



# Proposal for Changes to Counter Terrorism Terminology

## Introduction

For many Muslims the use of current Counter Terrorism terminology, “Islamist/Islamism” and “Jihadist/Jihadism” (for the purposes of this document they will be referred to as CTT) is extremely problematic. A survey conducted by the National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP) found that most Muslims within the police service and Muslims surveyed in the community believe these terms should be changed. The majority of people who expressed an opinion also stated that they feel vulnerable when these terms are used and believe that the use of such terms contributes to the increasing levels of Islamophobia experienced by Muslims in the community and the workplace. Therefore, NAMP have identified this issue as a priority and we believe that a change in CTT would be a key component in building trust and confidence in the community, decreasing radicalisation, and reducing Islamophobia.

## Understanding the issues with CTT

Current CTT utilises Arabic words (Islam and Jihad), that feature heavily in the Islamic faith and which are routinely used by both Arabic speakers and members of the Islamic faith. In Arabic “Islam” is the name of the religion that Muslims follow and derives from the root word “Salema” meaning “Peace”. The Arabic word “Jihad” means “Struggle” and derives from the root word “Juhud” meaning “Hard Work”. Both words have legitimate meanings within a religious context.

To understand the issues relating to CTT, there needs to be a comparison with the names of other religions. There also needs to be an understanding of how suffixes are used when it comes to religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Judaism. The suffix “ism” is used to describe the religious ideology of the root word, i.e. Buddhism is practiced by people who follow Buddha. With the same word, when the suffix “ist” is applied, the word becomes “Buddhist”, which describes a person that adheres to the religion based on the teachings of Buddha. If the same methodology was applied to “Islam”, the word “Islamism” would describe a way of life rooted in Islam and “Islamist” would describe someone who practices and follows Islam. This would be different to a “Muslim” who purely holds the belief yet may not practice. This however is not how these terms are used. Islam is the only religion where “ist” and “ism” are used to create words with negative connotations. This is usually seen with words where the root word has a negative meaning i.e. Nazi and Nazism. For many practicing Muslims this is seen as a demonisation of the religion of Islam.

Many Muslims will also see disparities when compared to cases relating to the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism (ERWT). For example, Anders Breivik, who was responsible for the Norwegian massacre of 77 people in 2011, identified as a Christian, utilised Christian symbology and referred to the Knights Templar and Crusades in his manifesto. The same connections with Christianity have appeared in

several other ERWT cases, yet the terminology never reflects their faith, despite it being one of the key motivating factors from their perspective.

Terrorism in Northern Ireland is another example of where there has been a disconnection between faith and terrorism. There are no connections drawn between Dissident Republicans and Catholics or Loyalists and Protestants despite them being reflective of those communities and having those clear divides.

The decision not to use any Christian labels when it comes to terrorism is understandable and fully supported. However, many Muslims recognise these inequalities, and many unfortunately perceive it as intentional. This inevitably creates a significant barrier between the police service and the Muslim community.

## **Why the need for change?**

The reasons why CTT needs to change can be summarised under three areas, which relate to increased Islamophobia, greater risk of radicalisation and low trust and confidence.

### **Increase in Islamophobia**

In 2017, the month following the Manchester Arena attack saw a 500% increase in Islamophobic hate crime compared to the previous year. This is a common trend which follows any so called “Islamist or Jihadist” attack. A study conducted by the University of Birmingham found that Muslims are the second “least liked” group within the UK. The recommendations from this survey concluded that: *“Government and other public figures should publicly acknowledge and address the lack of public criticism that Islamophobic discourses and practices trigger, and how Islamophobia stands out compared with other forms of racism and prejudice.”*

The 2020 NAMP survey showed that 85% of NAMP members believe that the use of current CTT influences Islamophobia within the police service and 92% of Muslim community respondents believe that the use of this CTT influences Islamophobia within the wider community.

It is firmly believed that the use of current CTT stigmatises Islam and appears to increase hatred towards Muslims. To properly address the issue of Islamophobia, the root cause needs to be addressed. Over the past 20 years Islam has become synonymous with terrorism. Until these links are broken, there will always be negative biases against Muslims and Islamophobia will continue to grow.

### **Greater risks of radicalisation**

The word “Jihad” has often been misunderstood and mistranslated to mean “holy war”. This is incorrect and is used by terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh to try and legitimise their cause. Daesh use “Islamic State” in their title to also try and establish a connection with Islam. This is an attempt to appeal to those who are vulnerable or less educated and to gain support to drive forward their own political agenda.

The same can be found in other proscribed groups such as National Action (NA). The word “National” is used to appeal to patriots, yet most would argue that NA do not represent British national values. Likewise, the way in which Islam and Jihad are used by terrorist groups does not represent the views of the wider Muslim population.

The use of current CTT inadvertently “validates” the connection between Islam and terrorism. It reinforces the position of terrorist groups and helps provide them with a platform. This in turn increases the risks of radicalisation.

### **Low trust and confidence**

The increase of Islamophobia and the low levels of cultural competence within the police service significantly affects trust and confidence, especially within the Muslim community. The relationship with Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP), particularly Prevent, often dictates the relationship with the wider police service. Unfortunately, the use of CTT creates many barriers for Muslims both internally and externally.

Muslim officers and staff are often affected by biases or discrimination due to the negative associations made between Islam and terrorism. This results in low Muslim representation, particularly in senior roles and frequently leads to many officers and staff leaving the police service.

Muslim communities feel alienated and increasingly vulnerable due to the stigmas associated with CTT. This frustrates efforts to foster improved community engagement and ironically makes it increasingly difficult for Prevent to build bridges within the community. The perception within the Muslim community that Prevent places a disproportionate focus on Muslims is connected to the negative connotations triggered by the CTT used. This in turn leaves many Muslims feeling disheartened and reluctant to engage due to their voices not being heard, which coupled with a sense of being “othered” by current CTT, leads to a general feeling of disenfranchisement amongst Muslims.

### **Proposed changes**

Two terms (including derivatives) have been identified by NAMP as potential replacements for current CTT, these include “Irhabi/Irhabism/Irhabist” and “Anti-Western Terrorism”. Below is a description of each of these terms and an explanation of the root word “Irhab”.

#### **Irhab**

“Irhab” is an Arabic term meaning “terror”. This word and its derivatives are frequently used in the Middle East to describe the actions of groups such as Al-Qaeda or Daesh. It is therefore apt to use this term as a replacement for the current terrorist related terms deriving from the words “Islam” and “Jihad”.

#### **Irhabi**

“Irhabi” is an Arabic term meaning “terrorist”. It can be used to describe a person who has carried out an act of terrorism, with an ideology rooted in “Irhabism”.

#### **Irhabism**

“Irhabism” is a term that describes an extremist ideology rooted in Anti-Western sentiment and with a belief and / or political motivation akin to groups such as Al-Qaeda or Daesh.

## **Irhabist**

“Irhabist” is a term that describes an individual that sympathises and / or supports “Irhabism” ideology. This may be vocally, through writing or actions such as fund raising or promoting “Irhabism” propaganda or terrorism related material.

## **Anti-Western Terrorism**

Anti-Western Terrorism is an overarching term that relates to any forms of terrorism motivated by Anti-Western sentiment. An example of this is “Irhabism” ideology.

## **Community Impact Assessment**

### **Benefits**

This change in terminology is expected to increase the Muslim community’s trust and confidence in the police service. This may also help reduce Islamophobia and biases against Muslims.

These changes will show that the police service care about the tackling issues connected to Islamophobia and that they support the needs of the Muslim community. This in turn will help promote positivity amongst ethnic minority communities and will potentially attract more minority applicants to the police service.

This will also provide a platform for Prevent to build better relationships with the Muslim community to tackle issues of radicalisation. The disassociation with Islam will also “delegitimise” the cause of “Irhabist” groups, making vulnerable Muslims less likely to be influenced and radicalised by extremists.

### **Potential Issues - The Muslim Community**

The use of the term “Irhab” and its derivatives may raise questions as to why an Arab word is being used. There may be concerns of Anti-Arab hate crime that need to be managed. This risk however has been considered. Both Islam and Jihad are Arabic words that have already been used in CTT. After the Manchester Arena attack Islamophobic hate crime rose by 500%, which was more of a significant increase than that seen under Race hate. The aforementioned study from the University of Birmingham also shows that Islamophobia stands out as potentially more of a pernicious issue than racism at this moment in time.

The proposed use of the term “Anti-Western” may also result in objections due to assumptions being made that any Eastern values or opposing views are automatically deemed as terrorism. There needs to be clarification around free speech, where the limits lie and when opposing views cross over into inciting hatred, radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism.

There may also be questions as to why we do not use “Anti-Eastern Terrorism” to describe ERWT. There may need to be considerations around sub-categories as to what drives the ERWT ideology, e.g. Anti-Eastern, Anti-Islam, Neo-Nazism etc.

Some Muslims may also feel that the change in terminology will draw unwanted attention from those supporting right wing ideologies, with a fear of an increase in Islamophobic hate crime. Therefore, safeguarding measures will need to be put in place and reassurance given to the Muslim community.

## **Potential Issues – Right Wing**

Those with right wing views may feel that the new terms are not accurate descriptions due to the lack of a direct connection to Islam. This may result in conspiracy theories, negative publicity of the police service and rise in Islamophobia in the short term.

There is a pervasive myth circulating amongst right wing commentators that Islam itself is adversative to the West, and that its root ideology is in and of itself extreme. This is a myth that has unfortunately been perpetuated by CTT, which as previously mentioned directly connects Islam the faith, with the abhorrent actions of extremists. This myth is easily dismissed by simple logic: Islam is the religion of approximately 2 billion people worldwide. If violent extremism was a core theme of its ideology, then surely violent extremism would be significantly more commonplace. To tackle this issue, there needs to be a programme of education to explain why the new terms are being used and why they are more suitable. Also, a phased approach should be taken to the adoption of any new terminology.

## **Proposed introduction of new terms**

NAMP are recommending the police service and CTP to adopt these new terms in place of current CTT. Consultations with local Muslim police associations and Muslim communities will help gauge the wider Muslim response to these terms should they become more widely adopted. Coordination with local authorities could also be considered as many councils have already recognised the issues relating to current CTT and refrain from using such terminology due to the negative impact on communities. There should also be a consistent approach for all communications, explaining why, how, and when these terms will be used. NAMP would like to see this inform and influence change within the CONTEST Strategy 2022.