

Britain and Islamic Extremists

by Michael Curtis (September 2016)



The official attitude, political and legal, of Britain to Islamic terrorists, jihadists and their supporters has and continues to be ambivalent. It used to be indecisive: now it's not so sure. If not imitating the action of the tiger, British policy needs a stiffening of the sinews.

Events during the last month in Britain illustrate the uncertainty if not a double standard being invoked in decision-making. On one hand, Anjem Choudary, a terrorist linked to ISIS and to at least 15 terror plots, was on July 26, 2016 convicted in London and sentenced to prison. On August 9, 2016 a Muslim extremist named Tanveer Ahmed was sentenced to a 27 year prison term for the "barbaric, premeditated" murder in Glasgow of a fellow Muslim in an Islamic sectarian dispute. It was heartening news that the new prime minister Theresa May has spoken of a possible ban on extreme Islamic preachers in mosques and other places.

Yet, on the other hand and at the same time, the British Special Immigration Commission on April 18, 2016 took a surprisingly timorous position and allowed six Algerians, suspected of having ties to al-Qaeda, to remain in the UK because it felt they might be ill treated if deported to Algeria.

The benign attitude towards Islamic extremists has been repeated. On July 16, 2016 two Pakistanis clerics, Muhammed Naqib ur Rehman and Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman were allowed to enter Britain for a seven week preaching tour, "a Sacred Journey," at mosques in a number of cities. With what must be considered astonishing nerve, one of those cities is Maidenhead, the constituency of Prime Minister Theresa May herself.

The lack of judgment in admitting the two clerics to the country was compounded by the behavior of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. On July 18, 2016 he "welcomed" the two clerics to his official residence in Lambeth Palace in London. No one doubts the good will and intentions of the Archbishop, who until he was aged 60 thought he was the son of a whiskey salesman of Jewish origin, towards members of other religions. He has on June 10 hosted the Grand Imam of the Al Azhar Mosque in Egypt.

The Archbishop in a debate in the House of Lords in December 2015 showed political astuteness. He declared that ISIS would not be defeated by military action alone. Religious and political extremism needed to be confronted with a robust ideological response, and supporters of Islamic extremism had to be confronted. After the massacre in Nice on July 14, 2016 Archbishop Welby said, "Let us weep with them, let us stand with them."

Nevertheless, in his remarks, diplomatic but rather naïve, at meeting the two Islamic clerics he said the result of the meeting would be to strengthen interfaith relations and address the narrative of extremism and terrorism. It is unclear whether he actually accepted the message of the two clerics that they had come to spread a message of peace, love, and tolerance.

A spokesperson for the Archbishop said he had received a "first hand account of the situation in Pakistan." The details were not provided but one doubts that the Archbishop had been correctly informed of the affiliations of the two Rehman and their Pakistani activities. They had been affiliated with one of the rival Islamic sects, the Deobandi, a sect that is more supportive of suicide

bombings and violent jihad than the rival Barelvi sect. Nearly half of the mosques and the Islamic seminaries in the UK belong to the Deobandi movement.

The most compelling of the Rehman activities was their campaign in Pakistan in praise of Mumtaz Qadri whom they termed an Islamic holy warrior and martyr.

The issue is related to events on Pakistan in January 2016 when the "heroic martyr" Mumtaz Qadri was executed for the murder of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab province in Pakistan, a man who had disapproved of the strict blasphemy laws in his country, and disapproved of discrimination against religious minorities. Taseer had called for pardon for a Christian woman who was sentenced in 2010 to death for insulting the Prophet. According to strict Islamic law, Taseer was an apostate for opposing the laws. Qadri thought he had a religious duty to kill him and did. Taseer's 33 year old son Shahbaz, was kidnapped and held hostage for four years.

Archbishop Welby and those who admitted the two Rehman to the country might have been familiar with Qadri as a result of a recent court case. It concerned the murder in Glasgow of a shopkeeper named Asad Shah who was an open believer of the Ahmadi branch of Islam which holds that Muhammad was not the final Muslim Prophet. This offended a Sunni taxi driver named Tanveer Ahmed in Bradford, a town dominated by Muslims, who opposed Shah's religious views and travelled 200 miles to stab Shah to death.

On being sentenced on August 9, 2016, Ahmed proclaimed, "Praise for the Prophet Muhammad, there is only one Prophet." What is relevant to the case of the two Rehman is that Ahmed was a disciple of Qadri.

One interesting aspect of the Ahmed case is the seeming lack of clarity of British law. It was not completely clear whether his offence was held to have been aggravated by "religious prejudice." If so, Ahmed, already sentenced to 27 years, might have faced a longer term of imprisonment.

The present issue of the Rehman is a repetition of the blunder made more than twenty years ago, On August 6, 1993, the Pakistani cleric Masood Azhar, the founder and leader of Jaish-e Mohammad in the Pakistani part of Kashmir and one of the most wanted terrorists in the world, was admitted to Britain for a speaking and fund raising tour. He delivered his message of jihad in 40 British mosques in 1993.

According to him a substantial part of the Koran was devoted to killing for the sake of Allah. British security should have known Azhar was close to Osama bin Laden and had inspired a number of terrorist events. Among them were plots such as the 2005, 7/7 London bombings, the beheading of David Pearl, training camps facilities and logistical support to British Muslims to carry out attacks in Britain, and the attempt in 2006 to smuggle liquid bomb making substances on to planes.

The whole appeal of Azhar, who had been welcomed in Britain as a VIP guest, was based on the call for jihad and acceptance of a hard cord jihadist ideology.

Both past events and present concerns suggest that the Rehman, one of whom is officially, the Custodian of the Eidgah Shareef, a Sunni Sufi shrine in Rawalpindi that hosts religious gatherings, should never have been admitted into the UK, and should never have been made welcome by official dignitaries. Those two clerics are connected to those in Pakistan who preach murder and hate.

The UK government Home Secretary can ban people if their presence is not conducive to the public good. Until she became Prime Minister, Theresa May held that position. Her successor Amber Rudd should be equally concerned with the poisonous hate of Islamist extremists and do the right thing.

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