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*This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform you about CT issues that have been covered in the media and to help you to respond to any concerns generated as a result. It is not intended to provide detailed briefing about Government policies, and explaining these issues to the media is the role of relevant departmental press offices.*

### **Universities UK Report on Extremism**

This week there has been widespread interest in relation to the risk of extremism and radicalisation in UK universities; following a report published by Universities UK (UUK), the umbrella group for vice-chancellors which represents 133 universities. The report represents the first time that the sector themselves have undertaken an extensive piece of work on extremism, security and how to balance these challenges with their duties to promote freedom of speech. The media have previously been critical that UK universities are recruiting grounds for extremists and potential terrorists and that institutions are not doing enough to address this threat.

#### **What did the report say?**

UUK recommend that vice-chancellors reject demands to ban controversial speakers and “engage with, rather than proscribe” extreme political views on campus, suggesting that universities must not put students under surveillance or invade their privacy.

#### **Does the Government agree with the findings of the report?**

The Government is studying the report whilst it considers the challenge of what to do to address the risk of extremism and radicalisation in universities through the development of the revised *Prevent* strategy.

Lord Carlile, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, said that the report was “weak” and demonstrated a “total failure to deal with how to identify and handle individuals who might be suspected of radicalising or being radicalised” within a university. He also said that Universities need to do more: “In exercising their duty of care, academics in British universities need a much stronger knowledge of the traffic lights which might indicate that someone is being radicalised and is changing his or her behaviour in a particular way”.

#### **So, what is the Government doing to deal with extremism in universities?**

The Government is working closely with the further and higher education sectors, the NUS and other partners. This work will enable everyone to be clear about the risks extremism can pose and ensure that universities and colleges are more resilient to the risks and that students who may be vulnerable are identified and supported better.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills has commissioned a report from the Institute of Community Cohesion which will be published shortly. It will look at the challenges facing colleges and Universities and also at some of the good practice that is taking place already. It will also give recommendations to colleges and universities about how to deal with extremism.

### **The Prime Minister calls for political reform in the Middle East**

Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a speech on Britain’s relationship with the Middle East to the National Assembly in Kuwait on 22 February. The speech was delivered during a time of continued

speculation in the media as a result of the uprising in Libya and wider unrest across the region as a whole. This includes a specific focus on what it all means for Al Qa'ida (AQ) and extremist organisations in the region. AQ have also released statements to the media and in online forums in which they are trying to capitalise on this unrest.

## What did the Prime Minister say?

The Prime Minister's speech urged political and economic reform in the Middle East at this "precious moment of opportunity" for the region. The PM said that only freedom, justice and the rule of law will allow countries to meet the aspirations of their young populations who "yearn for something better".

The PM stressed the importance of advancing shared interests, including economic relations, through improved security and stability. To help achieve this aim, he called for an "urgent return to talks" on the Middle East peace process, an increase in security co-operation with the aim of tackling extremism and a process of "governments engaging in dialogue with their people" across the region.

He also talked about the partnership between the UK and Kuwait: "yes, ours is a partnership to deliver shared security interests not least as we confront the terrorist threat we face from extremists. But crucially, far from running counter to these vital interests of prosperity and security, I believe that political and economic reform in the Arab world is essential not just in advancing these vital shared interests but as a long-term guarantor of the stability needed for both our societies to flourish."

Please find a link to the speech [here](#)

## Are extremist and terrorist groups becoming emboldened by the unrest?

The PM said in an interview with Al Jazeera on Wednesday, when speaking about the unrest: "Of course, there are all sorts of dangers and risks: the risk of Islamic extremism taking hold, the risk of military regimes becoming entrenched. Yes, there are risks and there are clearly risks in Libya, but I think we should look optimistically at the opportunities of greater democracy, of greater freedom, of more open societies".

Some commentators have observed that a swift and successful transition to democracy could be the opposite of what AQ hope for - a harsh crackdown from the remaining regimes to fuel the group's narrative. Marina Ottaway's comments being one example: "There is something momentous unfolding in the region and AQ is not an actor in it. They feel left out. Even the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist organisations are calling for democracy. It's a problem for AQ that these protest movements are predominantly secular".

## Other News

*Please also see the following interesting news items from the past week, commenting more generally on the nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations, which you may want to circulate more widely:*

### Baroness Warsi visits Pakistan

The Associated Press of Pakistan has welcomed the visit of Baroness Warsi to the country earlier this week and reported President Zardari's comments that militancy and terrorism were the common enemy and that cooperation between the two countries must continue in order to fight the war on terrorism.

### UK's Muslim soldiers "fighting extremists not Muslims"

The BBC Asian Network has, this week asked: "with more than 600 Muslims in the British Armed Forces, do those that are deployed on the front line in Afghanistan have to reconcile their beliefs in order to fight hardline Islamic Taliban militants?" The network carried an interview with a Muslim soldier on the front line in Afghanistan who said: "If you narrow it down, we're not just fighting Muslims we're fighting extremists. Every culture, every faith... has an extremist background in it. That's something I personally feel should be eradicated, so this is why I'm here to fight this war".