,” “have a more positive opinion of American people,” and “understand the United States better” (U.S. State Department, 2009). These students from Muslim-majority countries are much more able than Western co-religionists to become cultural ambassadors without impositions.

These exchanges are precarious, as is any cultural exchange. Governments can pick open-minded students and provide them with some positive experiences, but government cannot control everything anyone experiences; this presents some dangers (Belanger, 1999, p. 678). Furthermore, even the most cautious and integrative programs can be seen as Western impositions (Schweizer, 2004). Still, cultural exchange can, as seen in the data above, effectively challenge the narrative that the West is against Islam. The UK can and should instate similar programs. Like the U.S., the UK has many educational opportunities to offer. Furthermore, by working with the U.S. to establish leadership training, the UK can change the way it is perceived abroad

3. THE PROBLEM OF FUNDING

Despite the importance of public diplomacy and diplomacy in general, funding for these programmes is decreasing. In 2010, spending cuts particularly targeted the FCO. There was a 24% planned budget reduction and an additional 5.9% was cut (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2015). In fact, out of the twelve countries with a comparable department, the FCO ranks eighth in its amount of spending per capita, ahead of only Ireland, Sweden, South Africa, and India (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2015). Despite the importance of radicalisation's threat to British national defence, HMDS spends only 6% of what is spent by the British Ministry of Defence (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2015). Furthermore, of the £1.17 billion per annum spent by the FCO, spending "on peacekeeping and conflict prevention" is only £474 million (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2015).

Cultural diplomacy often does not have obvious and immediate results; thus, it is likely to suffer most from budget cuts. Cutting its budget, however, would be an erroneous policy since cultural diplomacy is the UK's best tool in fighting anti-Western radicalism, one of its most severe threats from abroad. If the UK hopes to seriously engage with efforts to limit radicalisation abroad, it must rethink its funding priorities.¹⁰

¹⁰ One funding-based caution from America's Cold War cultural engagement is, although looking for alternative funding may be tempting given FCO budget limitations, not to take money from security agencies. American public diplomacy from the Cold War was largely funded by the CIA (Finn, 2013). Given the negative history of Western military involvement for Middle East Muslims, money must be funneled from the diplomatic corps and not from military or security agencies.

CONCLUSION

The conversations and research conducted for this project revealed a dominant theme, expressed pithily by Mohamed AlQadhi; “you can’t co-opt people to speak a particular version [of a narrative], you have to persuade them.” Anti-Western radicalisation, which presents a danger to the UK, occurs when Muslims see their identity as inherently threatened by the West. Initiatives must create trust through cooperation. Engaging co-religionists can create a counter-narrative to the idea of inherent conflict and build a stronger diplomatic service.

This report proposes cooperative practices that engage Muslims with other Muslims. It recommends engaging Muslim school children abroad with Muslim students in the UK to show that Muslim and British identity are not at odds. It suggests increasing diversity in the Foreign Service, again to show that British Muslims can become leaders in British society without losing their Muslim identity. Finally, it advocates inter-cultural programs so that Muslim students from abroad can create credible cultural ties, proving to their friends and family that living in the UK and being Muslim are not antithetical.

Much more research is needed in the area of religion and diplomacy. There are other ways in which identity gaps have been bridged. One of these is through co-religionist delegations. Jerry White, who directs the Bureau of Conflict and Stability at the U.S. State Department, talked about sending delegations of co-religionists to the Central African Republic to counsel their communities about the problems they experience (White, 2014). This resulted in trust-building with the Muslim communities in the Central African Republic. Although there is little information on this program, its success fits well within our larger idea of cooperating rather than imposing. Many more programs should be developed involving and cooperating with Muslim communities abroad.

Religion can offer a strong platform for engagement with communities abroad. Its transnational nature can be both dangerous and useful to British diplomats. Radicalisers can use transnational identity to exploit crises of identity for Muslims. They can demonstrate that conflicts worldwide that endanger Muslims are the fault of the “West.” Transnational identity can also, however, prevent this ideology and create an inclusive, non-threatening narrative. The UK can show that British Muslims coexist with other British faith groups. This narrative can help operationalise transnational Muslim identity to create tolerance.

Engagement must be cautious but it also must be continuous. HMDS needs to use collaborative and uninterrupted engagement to convince communities that anti-Western radicalism is not an accurate narrative. HMDS can achieve this through cultural diplomacy. On the part of the government, such a form of diplomacy takes dedication and persistence. Results may not be immediate, but they will be critical to British security. Cooperative cultural diplomacy is the best way forward in order to fight anti-Western, radical sentiment.

GLOSSARY

National interests:

The goal of the policy presented in this paper is to serve national interests. Scholars argue over an accepted definition of ‘national interest.’ We accept Donald E. Nuechterlein’s definition which states, “the national interest is the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment.”

Of his four categories of national interest, two are most important to this project.

1. Defence interests, which are “the protection of the nation-state and its citizens against the threat of physical violence directed from another state, and/or an externally inspired threat to its system of government.
2. World Order interests, which are “the maintenance of an international political and economic system in which the nation-state may feel secure, and in which its citizens and commerce may operate peacefully outside its borders.”

In short, national interests are to provide a secure system for citizens both inside and outside of national borders.

Radicalisation:

The report aims to show ways to prevent radicalisation. Radicalism is a process “in which a group undergoes ideological and/or behavioural transformations that lead to the rejection of democratic principles (including peaceful alternation of power and the legitimacy of ideological and political pluralism)” (Schmid, 2013: 20). Radicalisation is not necessary negative or synonymous with terrorism (Schmid, 2013). However, this report discusses only a form of radicalism that directly harms British interests by fostering violent, anti-Western ideas.

Thus, for the purpose of this report, radicalisation is a process in which individuals accept that violence is necessary to combat Westernisation and Western intervention.

Religious communities:

The report aims to define best practices for interactions with Muslim religious communities. A religious community is a community (group of people) who practice the same religion. Often, they have resources (such as buildings, schools, and gatherings) that can be mobilised for political and social purpose.

Religious identity:

Religious identity is how individuals see themselves in relation to their religious communities. This is influenced by their social situation.

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