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Summary:

Islamist theology From an examination of the ideas promoted by those speakers, a broadly common message can be identified. It should be noted that not all institutions hosted the same speakers, and not all speakers promoted precisely the same message. Neither is it claimed that these speakers necessarily advocated the full range of the problematic ideas set out below, or expressed these views in every recorded speech. The opinions expressed by each speaker are set out below. The Sunni Islamist reading of Islam rests on the pillars of (i) ummah, (ii) khilafah, (iii) shari'ah, (iv) jihad, and (v) al-wala' wal-bara'. These five elements are more or less agreed upon independently

by several experts, most of whom are ex-islamist leaders. For the purposes of this paper, (v) is subsumed under (i), to which it is strongly related. It is our contention that the preachers discussed in this paper can be properly characterised as Islamist based on the facts surrounding them and the statements made by them in this paper. The logic of Sunni islamism proceeds as follows: 1 (i) Ummah: this is understood as “the Muslim nation” worldwide. 2 (ii) Once this binary worldview, of Muslims and non-Muslims, is adopted, it effectively defines all Muslims worldwide as a separate nation. Hence, the idea of khilafah or caliphate, a separate Islamic nation-state for all the Muslims of the world, follows immediately. 3 (iii) Upon achieving such a caliphate, it must be governed by a state law. Islamists naturally apply their understanding of shari’ah as state law, to be enforced on its subjects. 4 (iv) Jihad has been applied by islamists by focussing on its physical or military aspects, and often ignoring the wider inner and social aspects of jihad. Where focussing on physical or military jihad, some islamists will ignore the substantial Islamic tradition of ethics in warfare. In this manner, the concept of jihad may be deployed to justify resistance, insurgency, revolution, terrorism and to wage war relentlessly for the defence and expansion of an idealised “Islamic state.” Those who promote such an ideology sincerely believe it to be “normative Islam”. It follows therefore that a challenge to such a perspective is regarded as an attack on the fundamental requirements of Islam. The presentation of preachers who shared such an islamist reading of Islam as authoritative guides assisted in the normalisation and propagation of their politics. Many of these preachers spoke at university student Islamic Societies. There are many factors which contribute to an individual’s radicalisation, and it is not proper to draw a direct link between the appearance of a preacher who promoted the ideal of a Caliphate at a particular institution, and a particular student’s decision to engage in terrorism. However, it is notable that a number of graduates of British universities have been convicted of terrorist offences or travelled to Syria to join terrorist group

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