

David Cameron MP
Speech to the Foreign Policy Centre
Wednesday, 24th August

INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak here this morning.

Your work – particularly on global security and the need to encourage greater freedom and democracy in the Middle East - has been immensely valuable.

Two principles lie behind much of what you do.

That Britain has an important role to play in international affairs.

And that foreign and domestic policy are deeply inter-connected.

You're right about both.

And there's no better example than the subject I would like to focus on today: the threat from extremist Islamist terrorism.

In recent weeks I have been outlining some of the challenges I believe we face as country - and the need to foster a new sense of shared responsibility to deal with them.

The challenges of global terror require exactly that kind of response.

We're all in this together, and we must act together to defend our security.

I want to look at three areas in particular.

The truly global nature of the threat - and the foreign policy response that requires.

The security response that the Government should take to ensure that liberal values are best defended from a dangerous assault.

And the action we need to take as a country to strengthen the ties which bind us together as a nation.

OUR SHARED VALUES

But we should first understand the connection between these three areas.

Our foreign policy response, our security response and our national response should all be rooted in our shared values.

Our shared values as a nation are not the same thing as our national character and characteristics.

There's a long list of things we might include in any description of our national character, or "Britishness."

But I don't think we need engage in some protracted exercise to define our shared values. We can do it in a single phrase.

Freedom under the rule of law.

This simple, yet profound expression explains almost everything you need to know about our country, our institutions, our history, our culture – even our economy.

It is why British citizens are free men and women, able to do what they like unless it harms others or is explicitly forbidden.

And why no-one and nothing is above the law.

These shared values, enshrined in our constitution and institutions over centuries, are the foundation of our civilised society.

They are democratic, progressive and protect our human rights.

Our response to the new threats we face - whether through foreign policy, security policy, or as a nation - should involve the consistent application of these shared values.

THE GLOBAL THREAT

The attacks which London endured on the 7th of July were horrific acts of mass murder.

Since that day there have been other attempts by other young men to bring terror to London.

Britain has joined the long list of nations to be directly targeted by extremist Islamist terror.

Indonesia, India, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, Russia, Kenya, Tanzania and the United States of America.

The range of nations targeted by these terrorists underlines the global nature of the threat - as does the background of the attackers.

It is profoundly shocking to learn that those responsible for 7/7 were British citizens. But they were not the first young British Muslims either to kill for terrorist ends, or become suicide bombers.

The American journalist Daniel Pearl was murdered in Pakistan by a Briton educated in Essex.

British suicide bombers have committed acts of terrorism in Israel.

And we know that Britons have passed through Osama bin Laden's terrorist training camps and attended fundamentalist madrassas in Pakistan.

It is clearly right to say that there is no list of demands we can accept and no group of terrorists we could meet and negotiate with - even if we wanted to - to stop the attacks.

But we can and should try to understand the nature of the force that we need to defeat.

The driving force behind today's terrorist threat is Islamist fundamentalism.

The struggle we are engaged in is, at root, ideological.

During the last century a strain of Islamist thinking has developed which, like other totalitarianisms, such as Nazi-ism and Communism, offers its followers a form of redemption through violence.

The seeds of this ideology are various.

As the great Middle Eastern scholar Bernard Lewis has pointed out, there are some in the Islamic - and especially Arab - world who are looking for a simple explanation for the decline in their regions' power and prestige.

A number of thinkers - most notably the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb - have argued that it has been the abandonment of true Islam which lies at the heart of Muslim problems.

Qutb and his followers, including Osama bin Laden, have argued for a jihad to purge the Islamic world of those they see as apostate leaders and rid it of all Western influences.

They have opposed the secular Egyptian Government and the House of Saud, as well as demanding an end to any Western presence on Islamic soil.

But the Jihadist programme is not limited to these goals. They work, like Trotskyist "transitional demands", to rally support among the disaffected and radicalise them for the greater struggle.

This is the establishment of a single, puritan, fundamentalist strain of Islam across the Muslim world, and the eventual advance of Islamist influence across the globe.

Jihadism feeds into the bewilderment, alienation and lack of progress felt by many in the Muslim world.

The corruption of many states in the Middle East. The lack of democracy. The concentration of power in the hands of elites whose lifestyles are noticeably unIslamic. All these things create resentments.

Those resentments are very far from being restricted to the poor.

Jihadism, like Nazism and Communism before it, often bewitches the minds of gifted and educated young men.

Mohammed Atta, the ringleader of the 9/11 terrorists, was an architect - and many of his confederates were graduates.

For them the West was a source of corruption. Atta romanticised the simplicity and purity of Islamic life, which, he believed, was mortally threatened by Westernisation. It wasn't just the presence of American troops on Muslim soil which offended him, but the influence of Western ideas, capitalism, female emancipation, democracy and the mixing of cultures.

As the writer Jonathan Raban has observed, there is a generation of Islamists in the West, young men whose insecurities and search for certainty make them vulnerable to an ideology of purity.

And, once they embrace Jihadism, their life in the West becomes "a hazardous survival exercise in enemy-occupied territory" with temptations to impurity everywhere.

Taking up arms against that society becomes not just a cleansing exercise, it also confers on the young terrorist a sense of mission and superiority.

Just like the Nazis of 1930s Germany they want to purge corrupt cosmopolitan influences.

The parallels with the rise of Nazi-ism go further. Just as there were figures in the nineteen-thirties who misunderstood the totalitarian wickedness of Nazi-ism and argued that Hitler had a rational set of limited political demands, so there are people today who try to explain Jihadist violence with reference to a limited set of political goals.

If only, some argue, we withdrew from Iraq, or Israel made massive concessions, then we would assuage Jihadist anger.

That argument, while often advanced by well-meaning people, is as limited as the belief in the Thirties that, by allowing Germany to remilitarise the Rhineland or take over the Sudetenland, we would satisfy Nazi ambitions.

As we discovered in the nineteen-thirties, a willingness to cede ground and duck confrontation is interpreted as fatal weakness. It can provide an incentive to escalate the struggle against a foe who clearly lacks the stomach for the fight.

Indeed, in the 1990s the inaction of the West fed the belief among Osama bin Laden and his allies that we lacked the strength to defend ourselves.

The ignominious US withdrawal from Somalia. The weakness of the response to the bombings of embassies in Africa - and to the attack on the USS Cole.

All these factors signalled weakness, especially in the face of a determined and fanatical foe.

The lesson from all of this with respect to our presence in Iraq is clear.

Premature withdrawal – and failure to support the Iraqi authority - would be seen as a surrender to militant Jihadism. Nothing would embolden the terrorists more.

As Bin Laden's principal lieutenant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi has explained, the greatest threat to their project comes from liberal democracy.

That is why their campaign there is sustained with such ferocity.

Should representative government, or a system close to it, take root in Iraq they will not only have been defeated in one key battle, they will also find that an alternative path has been established in the Middle East which gives its people the hope, prosperity and freedom they deserve.

Vital encouragement will be given to those struggling for democracy elsewhere in the Middle East, from Lebanon and Palestine to Syria and Iran.

The mission to establish a representative Government in Iraq is a cause worth fighting for.

As a Conservative, whose natural instincts are to be wary of grand schemes and ambitious projects for the re-making of society, I had my concerns about the scale of what is being attempted.

Moving from the position of deterring a foe – Saddam – to an approach of pre-emptive action to remove him, was a profound change. That is why specific endorsement from the UN – through a “second resolution” - was so desirable.

But when – principally due to French obstruction – that was not possible, a decision still had to be made.

Should we enforce a stream of UN resolutions against Saddam, remove a key element of instability in the region and neutralise a continued threat – or should we back off?

I thought then that, on balance, it was right to go ahead, and I still do now.

If we are to defeat the global Jihadist terrorist threat we must realise that we’re all in this together.

That we share a responsibility with the people of the Islamic world and the Middle East to promote change, reform and liberalisation.

That means...

... standing with those brave democrats in Iraq who are trying to rebuild their nation....

... providing encouragement and support for the process of democratic state-building in Palestine

...supporting, diplomatically, financially and morally, those leaders who are taking the difficult but necessary steps towards modernisation

... and demonstrating our strength of purpose to regimes that support terror.

In other words, it means standing up for our shared values – freedom under the rule of law.

HOMELAND SECURITY

It's an ambitious mission. But the threat we face demands nothing less.

It also requires us to move quickly to deal with the direct security threat our citizens face today.

There is a simple series of direct questions we must answer.

Do we have effective border controls to prevent terrorists or those who may wish to do us harm entering the UK illegally?

Do we have an asylum system that is sufficiently robust to prevent them from abusing it?

Can we remove them, through deportation, if they choose to try and stay here?

Have we funded and directed our security services to ensure they can do everything possible to find and track such people, whether they are foreign nationals or UK citizens?

Is our domestic anti-terror legislation being used properly by the security services, the Police and the courts to arrest, question, charge and imprison them?

And is our response consistent with our shared national values?

I fear that the accurate answer to all these questions is “no.”

For much of the last Parliament I sat on the Home Affairs Select Committee. Following 9/11 we examined these issues in some detail.

And as a Home Office adviser in the 1990s I know the awesome responsibility on the Home Office to get it right.

These are difficult areas, but let me try and make some concrete suggestions.

Border controls.

We have 7 different agencies manning our ports. 24 out of Britain’s 35 main ports do not have round the clock security.

So we do not know who is coming into our country. And because we have no embarkation controls, even when we do know who has come in, we have absolutely no idea whether they have left.

That is why the Government has no real idea how many illegal immigrants there are in the UK, nor even how many asylum seekers whose claims have been refused have left.

The case for a dedicated border Police force, 24-hour security at major ports and embarkation controls is now becoming unanswerable.

Deportation.

Under the European Convention on Human Rights, and in particular through important cases such as *Chahal*, it has become close to impossible to deport foreign nationals that may pose a threat to the UK.

Being able to balance the danger they may pose to the UK if they stay with the danger to them if they are returned to their country of origin, is no longer possible. That is wrong.

I have pursued this point in the Commons, on the select committee and in the press. Until very recently the Government's attitude has been complacent – refusing to recognise that the problem is compounded by the interpretation of the ECHR and the passage of the Government's own Human Rights Act.

If the Government succeeds in its attempts to achieve memorandums of understanding with countries to which these people would be returned, so much the better.

If not, we must will the means to the end that we desire and amend the Human Rights Act or, if necessary, leave – perhaps temporarily – the ECHR.

The Security services.

Are MI5 and MI6 equipped properly for this new terrorist era?

With a joint budget which is only one third of the DTI, there must be considerable doubts.

There are worrying indications that MI5, for example, did not have enough manpower to track one of the 7 July bombers, even though his name was clearly on the intelligence radar.

In America after 9/11 the White House established a Commission to look into the events of that tragic day. It asked tough questions and led to constructive reforms in intelligence and security.

Surely we can only benefit from a similar exercise here, which looks forward to the immense security challenges we face. It would have the ability to question what has been done, and what requires to be done, to deal with the Jihadist terrorist threat.

Use of legislation

We've seen a flurry of anti-terrorist legislation from the Government in recent years. And a positive whirlwind of proposals in recent weeks.

But before we agree to hastily-drafted new laws, we should ask searching questions about whether our existing laws are being applied properly.

In the case of Omar Bakri Mohammed the saga of: 'Can he be excluded, can't he be excluded?' was chaotic.

The European Think Tank with a Global Outlook

What we need from our Government is cool heads and clear thinking. Instead, we've seen hot-headed muddle. I agree with John Denham, Chairman of the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, that ministers need to get a grip.

No more announcements made one day only to be contradicted the next.

Proper follow-through and rigorous implementation of existing powers.

And nothing which undermines that which we are trying to defend: our shared values of freedom under the rule of law.

Everything we do should be consistent with upholding the rule of law.

As a start this means ensuring the consistent application of the law.

We must not shy away from upholding our shared values of freedom under the rule of law – whether that means plays in Birmingham or postal vote fraud in the East End of London.

ONE NATION

In asking searching questions we also have a shared responsibility to consider what needs to be done to bind the nation together and tackle the alienation which exists within the Muslim community.

Over the past few weeks, many people have spoken about the need for us to reassert a common sense of British identity. I agree.

But I don't want to engage today in some generalised debate about multiculturalism, what it means, and what we should do with it.

I want to focus on specifics: concrete steps we can take to strengthen the ties that bind us as a nation.

To make clear that it is allegiance to our shared British values, not ethnicity or faith, which should provide our shared national identity.

I think there are three priority areas where action is required.

Citizenship

The first is citizenship.

The citizenship ceremonies that the Government introduced last year quite rightly emphasise responsibilities as well as rights.

New citizens are required to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen.

They must pledge to respect our rights and freedoms, and to uphold our democratic values.

And from November this year, all new applicants will have to demonstrate knowledge of the English language and of life in the UK.

I warmly welcome these new requirements, but we need to go further.

We must never give citizenship to those who have, in their past behaviour, demonstrated a rejection of our values.

And if it's important for new citizens to speak English, and to understand our rights, freedoms and democratic values, surely it's equally important for existing citizens to do the same?

We should not allow respect for other cultures to undermine our shared national culture.

English is becoming the world's language of choice. Millions of people in India and Pakistan are eager to learn English. Yet in the UK in 2005 a significant number of our own citizens cannot speak it.

A Home Office study found that while 26 per cent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK are fluent in English, the equivalent figure for the US is 68 per cent.

We need to ask whether Government and other bodies, by allowing other languages to be used in official settings, can almost encourage the belief that learning English is not necessary.

Of course we must make Government services accessible – and that means helping people who have not yet learnt English. But we must always be clear that use of other languages is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

If you don't speak English, you can't participate fully in national life. Government needs to make this clear, and help create incentives for every citizen of this country to speak our national language.

Schools

The second area where government needs to act is in education.

Our experience at school helps shape our values and behaviour, and we have a responsibility to make sure that our education system instils the right values, and encourages the right behaviour.

It has been suggested that in order to halt the rise of separatism and to promote a greater sense of national cohesion, we should discourage the establishment of faith schools.

Some have gone as far as saying that faith schools should be banned. They point to the rigid secularism of the education system in France and recommend it as a model for this country.

But if we agree that freedom is one of our shared values, surely that includes the freedom for parents to educate their children in a context that fits their religious beliefs, if that's what they want for their children?

It would run counter to all that we stand for to ban faith schools, whether the faith in question is Islam, Christianity, Judaism or any other.

The correct policy response on faith schools is to heed the words of David Bell, the Chief Inspector of Schools, who expressed his concern over what is being taught in Muslim schools.

He's right, and the Government must take firm action now...

...to enforce the teaching of the national curriculum in faith schools...

...to insist that lessons are conducted in English...

...and to ensure that instruction is given in our shared values, and the heritage and institutions that underpin them.

This applies, of course, not just to faith schools but to all schools.

I've argued that government's number one priority in education should be to enforce greater academic rigour throughout the system.

This applies with equal force to the values that are taught in school. We need to be much more rigorous in ensuring that all children are taught to be proud of Britain, our history and our values.

This doesn't mean just cherry picking proud achievements – such as Britain's role in ending slavery – any more than it should mean glossing over shameful episodes. But you don't have to be Colonel Blimp to worry about political correctness in the teaching of history.

The report for the Government by Ted Cante following the disturbances in Burnley and other towns made this clear. As he put it: "A failure to have a shared history is to condemn some sections of our nation to be forever strangers in their own country."

In his book "Empire" Niall Ferguson quotes from a BBC education website explaining that "The British Empire came to greatness by killing lots of people ...

and stealing their countries... [it] fell to pieces because of various people like Mahatma Gandhi, heroic revolutionary protester, sensitive to the needs of his people.”

But it’s not just the formal curriculum that shapes children’s values at school. Schools provide opportunities for social mixing: the chance for children to make friends from different backgrounds.

But in some inner city schools today, opportunities for social mixing are limited or even absent.

Government can do something about this.

We can promote school exchanges that introduce children to other young people from different backgrounds - to make those personal, emotional connections that are at the heart of civilised relationships and a sense of community.

Many schools already run exchange programmes, although often the focus is international rather than within the UK. I’d like to see school exchanges within Britain as a standard part of the educational experience for every child.

Mosques

The third specific area where Government can act is in our policy towards mosques.

We can help Muslims fight the extremism in their midst, just as we helped the moderate majority take back control of trade unions in the eighties, by insisting on greater transparency and openness.

The problem is rarely hate-filled preaching inside mosques.

Some moderate imams, often from rural backgrounds, are unable to provide relevant and attractive Islamic leadership. This leads to a rejection of the mosque, and the exposure of young Muslims to dangerous teaching outside mosques - in front rooms, community centres, even gyms.

But the issue of leadership will not be dealt with by the simplistic step of banning the import of imams from overseas. Some of our most impressive imams were born overseas.

Our objective should be to ensure that all imams, wherever they're from, can speak English, and have the right training and understanding of modern British life.

For these reasons, I fully support the recommendation of Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui, Leader of the Muslim Parliament, for the establishment of a Mosques Commission, led by Muslims.

It should provide proper regulatory oversight of mosques, and ensure the involvement of young people in their management committees.

But strengthening the ties that bind us as a nation is not just about mosques and it's not just about Islam.

It's about our attitude to ethnic and religious diversity, and the impact of government policy on community cohesion.

School leaver programme

The most powerful way to bring people together is to do things together.

I am always struck when asking anyone of my father's generation who did national service by the fact that they tend to reply in a similar way.

It was something we all did together ... irrespective of who we were, where we lived, where we came from, or what god we worshipped.

Today, University is our closest equivalent, with each campus becoming a melting pot mixing together all the elements of our country.

But can that ever be enough?

Isn't there more we can do to enable young people to come together and give service to their country?

I am not suggesting a return to national service. And I have neither a blueprint in mind, nor a clear answer to my own question.

But look at the best examples of organisations that encourage community service, particularly amongst the young.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award and Prince's Trust schemes here and the Peace Corps in America. Voluntary Service Overseas.

What they do for young people and with young people is inspiring.

Why not challenge them and many other organisations – from the Armed Forces to Community Groups – to come up with ideas for a school leaver programme, lasting a few months.

Something that prepares teenagers for their responsibilities as adult citizens...

...that enables them to meet people from different backgrounds, and to learn about the realities of life in different communities...

...and which teaches them the lifelong lesson that we're all in this together...

...that we have duties to our fellow citizens...

...and that self-respect and self-esteem come from respecting others and putting their needs first.

I want us to debate what form this new national movement could take.

It should build on the work that has already been done by the Russell Commission, set up to create a new national framework for youth engagement and volunteering.

We should involve young people in the creation of this new national movement, to make sure that it's relevant and inspiring - not a dull, worthy obligation. We

should involve businesses, social action organisations, community leaders and faith groups.

But above all, we should view this new enterprise as something for every young person in our country. An essential part of growing up to be a British citizen, not just an add-on extra for a select few.

Conclusion

British society cannot be, as the Labour peer Bhiku Parekh once argued, a community of communities.

Our nation is not a blank sheet in which each goes his own way.

It is a shared home with values which make it tolerant and hospitable in the first place.

We need to build that home together.

We need to re-assert faith in our shared British values which help guarantee stability, tolerance and civility.

If we lack belief in ourselves, then we transmit a fatal lack of resolution to defend liberal values against those who would destroy them.

Sometimes liberalism can decay into relativism, and respect for others can become an unwillingness to proclaim confidence in what we know to be right.

W.B Yeats warned of the consequences when the best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity.

The best answer to the passionate intensity of those dedicated to destroying the liberal order is a passionate commitment to defend it.

That is a truly noble cause at a time of trial.