

NEW ORDER SECURITY THINKING AND LEADERSHIP

As we grieve for the victims of recent terrorist attacks and mull deeply disturbing trends and outlook, we must shift to new orders of thinking and leadership. We are witnessing the most brutal terrorist violence in modern times and the variety and tempo is increasing rapidly.

We are in this together for the long haul so our new approach must be above party politics. If it is to succeed it requires the proper no-holds-barred long-term strategic thinking and leadership that many political and community leaders of all shades have dodged for years. Most difficult for many, this must include rigorous analysis and honesty about past mistakes including the occasional major failure of Whitehall groupthink.

For decades UK governments have been complicit in allowing the importation and incubation of neo-salafist ideology and now a generation later we are beginning to see what a huge mistake that this has been. We have compounded this by allowing significant numbers of our communities to plough their own furrow and, by failing to instil British values and norms, facilitate those who seek to do us harm.

We need to know the answers to many difficult questions concerning the present and future threat. This needs new order assessments of active and passive supporters of terrorism as well as those who might not support 21st century core British values and forward trends.

Most important of all, we must recognise that the traditional Whitehall security structure needs adjustment. For all the many successes and tactical professionalism we have seen, overall the system has demonstrated that it is not up to this job. It has ducked some unthinkable and difficult thinking to-date and failed to keep us safe from a monstrous home-grown enemy.

Power, responsibility, and accountability for security and community resilience and cohesion for each region must wrest in one person. They require Secretary of State level authority and control over all security and community related departments, officials, and elected mayors and police commissioners within their region. Each region will have different needs and dynamics and balances between between security and non-security resources. A centralised Whitehall one-size-fits-all approach with the PM overseeing the present departmental structure is long past its shelf life.

We are facing a very 21st century, complex, national emergency that has embedded itself over decades partly as a result of cynical neglect in Whitehall about the importance of faith and that for very many of our citizens - of all faiths - their faith is at the heart of their identity. Getting to grips with this 'challenge of our age' requires us to come together like never before, and involves nearly all sectors of our national life. The remarkably shallow election campaign focus on security reinforces the urgent need to depoliticise our collective response.

We must completely shift the focus of control and management to the local and regional levels. Whitehall must delegate and devolve control so that local and regional leaders who are the only ones who have access to all the necessary levers across their communities are in charge. Whitehall will be busy enough managing and controlling issues at the national and international level.

At present there is no one individual responsible or accountable across the board for security and community resilience and cohesion in, say, London, the Midlands, or the North West. Our divide and rule Whitehall-dominated present system with multiple layers and bodies and talking-shop committees must be replaced with one regional 'boss' in overall charge. Not only is this the pragmatic way ahead to manage an integrated security and community campaign of this scale, but it meets the mood of the nation which has clearly lost confidence in the established party political process with all jobs in the hands of the governing party.

It is time for new level honest and focused engagement with UK Muslims about the hatred, corruption of faith, and associated violence we are witnessing across the world within Islam. At the same time we must reassure the vast majority of UK Muslims who support our British values and norms that they are equally respected, valued, and welcome as any other citizen. This new engagement can only be done effectively at local and regional level and underneath the PM the regional boss is best placed to oversee this vital engagement.

The regional 'boss' requires Secretary of State equivalent authority and must report directly to the PM who is the one person responsible and accountable overall across the UK. The regional bosses must not only come from the party of government, and they must be exceptional 'team builders' and listeners and overseers of multiple local and regional forums.

What is at stake is too serious to leave to one Home Secretary and a confused and multiple layers and committees structure. By devolving control of this campaign to regional level we will soon establish who and what works best, and we will then be able to reinforce success and learn from successes and failures. The 'Whitehall knows best' and one-size-fits-all model which got us into this mess is bust and must change.

With Brexit and a long-term national emergency staring us in the face we have no option other than to be bold and courageous. It is time to rediscover our mojo and be truly innovative and entrepreneurial. We have often been our best and inspiration to others when history calls - as we ponder voting, we should ask ourselves if history is calling.

The big question is will our next government do better than those who allowed this situation to develop? Will it have the courage to do the necessary uncomfortable thinking and give us the combined security and community structure fit for purpose in tackling this enormous challenge?

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