Yusuf Desai: Response to Government Green Paper 4th June 2018.

My personal response to both Green Paper and to Muslim leadership's take on or their perceptions of what social cohesion initiative should look like is as follows:

There are real problems within the Muslim communities in the UK and elsewhere. There are voices of extremism at the very root of these communities and of course there are those that do denounce extremism and violence. The commonality in both these voices is that they do genuinely believe that they are duty bound to correct the "decadent" and permissive society of the West, more so in the UK where they are living. They strongly believe that it is their religious and moral obligation to perform this noble act (combating West's permissive society). This "mind-set" is entrenched in the monopoly of their imagined righteous belief system and more importantly belief in oft repeated glorified Islam that conquered the world. The mind-set remains convinced that it is their sacred obligation and duty to dominate ownership of righteousness over the British society's liberal/secular and democratic values.

Muslims by and large wherever they live find it very difficult to assume a minority status in a majority non-Islamic society. There is no concept of Muslims living as a minority in the UK even though knowing the Muslim population of the UK is less than 3% population of UK.

Muslims in UK are from diverse ethnic, cultural, language and sectarian backgrounds. The thinking described above is not confined to anyone specific group but is consistent and prevalent right across the Muslim communities wherever they live or whatever sect they follow.

Scholars and political/media analysts and social scientist have advocated that deprivation, social exclusion, discrimination, high rate of unemployment amongst Muslim youth, under achievers at schools are the main causes of radicalisation and extremism including lack of social integration and cohesion. That would be quite normal if society on the whole was observed through the same lens. I believe, for the very same scholars and social scientist once the Muslim mind-set is academically and politically analysed and understood then only will they be able to see beyond their academic identified causes and it may actually be a game changer for them to apply new phenomenon to address the issues not thought of or imagined before.

The general 'sense of alienation', or 'deprivation' or 'social inequality' that social scientists normally refer to, in reality for Muslim is compounded into one and only sense, their inability or due to circumstances not being able to establish "The Will of God", where they live which then leads to resorting to self-imposed isolation to preserve Muslim communities' "exclusionist identity". This then is followed by creation of parallel systems defined by its imagined belief system and faith. Establishment of such traditional power houses leads to demands for separation from main stream societies under the guise of faith schools, marriage institutes (Sharia Councils), separate judiciary for personal laws (inheritance and divorce), separate independent Islamic banking system (interest free loans and savings) and faith-based community structures which promote segregation of sexes and genders. I believe, Muslims do generally take advantage of our liberal attitudes in the UK,

knowing full well that under secular democratic governance their equality and citizenship rights would be upheld and protected.

Alas, the establishment and the policy makers have not shown any real seriousness to tackle these extremely serious Muslim community issues at its roots. Our liberal outlook and attitudes have lacked foresight in allowing such parallel systems to evolve and establish a foot hold and grow into phantoms which may be difficult to demolish, and that which has provided a legitimate cause "celebre" to Muslim community to live outside the law of the land and undermine the very real principles of freedom, equality and individual rights. A real tool of radicalising process giving preferences to live under the "Divine law" rather than man made laws.

Inquiries and its subsequent report findings all seem to end up with same old narrative about social exclusion and all its allied clichés and innuendos. Subsequent Green Paper/ White Paper or even policies developed from time to time remain focused on social causes and a need to calibrate existing social provision platforms and departments to become preferentially sensitive to demands of so called "marginalised communities" with emphasis on social cohesion and multicultural aspects of inclusive societies, as though somehow that would solve all social cohesion problem. This in fact has lead to muddled and confused mainstream British societies whose goodwill and liberal attitudes have been compromised and now normal British societies experience neglect, marginalisation and preferentially overlooked.

Higher education establishments have also lagged behind in a real academic response to the new phenomena experienced since arrival of Muslim communities in UK. Research think tanks could have been established to address the Muslim mind-set so that future Muslim generations could easily have become part of the mainstream society while maintaining their faith identity. This gap has forced the government to pass new legislations in order to contain the problems of extremists' violence and terror, but in no way addressed the root causes or provide a long-term solution for the wellbeing, safety and security of the British nation as a whole.

Some recommendations for way forward:
Let us be honest to ourselves and not fudge what the real issues are? Growing extremist and terrorist activity in the UK and Europe is only a mirror image of what is happening within the Muslim communities across the world. Power struggle in the Muslim communities is beginning to identify a common enemy that of democracy and secular world (The West in general). Analysts have identified a struggle from within the Muslim community, that of Old theological order (Non-violent) and the new concept of Jihad. This may be true but only superficially, because everyone is drinking from the same well. If the West or the UK establishments reads too much into such analysis then there is the likelihood of developing myopic understanding of the problem.

For the last two decades, having lived and experienced within these Muslim communities in the UK, I strongly recommend an academic establishment unit specifically to dissect, analyse and understand the Muslim mind-set. A need to inspect and enforce creation of modern Islamic literature to address the following key issues:

- Divine right of Muslims to establish Khilafat (Sharia law).

- Religious obligation to tackle liberal permissive society.

- Self-imposed alienation and segregation to maintain centuries old status quo.

- Ghettoized communities becoming breeding ground for radicalisation.

- Madrasah system established to clone future generation to remain 'exclusive" and eradicate any influence of secular system of education and values of majority mainstream society.

- New literature to educate the communities to understand that it is "Textual" obligation to be part of the mainstream society (Social cohesion).

- Years of Interfaith initiatives and dialogues have not penetrated core fibre of Muslim communities due to lack of real academic and scholarly input.

In conclusion, I would very strongly recommend review of current Green Paper plans and strategies to address social cohesion in order to combat UK and global radicalization issues and threats to state security. There is little precedent for the scale of action needed over the next decade. The dangers are clear and immediate to those who are involved in safeguarding life and limb and wellbeing of British society. The battle to protect the democratic systems and human rights lacks definition in the minds of many, which may explain the growing gap between what needs to be done to secure the future and what is being done.

Launching and carrying through the initiatives and policies needed to safeguard the British economy and British society will place extraordinary demands on political leadership and extremely high premiums on imaginative policy makers. The challenge now is for Educators, tabloid and communication media collectively to educate and emancipate the so called marginalized Muslim communities. Equally mainstream media to play a positive role by reporting and informing the public on the success of such initiatives that provide the necessary impetus and positive perceptions for all the communities to be participatory, sharing and caring for the wellbeing of all members of the society.

Britain can play a leading role by creating an environment of stability and progress through some hard and difficult choices so that by the end of next decade the dye will pretty well be cast. Communities of nations will have rallied, reversed and completely halted the threatening trends of religious and sectarian extremism, terrorism and mayhem. The ultimate rationale for such a massive social change will depend less on emotion and more on reason.

We Are NATO PROJECT   Background paper.

Why do Muslims in particular usually have a misconception of NATO?

Today, NATO's involvement in Muslim majority countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, is interpreted by the vast majority of Muslims as NATO's simply being hostile to Islam and Muslims per se. This is partly out of sheer ignorance, but it is compounded by how Muslim generally - and especially Muslim Youth in UK grassroots communities - feel about their role and place in mainstream society.

Muslim youth especially are not just *perceived* as "problematic" or, worse, as the 'enemy within', but are identified as such more often than others in our daily tabloid and digital media, not to mention in "institutional" conversations. No wonder they have a psychological complex. Living with a Muslim identity in the UK or anywhere else in Europe generally has become more challenging in recent times, both for the older generation of Muslims who have been here for decades but especially for Muslim youths born and bred in UK and Europe.

The UK establishment's integration and cohesion programmes, which were once addressed through programmes addressing all Black, Minority and Ethnic (BME) communities in common, are now perceived by the majority of Muslim communities as exclusively targeting them alone, and more specifically as targeting Muslim youths. The UK Police's "Stop and search" programme has been shown statistically to "favour" young Muslims with its attentions.

In such an environment of mistrust and a sense of dislocated belonging, it is mainstream British society, alas, which is the real loser, exposed as it is to constant media hype. This hype generates an environment of fear, leading to a further stigmatizing of Muslim communities and a fragmenting of society at large, reversing the earlier trend where the UK was slowly growing into an example of a vibrant multi-cultural society. For Muslims it used to be easy to live as a British Citizen, cooperating and respecting each others' cultural and religious values and willing to share and care in times of need. The pleasure of being able to vote with others in society and have a sense of belonging to a particular political persuasion or even to a chosen football fan club has almost disappeared under the spotlight of terrorism and extremism.

Alas, this drastic and relatively sudden change has resulted in a loss not just for one section of the community alone. It is an overall loss to the wellbeing of everyone in mainstream UK society. It impacts on the trust and faith people generally have in UK and European institutions. Victims of this loss of trust are the Army, the Police,

international institutions such as the UN, NATO and the International Court of Justice in The Hague. There is an urgent need to address the anxiety, resentment and suspicion now rapidly growing in mainstream British Society. Its resulting tensions are slowly but surely feeding the emergence of a political far right enjoying limited but significant electoral support.

Unfortunately, in the view of grassroots Muslim community leaderships, the UK's current PREVENT policy addressing counter-terrorism undermines old established concepts and policies that recognized the distinct identities of the different racial and cultural communities, and that respected and supported their diversity and their cultural organizations. This new policy framework is not perceived as simply addressing the radicalization of Muslim Youth in grassroots Muslim Communities. Rather the policy seems to have radicalized whole swathes of mainstream British Society into identifying Muslim Communities as the "alien other". Hence the rise of the Ultra Right within UK society. European Alt Right political movements have arisen for similar reasons, challenging long established political structures.

The Institute for Statecraft ongoing programme to facilitate a platform of dialogue to diffuse misconceptions, relieve tensions and promote societal integration.

The Institute for Statecraft has for some time been aware of young people's concerns and the generational gap in these grassroots communities. Being born into an ethnic parental cultural heritage but having to live life exposed on a daily basis - through schools, the education system and the digital media - to a radically different culture not only perpetuates both negative and positive stereotypes but further enhances the sense of not belonging properly to either culture. This leads to a lack of self-esteem, rebellious behaviour, and at the same time makes young people vulnerable to crime and gang culture, including radicalization.

For the last 12 years, The Institute for Statecraft has constantly explored ways to facilitate and promote better understanding between mainstream and ethnic communities. Recently, this has included education on NATO's role in the international arena and the Alliance's active participation in conflict zones. This has been done through inviting grassroots Muslim communities' leaderships, Muslim scholars, and Muslim youths (both male and female) to participate in open dialogue in a safe space, both at NATO HQ in Brussels and through several local UK based dialogue platforms.

This is an ongoing process which involves diverse Muslim communities, helping them to focus on, raise their awareness of, and at the same time address anxieties and doubts about, NATO's current role in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Syria. This has

enabled The Institute for Statecraft to plan an effective and varied approach to meet the different needs of each respective community. These are very diverse in their ethnicity and religious school of thought. South East Asian Muslims, Middle East Muslims, North African Muslim communities, Sub-Saharan/West African Muslim Communities, not to mention the increasing number of Afro Caribbean converts to Islam, all require a specially tailored approach.

The Institute for Statecraft, by using several different approaches, has successfully established itself at the heart of Muslim Communities in UK, where its representatives are well received as trusted and credible partners in an ongoing conversation. At the same time the Institute has been able to raise and debate the Muslim communities' own concerns and issues that drive fear and misunderstanding both across the communities and in society at large. For example, exploring multiple identities means that people generally do have similarities and differences. It also means that being consciously aware of differences diffuses tensions, fear, mistrust and hatred and, most significantly in the present context, dispels misunderstandings about the diverse role of NATO as an international intervention body that engages to prevent wars and conflicts and plays an important role in mediation and to bring lasting peace.

In one line of approach, The Institute for Statecraft has been hosting workshops for young people's own across different regions of the UK, under the guidance of both community leaders and trusted youth workers. These provide a safe space for young people to talk and discuss anything and everything, from their own personal life to issues and concerns they have with events in public life. The topics chosen by the young people themselves range from parental culture to the impact of Sharia rule on their lives, and other religious to socio economics issues. Popular themes are conforming to dress codes and behaviour, following vocations and professions in Music or dance classes or ballet classes or even art and culture. They often include what they think of NATO and their concern for NATO's current role in Muslim lands.

In another approach, The Institute continues to encourage external visits to NATO HQ, Defence Institutions such as RMA Sandhurst and other establishments and, jointly with British Army, runs a youth engagement programme - our "Shared Outcomes" Initiative. The Institute encourages communities to talk about perceived injustices, both local and international. Such interaction empowers grassroots Communities, through dialogue in their own localities, with local institutions and local authorities, to develop a sense of justice and injustice in terms of fair versus unfair, respectful versus disrespectful, equally applicable to all in society. This creates the realization that there is no real obstacle to civic participation and being part of the mainstream UK/European Society.

Two important concepts in The Institute's approach have been to look at the structures of Muslim communities in a more holistic way, maintaining the balance of effective communication and dialogue at all levels and age groups. Exploring the concerns and issues of young men and women whilst maintaining dialogue with Mosque Committees and Community leaderships of Elders and Religious Scholars and Imams, guarantees that no group is excluded and has an interest in derailing the dialogue.

The Institute has at the same been providing a road map for UK policy makers who perceive such communities as problematic and hard to reach. We create space for them to spend valuable time listening and learning to the young people, allowing for a free flow of conversation on both sides. The added value of such an initiative, in our experience, is far more effective as it tends to diffuse intra-communal tensions too, and allows Muslim Community leaderships to gain a better following in their communities, enabling them to initiate more positive, challenging programmes. We aim for a gradual increase in the honest exploration of real issues in place of headline-grabbing sensation. This should enable Muslim Communities to address their concerns and issues in way which both satisfies the vast majority of fair-minded people in the community and also benefits all in mainstream society.

"Why NATO Matters"

As an element in this process, it is now increasingly important that we extend our work to educate grassroots Muslim communities in UK to better understand the realities of international security, the nature of NATO, and those global conflicts where NATO is currently engaged, so that NATO is not perceived as simply a war machine. Global actions by NATO Allies are being misinterpreted within the communities, often driven by Daesh or Hizb ut Tahrir propaganda, and both diaspora communities and Muslim countries are being lost to the Western cause.

The "Why NATO Matters" programme will help reverse this undesirable trend, enabling the Institute **to** generate debate and discussions around NATO's actual role and educate key audiences in Muslim communities to understand how that is sanctioned through consensus. Tackling misconception and prejudices head on by creating a better understanding of how NATO works, NATO's activities and programmes should prove very effective.

As we develop these conversations under the We Are NATO banner, we will increase the awareness and understanding of the realities of defence/NATO and young people will be encouraged to talk to their friends and families about their

understanding of NATO's role in global conflicts, including humanitarian aid in natural disaster zones. It is our hope that our approach will encourage our participants to promote ideas and topics that reflect a truer image of NATO as an organization which stands for peace and harmony rather than one which drives wars and conflicts.

If our approach succeeds, community youth will come to have a new image of NATO and to genuinely support NATO and its programmes and activities, which we will harness through our new YATA Chapter. This will allow young participants to learn and understand the actual realities of global conflicts and why it is imperative for NATO to become an agent for conflict resolution and source of lasting peace. This platform of dialogue with Muslim Youth should empower them to think the unthinkable and at the same time be confident to ask questions relating to all perceived "No Go" areas of embedded prejudices and bias.

The long term sustainability and success of such dialogue programmes requires a well managed, well resourced programme in order to be effective, with an emphasis on mutual respect and a readiness to listen without pre condition. On this basis, supported by the We Are NATO project, we expect to be able to change perceptions both of NATO and of UK defence and the Armed Forces, and to inspire a long term appreciation of NATO, its mechanisms, programmes and intervention activities