

Islamist Organizations in the United Kingdom: From the Rushdie Affair to Present Day



By Charlotte Littlewood

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Cover Image Credit: “Salman Rushdie and ‘The Satanic Verses’,” *CNN*, 14 February 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/02/14/living/gallery/salman-rushdie/index.html>

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Executive Summary

Islamism in the United Kingdom (UK) manifests itself via many different organizations but mainly stems from two key influences: Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) from South Asia and the Arab Muslim Brotherhood (MB). This report intends to give an overview of Islamism's roots, its manifestation in the UK and the difficulties it creates for our Muslim communities and the wider population. It takes the Rushdie Affair as a starting point owing to the galvanising effect it had on Muslim communities in the UK and the awakening it provided for Islamist organizations.

The report chooses a number of organizations to discuss in greater detail as a means of giving an overview of the Islamist or Islamist-influenced organizations in the UK, documenting which of the two broad categories—relatively more influenced by the MB or more JI-influenced—they fit into.

The report identifies a number of themes that the organizations and individuals related to them focus on in their messaging, namely state-institutionalised Islamophobia, conflicts that are perceived as being a part of a Western “war on Islam”, and Islamic education.

The report finds a number of problems that Islamism creates in the UK, including creating for Muslims a sense of being under threat in the UK—particularly from the state—and a sense that the Western world is against Islam globally. This sows division and leads individuals to be less integrated, less trusting of non-Muslims and the government, and more vulnerable to radicalization. The academic theory underpinning this will be unpacked.

Also included in this report but not necessarily clearly falling within the remit of an Islamist organization is Khatme Nubuwwat (KN). KN is a sectarian South Asian movement that is heavily influenced by Islamist organizations such as JI. It has had a devastating impact on a specific community in the UK: Ahmadiyya Muslims. Since KN does not easily fall into the category of Islamist, and does not have the East versus West focus that is so concerning amongst other organizations in the UK, it gets readily overlooked in discussions of extremism. However, KN's influence and that of others that share in its outlook led to the sectarian murder of Assad Shah, an Ahmadi shopkeeper in Scotland, in 2016. The impact of KN and those that share in prioritising anti-Ahmadiyya rhetoric need to be discussed; they are the canary in the coalmine of extremism in the UK.

The main purpose of this report is to provide the reader with a greater sense of Islamism's roots and its manifestations in the UK. The report is predominantly a literature review of works on Islamism in the UK, brought together with a focus on how the organizations and individuals relate, the impact they are having, and, where relevant, how they spread their messages online and elsewhere.

The report will also briefly discuss the UK state's evolving approach to tackling Islamism and the merit in working towards a more integrated, cohesive UK.

Introduction

Muslims in the UK comprise a population of nearly three million people, about seventy percent of them from South Asian backgrounds.¹ The history of Islamism in the UK is reflective of Islamist movements abroad that directly impact on the UK Muslim communities. The influx of Muslim migrants from the Subcontinent throughout the 1960s enabled organizations that were closely aligned to South Asian Islamist organization Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) to be established in Britain. Later, immigration of Arab Muslims led to the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) on the establishment of further Islamist organizations in the UK. Members of the Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian, Libyan, Tunisian, Palestinian, and, to a lesser degree, other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood have settled predominantly in London. By the late 1990s, the general secretaries of the Syrian, Iraqi, and Tunisian branches of the Brotherhood were all living in London.² Beyond JI and MB, the Khatme Nubuwwat movement and more radical movements such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, as well as the Iranian Khomeinist movement, have had an impact.

According to Professor Peter Mandaville,³ Islamism refers to “forms of political theory and practice that have as their goal the establishment of an Islamic political order in the sense of a state whose governmental principles, institutions, and legal system derive directly from the sharia”.⁴ Therefore, a number of Islamic ideologies can be Islamist if they see a political change towards governing by *sharia* (Islamic law) as an aim. This means it is not restricted to Sunni or Shia, with Islamist ideologues influencing members of both sects and the branches within. In their majority, Islamists do not pose a violent threat to UK society and Islamists often take a public stance against violence, however there are a small section of radical Islamists who overtly seek to attain Islamic governance by way of violence. The primary issues with Islamism in the UK pertain to sowing division in society, fomenting intolerance, and rendering individuals more vulnerable to radicalization. Whether this is intentional or not varies.

Islamists believe that Muslims should consider themselves, first and foremost, to be members of a de-territorialised, decontextualised, deculturated, and globalised *Ummah* (Islamic Nation).⁵ Islamists insist that there is a “right” way to understand religion and loyalty to this ideology must be the overriding source of an individual’s identity. Typically, under this impulse, “Islamists seek to speak for, and be accepted as the authoritative representatives of, Muslim communities; in their rendering, a diverse mosaic of cultures, creeds, and practices should be treated as a monolithic faith bloc to which they alone provide access”.⁶ Where this proves problematic is where Muslims do not want to be represented by Islamists and where some Islamist groups declare these dissenters to be non-Muslims, a process known as *takfir* (excommunication), and try and force others to see them this way.

¹ Sadek Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, I.B.Tauris. 2020, p. 5

² James Brandon and Raffaello Pantucci, ‘UK Islamists and the Arab Uprisings’, *Hudson Institute*, 22 June 2012.

³ Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, Routledge. 2014.

⁴ Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, p. 74.

⁵ Oliver Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, London: Columbia University Press, 2006.

⁶ *Understanding Islam: A Policy Exchange Report*. Accessed 08/01/2022

Current Theory Underpinning the Problematic Nature of the ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’ Islamist Narrative

This report will elaborate on the above issues where they are exemplified within the organizations discussed. But first, a brief outline of the theory underpinning the risk associated with the “us” versus “them” narrative is necessary here, so as to understand the academic debate pertaining to whether it can be considered a radicalising factor and therefore a societal problem. It is important to note that Islamist ideologies are not always the cause of violent action, nor do Islamists inevitably take a violent path, but these ideologies do foster an atmosphere and direction that can lead to violent action.

In his study of literature from Right-wing Christian Identity movements, Professor Jonah Berger argues that “extremists tie an out group to a crisis or crises, and connect the in group to solutions”.⁷ What we will see in the following examples is a demonization of the out group (the non-Muslim West) and the crisis of perceived “institutionalised Islamophobia” and “global war on Islam”, where campaigning, fundraising, and community education are seen as the means to tackle these crises. This may not be problematic in and of itself, but worldviews that create an enemy and perceive their group as limited in means to overcome this enemy may lend themselves to violent action more easily than others.⁸ Berger also observes that escalating extremism can be seen when real, present-day grievances are expanded to fit into a larger historical or cosmic context.⁹ This could be, for example, experiencing a very real and discriminatory Islamophobic attack on a bus and the frustrating potential lack of any kind of prosecution, then taking that real experience and attaching to it the larger narrative wherein all non-Muslims are against Islam and a part of a state-orchestrated effort to discriminate against Muslims.

Professor Fathali Moghaddam’s staircase to terrorism¹⁰ visualizes the process as having a number of floors leading from radicalization to violent extremism, with grievances and in-group/out-group behaviour on the first floor and the extremist milieu on the second floor. It is in this extremist milieu where the out group becomes a threat and the grievances are given a grander historic or even cosmic significance; it is where we see most of the Islamist organizations discussed in this report sitting. Floor three is where support for terrorism begins. Moghaddam argues that the completion of the central processes on each step leads to the next step, however the evidentiary basis for this is contested.¹¹ What is clear is that Islamist terrorist organizations and non-violent UK Islamist extremist organizations share some core narratives. Some non-violent UK Islamist organizations share the narrative that there is a global “us” versus “them” conflict, and a Western “war on Islam”, rather than a number of different conflicts taking place in different countries in the Middle East for a number of different reasons. All non-violent UK Islamist organizations share the narrative of “us” versus “them” when it comes to the UK state, believing the UK government has institutionalised Islamophobia, rather than there being instances of Islamophobia in the society that have no official support, and the laws preventing state discrimination against Muslims are ignored. If understood, as Berger does, that “terrorism is a tactic,

⁷ J. M. Berger, ‘Extremist Construction of Identity: How Escalating Demands for Legitimacy Shape and Define In-Group and Out-Group Dynamics’, p. 8, [ICCT research paper](#), April 2017.

⁸ Anders Strindberg, ‘Social Identity Theory and the Study of Terrorism and Violent Extremism,’ December 2020, p. 29.

⁹ Berger, ‘Extremist Construction of Identity’, p. 8.

¹⁰ Fathali M. Moghaddam, ‘The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration’, in Bruce Bongar, Lisa M. Brown, Larry E. Beutler, James N. Breckenbridge, and Phillip Zimbardo, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), p. 70.

¹¹ Ragnhild B. Lygre et al, ‘Terrorism as a Process: A Critical Review of Moghaddam’s “Staircase to Terrorism”,’ p. 613, [Scandinavian Journal of Psychology](#), 2011.

whereas extremism is a belief system”,¹² then it is logical to assume a greater risk of people moving from floor two to floor three if they share in the same belief system as the violent extremists; in that frame of mind, it is easier to become convinced that non-violent tactics for furthering the cause are ineffective.

This report will give background on the way these Islamist ideologies map onto the UK and give a history of a number of UK Islamist organizations that adhere to these ideologies. It will conclude with a look at key themes the various Islamist organizations converge on and look at the UK approach to tackling Islamist extremism.



¹² J.M. Berger, *Extremism*, p. 30, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018.

Origins of Islamism in the UK: Ideologues and Their Organizations

Islamism in the UK has two main pan-Islamist influences, one of which has come from the Middle East (the Muslim Brotherhood or MB) and the other from South Asia (Jamaat-i-Islami or JI); together these strands form what is often referred to as the 'Islamic Movement'.

The MB and JI descend from a shared ideological tradition that really took form after the Ottoman caliphate was abolished in 1924, and the predominant inspirations are: Abu Ala al-Mawdudi, Hasan al-Banna, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and Syed Qutb. Both have in common an opposition to British colonialism and Western cultural influences in the Muslim world, and a belief in the need for an Islamic religious revival to displace state nationalism, which was, at the time these thinkers were writing, very powerful among intellectual and political elites in the Arab world and the Subcontinent.

As one of the Islamic Movement's early young activists, Ziauddin Sardar recalls that among Muslims in the UK in this period: "Two of the most influential organizations of the global Islamic movements vied with each other to capture our souls: the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan."¹³

Abu Ala al-Mawdudi

Mawdudi, considered one of the ablest theoreticians of the Islamic state in the Muslim world,¹⁴ argues for converting the state into a theological one. He claimed that "the sharia had to be fully restored, and all laws from other sources repealed; that secularist officials be replaced; and all media and education be utilized towards improving Islamic consciousness."¹⁵

In British India, in 1941, Mawdudi founded the Jamaat-i-Islami, an Islamist organization that opposed British Colonial rule and the partition of the Raj into Pakistan and India. The organization later split, with separate branches forming in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India (known as Jamaat-i-Islami Hind).

In Pakistan, JI's aim was to Islamize the nascent state. JI aimed to give an organized form to Mawdudi's idea that Muslims needed an Islamic state in order to carry out the requirements of their religion fully.¹⁶

Mawdudi also focused heavily on apostasy. He condemned groups such as the Ahmadiyya to death, most infamously leading the Lahore "riots" in 1953, a pogrom against Ahmadis.

¹³ Sardar Ziauddin, *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys Of A Sceptical Muslim*, Granta Books, 2012.

¹⁴ Ahmed Ishtiaq, *The Concept of an Islamic State: An Analysis of the Ideological Controversy in Pakistan*, London: Frances Pinter, 1987

¹⁵ Abu Ala al-Mawdudi, *The Islamic Way of Life*, (Ed. K. Ahmad), p. 14, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1986a.

¹⁶ R. A. Greaves, 'The Reproduction of Jamaat-i-Islami in Britain', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 1995.

Jamaat-i-Islami

JI functions as a political movement in Pakistan, predominantly involved in lobbying for further Islamization of the state and the exclusion of “heretics”. On 5 March 1953, Mawdudi published *Qadiani Masalah* (The Qadiani Issue)—“Qadiani” being a pejorative term used for Ahmadis—which is considered to be the most systematic denunciation of the Ahmadiyya as a group beyond the pale of Islam theologically. This is based on the fact Ahmadis regard their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), as a Prophet, and orthodox Islam declares Muhammad to be the last of them—*Khatam al-Nabiyeen* (the Seal of the Prophets).¹⁷

Mawdudi called for: “The expulsion in a constitutional manner of the Qadianis from the Muslim Community, for they are like a cancer eating up and gradually consuming the vitals of Muslims society.”¹⁸

In January 1953, Mawdudi and his followers demanded that the Pakistani Prime Minister remove all Ahmadis from government positions, specifically Muhammad Zafarullah Khan as Foreign Minister. The refusal of the Pakistani government to purge itself of Ahmadis, and to officially declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, was what Mawdudi used to instigate the Lahore riots weeks later.¹⁹ The riots killed a minimum of 200 Ahmadis and resulted in martial law for seventy days.²⁰

Jamaat-i-Islami in the United Kingdom

The UK Muslim community is largely of South Asian descent, thus JI influence has arguably been greater upon it than MB influence.

JI in the UK differs in strategy to that of JI in Pakistan as it is working among a Muslim minority; there is, therefore, little focus on bringing about an Islamic state. However, its emphasis on dictating the “true” understanding of Islam and opposing what it considers to be deviant understandings has transferred to the UK. Through JI-related organizations and the reception of hate preachers in the UK, JI has contributed to a virulent hatred among some British Muslims of so-called blasphemers, inspiring the fatal stabbing of Glaswegian shopkeeper Assad Shah, an Ahmadi, in 2016.²¹ The man who killed him, Tanveer Ahmed, had links to the Khatme Nubuwwat (KN) movement and KN social media celebrated Shah’s death.²² Ahmed had regular telephone calls with JI members in Pakistan, demonstrating the close links JI maintains between its branches, and to this day receives fan mail in prison from those who see him as a hero for killing an Ahmadi.²³

¹⁷ Baixas Lionel, Maudoodi (1903-1979), Maulana Abul Ala, 24 June 2008, *SciencesPo*. Accessed 08/01/2022

¹⁸ Abul Ala Mawdudi, *The Qadiani Problem*, 1953.

¹⁹ ‘History of Jamaat-i-Islami and its Leadership’, *The News* (Pakistan), 2019. Accessed 16/11/21

²⁰ ‘Sectarianism, Extremism and Hate Crime: The Impacts on the Ahmadiyya Community’, *Faith Matters*, 2016. Accessed 16/11/21

²¹ ‘Khatm-e-Nabuwwat and Dawat-e-Islami linked to the murder of Ahmadiyya Muslim Asad Shah’, *Rabwah Times*, 6 April 2016.

²² Ibid.

²³ Chris Campbell, ‘Sick “fans” laud British extremist who murdered Glasgow shopkeeper for “blasphemy”’, *Express*, 1 March 2017; ‘Police probe internet messages from religious killer Tanveer Ahmed’, *BBC*, 22 September 2016.

Birmingham University theology professor Jorgen Nielsen identifies four organizations that he claims to have been developed by JI in the UK: (1) The UK Islamic Mission (UKIM); (2) Young Muslims UK; (3) the Islamic Foundation; and (4) the Muslim Educational Trust.²⁴ There are no “formal”—that is, overt—JI organizations in the UK, but instead organizations that operate with close informal links to JI. Two other organizations that should be seen as part of this milieu, largely sharing the JI outlook and converging with the JI front groups over anti-Ahmadi rhetoric, are KN and Dawaat-e-Islami.

Majlis Tahaffuz-i-Khatam-i-Nubuwwat (MTKN)

Although the sectarian movement MTKN and its related KN organizations are heavily Islamist-influenced and have been linked to sectarian violence and a sectarian murder in the UK, KN does not fit neatly into a category and therefore regularly gets missed out in discussions about extremism in the UK. However, KN’s impact is too great to continue to be excluded.

MTKN originates as a splinter from the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam, usually known as Ahrar. The Ahrar emerged from the tumult of the early 1920s in British India, after the Amritsar disaster in 1919 and the collapse of the Khilafat movement, which wanted to pressure the British into leaving the caliphate in place after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. With the triumph of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his secular republic in post-war Turkey, the Khilafat movement was overtaken by events and disintegrated.²⁵ It was from the more radical remnants of the Khilafat movement that Ahrar was created, holding to a program of anti-imperialism and Indian nationalism that called for the departure of the British, though their anti-feudalism meant they were dissatisfied with the way the British actually did leave. Ahrar believed partition was a ruse to distract the poor from the real issues of social and economic injustice.²⁶ The Ahrar would later find official favour in the Pakistani state and continues to this day to be one of the main instigators of sectarian and Islamist rhetoric, in particular against the Ahmadiyya.

KN, a movement that it is important to note is not exactly Islamist but rather Islamist-influenced, has been active in the UK since 1985, when its first meeting was held at the Wembley Conference Centre. The meeting had a strong anti-Ahmadi focus. According to a London *Times* report on the event, the then-Pakistani President, General Muhammad Zia al-Haq, sent a message promising to “persevere in our effort to ensure that this cancer is exterminated”.²⁷ The Islamization of Pakistan is often blamed on Zia and there is no doubt he furthered this trend,²⁸ but, as has been laid out in this report, he was building on a process that began much earlier, with Mawdudi in the 1950s, intensified under military

²⁴ Sadek Hamid, ‘*A Mapping of Islamist Trends in the UK*’, September 2020.

²⁵ Raj Kumar Trivedi, ‘Mustafa Kemal and the Indian Khilafat Movement (to 1924),’ *Indian History Congress*, 1981.

²⁶ Afsar Ali, ‘Partition of India and Patriotism of Indian Muslims’, *The Milli Gazette*, 17 July 2017.

²⁷ ‘Meet the Spiritual Leader of 10 Million Whose Life Could Be At Risk’, *The Times* of London, 1985, [available here](#). Accessed 12/11/21

²⁸ Among other things, Zia formalized the conversion of Pakistan’s legal code to the sharia. In 1979, Zia introduced the *Hudud* ordinances, that is the fixed punishments prescribed in the Qur’an for certain offences, notably drinking alcohol, theft, *zina* (unlawful sexual activity), and apostasy. The *zina* ordinance can be [read here](#).

rule into the 1960s, and—as is often forgotten—continued and expanded under the civilian government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in the 1970s.²⁹

Since then, KN has firmly established itself in the UK and regularly hosts conferences of this kind. KN's various offshoots operate in a number of locations across the UK, including having two bases in London, one at the Stockwell Green Mosque and the other at the Khatme Nubuwwat Academy in Forest Gate.

“Khatme Nubuwwat” translates as something like “Finality of Prophethood,” i.e. recognizing Muhammad as “the Seal of the Prophets”. KN prioritises educating people about the importance of the doctrine that Muhammad was the final Prophet and raising awareness of those who (in their opinion) transgress this belief. Unsurprisingly, this means that a large proportion of KN literature and activities are directed against Ahmadis, specifically to popularizing the view that Ahmadis are not Muslims and are at best *kufir* (infidels) and often Ahmadis are called *murtadeen* (apostates from Islam), for whom the traditional penalty is death.

The severity of the penalty for apostasy is because apostasy has in traditional Islamic jurisprudence the same connotations as treason has in the West, only the treason is to God and His community, rather than a nation-state. This is the doctrine operating in the background when the Khatme Nubuwwat Academy in London openly displays a message on their website's home page that says: “Ahmadis are traitors both to Islam and to India”.³⁰

MTKN and KN are not always explicit that apostates should be killed, but in some cases they are. As just one example, MTKN Pakistan explains that anyone who denies Muhammad is “the Seal of the Prophets” is “an infidel, traitor, and biggest liar [*sic*]. His punishment is the same as that Musaylama Kazzab”.³¹ Musaylama proclaimed himself a Prophet and rebelled against the first caliph, Abu Bakr, before being killed at the Battle of Yamama in 632. “Kazzab” is an appellation added to his name in Muslim historiography and literally means “the liar”.

Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood was established in Egypt in 1928. The founder and first Supreme Guide, Hassan al-Banna, called for the religious reformation of individual Muslims, the progressive moral purification of Muslim societies, and their eventual political unification in a caliphate under sharia.³² Al-Banna argued that secularization and Westernization were at the root of all contemporary problems of Arab and Muslim societies, and that pan-Islamism rather than nationalism was the answer.

²⁹ Oved Lobel, ‘The Graveyard of Empires: The Causes and Consequences of American Withdrawal from Afghanistan’, *European Eye on Radicalization Report*, 4 August 2021.

³⁰ *Khatme Nubuwwat Academy*, London. Accessed 11/11/21

³¹ *Faith of Khatm-e-Nubuwwat*. Accessed 11/11/21

³² Sir John Jenkins et al., ‘Muslim Brotherhood Review’, *British House of Commons*, 17 December 2015. Accessed 12/11/21

Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, Director for the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University, defines the Muslim Brotherhood as “the oldest and arguably the most influential contemporary Islamist movement”.³³

The UK government commissioned a report into the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in 2014,³⁴ and found the MB to have routinely:

- Defended Hamas—the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, the governing party in Gaza and designated terrorist organization—and its attacks against Israel, including the use of suicide bombers and the killing of civilians.
- Facilitated funding for Hamas.
- Used virulent, antisemitic language and have justified attacks against coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. This came from senior MB members, as well as the rank-and-file.
- Claimed that the attacks on 9/11 were fabricated by the US as a pretext for the “War on Terror”, which is really an attack on Muslims. This rhetoric from the MB coexists with some of its members (mainly in non-Muslim-majority countries) having strongly criticized Al-Qaeda.

The MB has a presence in some ninety countries worldwide and in each country the movement has taken different forms, adapting to the local political conditions. Brotherhood-linked entities work according to a common vision, but often with complete operational independence.³⁵

This means the MB around the globe prioritises differently from country to country. The MB labels the West “*Dar al-Dawa*” (land of preaching). The MB priority in the West is, as the group’s spiritual leader Yusuf al-Qaradawi puts it, to spread their interpretation of Islam and to resist being “swept by the whirlpool of the materialistic trend that prevails in the West”.³⁶ The spreading of (the MB version of) the faith comes with the parallel aim of being understood as the representatives of Islam in their host countries in the West. On this point, Al-Qaradawi declares that “it is necessary for Islam in this age to have a presence in such societies that affect world politics” and that the presence of a strong and organized Islamist movement in the West is “required for defending the causes of the Muslim Nation and the Muslim Land against the antagonism and misinformation of anti-Islamic forces and trends”.³⁷

While the MB’s intention to install Islamic rule in Western countries is often muted and their time-horizons for such an outcome rather vague, there is an inherent belief that by leading Muslim communities in the West to live Islamically, according to MB lights, Islamization of the state will occur naturally.

³³ Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, ‘The Muslim Brotherhood in the United Kingdom’, *Program on Extremism*, December 2015.

³⁴ *Muslim Brotherhood Review*, Main Findings.

³⁵ Vidino, ‘The Muslim Brotherhood in the United Kingdom’. Accessed 7/12/21

³⁶ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, ‘*Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*’, Swansea, UK: Awakening Publications, 2000.

³⁷ Al-Qaradawi, ‘*Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase*’.

Muslim Brotherhood in the United Kingdom

The Muslim Brotherhood Review by the UK government was carried out by Sir John Jenkins, formerly HM Ambassador to Riyadh, and Charles Farr, at the time the Director General of the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism in the Home Office. They found, in the UK, as for other non-Muslim countries, the public narrative of the Muslim Brotherhood focused more on the task of Islamizing the individual and community, rather than establishing an Islamic state.³⁸

The MB in the UK closely follows the objectives Al-Qaradawi has set out for groups in Western states:

1. Raising the awareness of Muslims about their religion;
2. Creating alarm among Muslims about the perils surrounding their religion and identity under the guise of carefully tailored terms like “globalization” and “modernity”;
3. Creating a generation equipped with unshakable belief to carry the Islamic torch;
4. Being a guiding light for all Muslims and finding optimal solutions to their problems;
5. Unifying the ranks of Muslim scholars when dealing with the Ummah’s major issues; and
6. Acting in unison in the face of the Ummah’s enemies by concentrating on any available common ground and resolving differences.³⁹

In 2015, the UK government published the main findings from the Muslim Brotherhood report by Jenkins et al., and one scholar who reviewed it pointed to the Brotherhood using “entryist” tactics to influence host societies, creating front groups—notably the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)—that all shared the following aims:

- Spreading their religious and political views to British Muslim communities;
- Becoming the official or de facto representatives of British Muslim communities in the eyes of the government and the media; and
- Supporting domestic and international Islamist causes, mobilizing local Muslim communities to pressure the public and policymakers.⁴⁰

The UK government’s MB report concluded: “Aspects of Muslim Brotherhood ideology and tactics, in this country and overseas, are contrary to our values and have been contrary to our national interests and our national security”.⁴¹ A case in point is Al-Qaradawi himself, a senior Brotherhood member who is considered by many analysts to be “the most influential living Islamic scholar”, perhaps even more so among Muslim minorities in the West than in the Middle East.⁴²

Al-Qaradawi preaches a need to protect Muslims living in the West from losing their religion, whilst also seeing Muslims living there as an opportunity to prevent the running of the West being left “to the

³⁸ ‘Muslim Brotherhood Review’, Main Findings.

³⁹ Ali al-Halawani and Hany Mohammad, ‘Scholars Launch pan-Muslim Body in London’, *Islam Online*, 12 July 2004, [available here](#).

⁴⁰ Lorenzo, ‘The Muslim Brotherhood in the United Kingdom’.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Samuel Helfont, ‘Islam and Islamism Today: The Case of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi’, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 8 January 2010.

influence of the Jews alone”.⁴³ Al-Qaradawi also sees Muslims in the West providing an opportunity to attract new converts, believing that the whole of Europe will eventually convert to Islam.⁴⁴ Al-Qaradawi has predicted, “Islam will return to Europe as a conqueror and victor after being expelled from it twice”, referring to the Reconquista and the eventual reversal of the Ottoman conquests in eastern Europe. “The conquest this time will not be by the sword, but by preaching and ideology,” says Al-Qaradawi.⁴⁵

In addition to promoting antisemitism and supremacism, Al-Qaradawi, who has been praised by numerous members of the Islamic Movement in Britain, supported jihad against Western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his views on gender and homosexuality are in conflict with the British values of individual liberty and equality.⁴⁶

Like Al-Qaradawi,⁴⁷ MB-related organizations and individuals in the UK have openly supported the activities of Hamas.⁴⁸ People associated with the Brotherhood in the UK have applauded suicide bombing by Hamas, in some cases against civilians. Hamas’ terrorist activities have not been publicly disowned or condemned. MB organizations and affiliates in the UK have neither openly nor consistently refuted the literature of Brotherhood ideologue Syed Qutb.⁴⁹

Syed Qutb

Influenced by his personal experiences in 1940s Egypt, in the US in the same time period, and in prison under Egypt’s president Gamal Abdel Nasser (r. 1952-1970), Syed Qutb became the key Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, drawing on the thought of Mawdudi, to promote the doctrine of *takfirism*.⁵⁰ This has consistently been understood as a doctrine permitting the branding of other Muslims as infidels or apostates, viewing the existing states in Muslim-majority countries as un-Islamic, and the use of extreme violence in the pursuit of the perfect Islamic society.

Qutb argued that most Muslims had fallen into *jahiliyya* (a state of ignorance of Islam) and a vanguard of true believers was essential to recreate an authentically Islamic community and state. Qutb’s thinking provided key parts of the ideological scaffolding for the emergence of a takfiri trend within Islamism and has inspired many terrorist organizations.

Qutb, like the other Islamist ideologues, was pushing for a shift in identity, away from culture and state, towards an ideological definition that supersedes borders and unites Muslims in a way of thinking that is not only anti-colonial—rejecting Western military-political domination of Muslim-majority states—but is supremacist, rejecting ideas imported from the West like democracy and liberalism, and inciting against those Muslims who advocate for them.

⁴³ Barry Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, p. 29, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

⁴⁴ ‘Sheik Yousuf Al-Qaradawi: Islam’s “Conquest of Rome” Will Save Europe from Its Subjugation to Materialism and Promiscuity’, [MEMRI](#), 28 July 2007.

⁴⁵ ‘The Heralds of the Victory of Islam’, [Islam Online](#) [Arabic]. Accessed 12/11/21

⁴⁶ Rich, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, p. 131.

⁴⁷ Anthony Barnett, ‘Suicide bombs are a duty, says Islamic scholar’, [The Guardian](#), 28 August 2005.

⁴⁸ “Hamas” is an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islami*, “the Islamic Resistance Movement”.

⁴⁹ ‘Muslim Brotherhood Review’, Main Findings.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Qutb was executed in Egypt in 1966 and many of his followers driven out of Egypt, taking refuge in the West. It was in this period, the 1960s and 1970s, that the first mainstream Islamist organizations were established in the UK by MB- and JI-related groups. Among this first wave of groups, according to Dr. Damon Perry of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), were: “The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS); the UK Islamic Mission (UKIM); the Muslim Educational Trust (MET); Muslim Welfare House; and the Islamic Foundation.”⁵¹

In the 1980s and 1990s, a raft more such organizations were established: the Islamic Sharia Council; the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE) and its youth wing, the Young Muslim Organisation (YMO); the Association of Muslim Schools UK (AMS-UK); the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB); the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB); the Palestinian Relief and Development Fund (Interpal); the Palestine Return Centre and Muslim Aid; and UKIM established Young Muslims UK (YM).⁵²

A key focus of these groups was educating the second generation of Muslims who had been born in the UK, ensuring their religious teaching and values were passed on, whilst also propagating the perspectives of JI and MB. A catalyst was needed to take this activism from the relatively private sphere to the public; something that would instil a common sense of outrage and inspire united action. The Rushdie Affair provided such a catalyst.



⁵¹ Damon Perry, ‘Mainstream Islamism in Britain: Educating for the “Islamic Revival”’, September 2019. [Available here](#). Accessed 22/11/21

⁵² Perry, ‘Mainstream Islamism in Britain: Educating for the “Islamic Revival”.’ Accessed 22/11/21

The Rushdie Affair

Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, published in September 1988, was declared blasphemous on a number of grounds, including mockery of the Prophet Muhammad's wives, suggesting verses of the Qur'an originated from Satan, and using a pejorative term to refer to Prophet Muhammad.

On 14 February 1989, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a *fatwa* against Rushdie:

"I would like to inform all the intrepid Muslims in the world ... that the author of the book titled *The Satanic Verses*, which has been compiled, printed, and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an, as well as those publishers who were aware of its contents, have been declared *madhur el-dam* ['those whose blood must be shed']. I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they find them, so that no one will dare to insult Islam again."

In addition to the *fatwa*, Iran also offered a bounty of six million dollars for the assassination of Rushdie.

In 1991, the Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed to death. Shortly afterward, the Italian translator was also stabbed, but survived. In the summer of 1993, an Islamist mob killed forty people in an arson attack against the Turkish translator of the book and a few months later the Norwegian publisher was injured in a gun attack.

Governments in forty-five Islamic countries banned the book.⁵³ Twenty Muslim organizations convened to form the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs (UKACIA) to handle the "crisis". The Rushdie Affair was a pivotal moment in British-Muslim history that marked an awakening and politicization of Muslim youth in particular.

As one Islamist journalist put:

"It was the Rushdie controversy that forced us into the open. An invisible community then—if such a word could be used for a group as diverse as we were, divided by language, national origins, race, and class—we were attacked by the racist scorpions then set loose, stinging us all without distinction."⁵⁴

Ed Hussain, author of *The Islamist* and co-founder of the counter-extremism think tank Quilliam⁵⁵ saw the Rushdie affair as pivotal to his own radicalization. Hussain observed:

⁵³ Malgorzata Czader, *The Rushdie Affair: Politics, Culture, and Ethnicity in Hanif Kureishi's The Black Album*, pp. 11-26, 2015.

⁵⁴ 'The Rushdie Affair: 1988 – 1991', *Salaam*. Accessed 22/11/21

⁵⁵ Now dissolved.

“The parks in which we’d protested against Salman Rushdie were now being used to protest against UK foreign policy. We’d gone from opposing an author to opposing the British government. We’d been completely politicized.”⁵⁶

In response to the incident, the Muslim Parliament (1992-1998) was inaugurated as a means to bring Muslim communities together politically. Their early manifesto (1990) stated:⁵⁷

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE LIFE OF THE MUSLIM INDIVIDUAL IN BRITAIN

1. Every Muslim, man or woman, must practice Islam in all its dimensions in order to achieve the greatest possible degree of taqwa in his/her private, personal, family, social and professional life...
2. Every Muslim must pursue excellence in all departments of life, especially in the acquisition of all-round knowledge...
3. Every Muslim must ensure that his/her and his/her family’s private and public life be committed to the pursuit of Allah’s good pleasure alone...
4. Every Muslim must ensure that his/her lifestyle does not absorb the moral laxity prevalent in the secular culture of modern Britain today...
5. Every Muslim must live within the Statute Laws of the United Kingdom...
6. Every Muslim should seek to develop an identity in terms of the goals of Islam and participate in the struggle of the global Islamic movement toward these goals...
7. Jihad is a basic requirement of Islam and living in Britain or having British nationality by birth or naturalisation does not absolve the Muslim from his or her duty to participate in jihad: this participation can be active service in armed struggle abroad and/or the provision of material and moral support to those engaged in such struggle anywhere in the world...¹
8. Every Muslim must contribute a regular proportion of his or her income to the Islamic movement instead of the habit of giving small or insignificant amounts only when faced with a “collection box”...²
9. Every Muslim must pursue his or her personal goals within the framework of the Muslim community in Britain, of the Ummah, and of the global Islamic movement...

Maxim: Islam is our guide in all situations.

⁵⁶ Mobeen Azhar, “Salman Rushdie radicalised my generation”, *BBC*, 14 February 2019. Accessed 22/11/21

⁵⁷ The Muslim Manifesto: A Strategy for Survival’, kalimsiddiqui.com, January 2016. Accessed 03/12/21

The Islamist-friendly *Salaam* portal summarised the repercussions of the Rushdie affair as thus:

“The most positive outcome of the Rushdie Affair was that it permitted some level of coordination and networking among Muslim community bodies and activists, leading to the formation of UKACIA, which in turn was a precursor of a more ambitious initiative to unite British Muslims—the Muslim Council of Britain inaugurated in Brent Town Hall in November 1997. The activists involved in UKACIA, notably Abdul Wahid Hamid, Iqbal Sacranie, Sher Azam, Khurshid Drabu—to name a few—were also to be key in laying down the MCB’s foundations.”⁵⁸

It later came to light that Kalim Siddiqui (1931-1996), former director of the now-dissolved Muslim Institute and who founded the also-dissolved Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, travelled to Iran and asked the Ayatollah to issue the fatwa. Journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a secular Muslim, who interviewed those concerned later, said that “the fatwa would not have been issued had the Britons not made that trip. The origins of the fatwa were here”.⁵⁹

The response to the Rushdie Affair was an expression of what French scholar Olivier Roy called a globalised, “de-territorialized” Islamic identity,⁶⁰ an identity that transcends borders and ethnic roots to provide a shared ideology.

Professor of Islamic Studies Marcia Hermansen explains:

“An ideological premise of internationalist identity in Islam is that this ‘true’ Islam is apparently floating above everything cultural. It is pristine and unassailable, politically it had established a utopian state where everyone was happy and honest, and that this state should be re-imposed in humanity today and it will make a better world. Internationalist Muslim revivalist movements such as Jamaat-i-Islami and Muslim Brotherhood ... have encouraged this concept of a ‘cultureless’ Islam around the world. These revivalists have been able to dominate Muslim organizations and mosques because of their commitment, pre-existing networks, external material support, and defined ideological agenda.”⁶¹

Inspired in this new vein and in response to the Rushdie Affair, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), both of them affiliated with the MB, were founded, as was the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), which follows the ideology of the Iranian theocracy.

In the 2000s, additional groups were established, reflecting a further diversification of Islamist interests, including CAGE, the Islam Channel, the Cordoba Foundation, Muslim Engagement and Development or MEND (initially called iEngage), and the Middle East Monitor (MEMO).

⁵⁸ ‘The Rushdie Affair: 1988 – 1991’, *Salaam*. Accessed 21/11/21

⁵⁹ Dominic Kennedy, ‘British activist was behind Iran’s fatwa on Salman Rushdie’, *London Times*, 25 February 2019. Accessed 7/12/21

⁶⁰ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

⁶¹ Marcia Hermansen, cited in Omad Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Gender Justice and Pluralism*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), p. 309.

Case Studies: Islamist Organizations in the UK

Having given a broad synopsis of the roots and history of Islamism in the UK, this report will now outline a number of case studies of active, non-proscribed, Islamist organizations in the UK, giving a look at their history, their aims, and some of their activities and impact.

These case studies act to provide an overview of how Islamism manifests itself in the UK. Given the complexity and breadth of the Islamic Movement in the UK, this does not aim to provide a fully comprehensive study. The organizations outlined have been chosen for the particular manifestation of Islamism that they illuminate.

UKIM and KN are examples of JI-inspired organizations; MAB shows an MB-related organization, as does the MCB; the IHRC is Khomeinist; MEND gives an insight into civil society groups; and Islam 21C, which is arguably more toward the Salafist end of the Islamist spectrum, shows how some of these groups come together and the public narratives they share. Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) gives insight into a more radical Islamist organization.

There are a number of organizations discussed in passing within the case studies, such as the Islamic Society of Britain, the Cordoba Foundation, and the Muslim Research and Development Foundation.

A few, however, are left out altogether:

- CAGE: the format of this group is covered in the section on MEND, with which CAGE has shared senior officials. CAGE acts similarly to MEND as a registered charity and nominal civil society organization, which campaigns on various issues and does “community work”. Unlike MEND, CAGE’s focus is more on defending Muslims charged with offences related to terrorism.
- Jamiat Ihyaa Minhaaj al-Sunnah (JIMAS): despite originally being a controversial Salafi-Islamist organization, it has since changed its aims completely and no longer relates to its original purpose. Instead, the Muslim Research and Development Fund (MRDF) is now considered to be the leading Salafist organization in the UK and will be discussed in the section on Sheikh Haitham al-Haddad.
- Al-Muhajiroun: the group is touched upon in the section on HT, but, as a proscribed organization in the UK, it falls outside the remit of this report.
- iERA is a Salafi-Islamist *da’wa* (proselytising organization), set up by converts, one of whom is a former member of HT, which will be discussed in detail.

This is not an exhaustive list: there will be Islamist organizations active in the UK unremarked upon entirely in this report. The report aims to give enough of insight so as to be able to see the Islamist picture in the UK, how organizations relate, and what their shared aims are.

Jamaat-i-Islami-Related Organizations

United Kingdom Islamic Mission (UKIM)

UKIM was one of the first manifestations of the Islamic Movement in the UK. Founded in 1962, UKIM still exists today and has inspired the creation of and is linked with other key Islamist organizations in the UK. Being foundational and influential, it provides insight into the influences and aims of such organizations.

UKIM was formed to “cater for the needs of a new growing Muslim community” in the UK.⁶² Most of its members were also members of JI or people sympathetic to the ideas of Mawdudi.

One key supporter, Khurram Murad, set out that the Islamic Movement in the UK’s aim should be:

“An organised struggle to change the existing society into an Islamic Society based upon the Qur’an and the Sunnah and make Islam, which is a code for entire life, supreme and dominant, especially in the socio-political spheres ... [T]he movement in the West should reaffirm and re-emphasize the concept of total change and supremacy of Islam in the Western society as its ultimate objective and allocate to it the highest priority ... [I]t shall not be realised unless the struggle is made by the locals. For it is only they who have the power to change the society into an Islamic society.”⁶³

After receiving training from Murad, UKIM launched the Young Muslims UK.⁶⁴ YM was fiercely successful, within a few years, having a presence in every major town and city with a significant Muslim population.⁶⁵

YM was found to have a chat room that was used by extremists to promote jihadist messages and a web page with literature aimed at children that called on them to “boycott those who openly wage war against Allah”. The same article went on:

“Jihad is a powerful invigorating yearning for Islam’s might and glory ... which makes you cry when looking at the weakness of Muslims today and the humiliating tragedies crushing him to death everywhere ... Jihad is to be a soldier for Allah. When the bugle calls ... you should be the first to answer the call to join the ranks for jihad.”⁶⁶

In the 1990s, UKIM began to strengthen its connections with leading international Islamist organizations through visits hosted by members of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1993, members went to Sudan as guests of Muslim Brotherhood ideologue and de facto co-ruler Hassan al-Turabi, to Turkey to meet the Refah (Welfare) Party of Necmettin Erbakan, to Pakistan to meet with Jamaat-i-Islami, and to

⁶² UK Islamic Mission. Accessed 20/10/21

⁶³ Cited in Larry Poston’s *Islamic Dawah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion in Islam*, p. 16, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

⁶⁴ Hamid, *Sufis Salafists and Islamists, the contested ground of British Islamic Activism*, Chapter One.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Shiv Malik, ‘Youth wing of UK Muslim group calls for jihad’, *The Independent*, 31 July 2005. Accessed 11/11/21

Malaysia to meet the Malay Islamic Party (PAS).⁶⁷ The point of this journey was to reinforce the global connections of the Islamic Movement in the UK, raising its profile and reach so it could have a greater impact on Muslim communities domestically.

YM merged with Islamic Society of Britain (ISB). Since 2001 the Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) has distanced itself from the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslim Brotherhood ideology.⁶⁸ After the 7/7 attacks in London in 2005, neither YM nor ISB share online Islamist ideological messages. All references to Islamist ideologues and discussions of jihad, as set out above, have been removed, too.

Eventually, infighting led to a split. After unsuccessful reconciliation efforts by senior figures in JI and MB, YM splintered into a UKIM youth wing and some went to join the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB).

Muslim Brotherhood-Related Organizations

Muslim Association of Britain (MAB)

The MAB website describes the group rather blandly as a British (Sunni) Muslim organization founded in 1997 that aims to encourage Muslim participation in politics and the wider society. The MAB's main activities appear to be centred around protesting war and campaigning for Muslim affairs in the UK and overseas. Where UKIM's ties were predominantly with JI, the MAB is considered to be closely aligned with the MB.

Kemal Helbawy joined the MB at the age of twelve. He was a part of the MB wave that came to the West fleeing the crackdowns in Egypt to Saudi Arabia. He was later responsible for MB activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan, before moving to the UK and with others founded the MAB, as well as the Muslim Welfare House and helped set up the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).⁶⁹ Helbawy later left the MB after disagreeing with them on a number of matters following the Arab Spring in 2010-11. However, he continues to support Al-Banna's vision and the MB ideology.⁷⁰

Anas al-Tikriti, founder of the Cordoba Foundation and former Vice President and Patron of the Stop the War "Coalition"—a front for the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP)—is also a former Chairman of the MAB.

⁶⁷ Hamid, *Sufis Salafists and Islamists, the contested ground of British Islamic Activism*, p. 26.

⁶⁸ 'Muslim Brotherhood Report', Key Findings.

⁶⁹ Kemal al-Helbawy profile, [SOAS](#). Accessed 13/12/2021

⁷⁰ Lorenzo Vidino, 'Kamal Helbawy: Pioneer of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West', *Program on Extremism*, January 2020.

Al-Tikriti has described the MAB as:

“The closest there is to the Muslim Brotherhood [in the UK], and which espouses the basic tenets of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology ... which I am a member of, I am a founding member of, and I was a president of, and now I’m the chairman of.”⁷¹

MAB has visible links to the Cordoba Foundation through Al-Tikriti, and in 2007 Al-Tikriti went on to found the British Muslim Initiative, again described as an affiliate of the MB.⁷² While it can be tempting to think of this kind of factionalism as “atomization within the ranks [it] is instead more reminiscent of cell replication”, as one scholar of Islamism has pointed out in another context.⁷³

The UK government report on the MB concluded:

“For some years the Muslim Brotherhood ... dominated the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) ... MAB became politically active, notably in connection with Palestine and Iraq, and promoted candidates in national and local elections”.⁷⁴

The report acknowledges that MAB has publicly distanced itself from the MB, but notes that privately the group seems to remain sympathetic to the MB.⁷⁵

MAB appears to be much less active at the present time: it claimed to have just 600 members in 2014, though, since it is able to maintain eight welfare houses and associated mosques and nine UK branches,⁷⁶ this could be an underestimate. Regardless, MAB has had a profound effect in reshaping the nature of Islamist activity in the UK.

David Rich, the Head of Policy at the Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Jewish hate in the UK, has described the MAB as having revolutionized political Islam’s role in the UK by “shifting it to a more anti-Western, anti-Israel, and antisemitic outlook”.⁷⁷ This can be seen with Helbawy, who has repeatedly echoed the views of Al-Qaradawi and the late Shaykh Ahmed Yasin of Hamas, saying that Israeli civilians are different from the civilians of other countries because all Israelis are past, current, or future soldiers and therefore suicide bombings against Israelis should not be seen as terrorism.⁷⁸

In late 2002 and 2003, the MAB organised a speaking tour in the UK for Anwar al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki was involved with the network that carried out the 9/11 attack⁷⁹ and was thereafter a key English-language propagandist-recruiter for Al-Qaeda, whose works have inspired many terrorist attacks even after he was killed in a 2011 US drone strike in Yemen. Al-Awlaki’s tour of the UK saw him lecture to

⁷¹ ‘Oral Evidence: Political Islam’, *House of Commons*, 7 June 2016. Accessed 10/11/21

⁷² Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood*.

⁷³ Phillip Smyth, ‘The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects’, *The Washington Institute*, 2 February 2015.

⁷⁴ ‘Muslim Brotherhood Report’, Key Findings.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Richard Phillips, ‘Standing Together: The Muslim Association of Britain and the Anti-War Movement’, *Race & Class*, October 2008; Michael Whine, ‘The Advance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK,’ *Hudson Institute*, p. 35, 2005.

⁷⁸ Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, p. 124.

⁷⁹ J.M. Berger, ‘Anwar Al-Awlaki’s Links to the September 11 Hijackers’, *The Atlantic*, 9 September 2011.

MAB, FOSIS, JIMAS, and the Islamic Forum Europe.⁸⁰ On 18 June 2003, he spoke at an event in London held in conjunction with the MAB and the Islamic societies of four of the city's main universities.⁸¹ At the University of Aston in Birmingham four days later, his entire talk was in praise of a number of leading Islamist ideologues, including Muslim Brotherhood founder Hasan al-Banna.⁸²

The MAB has tried to revamp its image in the years since. For example, MAB provided some help to the UK government in removing the hook-handed extremist preacher Abu Hamza from the Finsbury Park Mosque and it holds a vigil every year for the victims of the 7 July 2005 London bombings.⁸³

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)

The MCB was born out of a perceived need to unite Muslims in the UK, in particular to unite them in defence against the harm caused by the blasphemy found in *The Satanic Verses*. Founded more than thirty years after UKIM—and around the same time as MAB—the MCB aimed to be the dominant Muslim umbrella organization in the UK.

The MCB describes itself as “the UK’s largest and most diverse national Muslim umbrella organization, with over 500 members including mosques, schools, charitable associations, and professional networks. Our mission is empowering Muslim communities to achieve a just, cohesive and successful British society. Founded in 1997, we lead community projects and initiatives around the country.”⁸⁴

MCB is among the groups the 2014 UK government report identifies as influenced or dominated by the MB. This is significant because the MCB had been one of the main interlocutors for the government’s community outreach efforts.

The MCB vigorously protested British involvement in the military response to 9/11 against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2001 and the toppling of Saddam Hussein in Iraq two years later. The MCB’s boycott of Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) between 2005-2007 further soured relations with the UK government. The final straw was the MCB’s response to the Israeli incursion against Hamas in the Gaza strip in December 2008. The former deputy secretary general, Dr. Daud Abdullah, signed the Istanbul Declaration in March 2009 that supports violence against foreign forces, which could include British naval personnel, and advocates attacks on Jewish communities all around the world.⁸⁵ The UK government ceased cooperation with the MCB.

⁸⁰ Duncan Gardham, ‘Al-Qaeda leader’s tour of Britain revealed’, *The Telegraph*, 5 November 2010. Accessed 10/11/21

⁸¹ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, ‘As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad’, *ICSR Paper*, 2011. Accessed 10/11/21

⁸² Meleagrou-Hitchens, ‘As American as Apple Pie: How Anwar al-Awlaki Became the Face of Western Jihad’. Accessed 10/11/21

⁸³ Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) website, ‘History’ section. Accessed 10/11/21

⁸⁴ Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) website. Accessed 21/11/21

⁸⁵ Hazel Blears, ‘Our shunning of the MCB is not grandstanding’, *The Guardian*, 25 March 2009. Accessed 21/11/21

The MCB has a response to this on the FAQ section of its website:

“The Muslim Council of Britain did not sign or support the ‘Istanbul Declaration’ and a former Deputy Secretary General who signed the document did so in a personal capacity. This was understood and accepted by the government at the time. For the avoidance of any doubt: the Muslim Council of Britain has, from its inception, been a strong proponent of Muslims serving in our armed forces.”⁸⁶

In 2007, the MCB published guidance for schools on the supposedly distinct needs of Muslim children. The guidance stated that girls and boys ought to be subject to specific dress codes. Putting forward one interpretation of the Islamic scholarly understanding of the issue, it asserts, “In public boys should always be covered between the navel and knee and girls should be covered except for their hands and faces, a concept known as ‘hijab’.” The author of the guidance, Tahir Alam, was later found to be central to the infamous Trojan Horse scandal,⁸⁷ wherein a number of Birmingham schools were strategically taken over with the intention of being run “Islamically” and found to be run in opposition to values of equality, mutual respect, and tolerance.

In 2008, a revised Islamic marriage contract was drawn up by the Muslim Institute, the group founded by Kalim Siddiqui, the man who solicited the fatwa from Khomeini against Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses*. The contract, which initially included the MCB logo and a statement of endorsement on its first page,⁸⁸ was aimed at improving equality for women by allowing them to initiate divorce on equal terms with men. According to the Islamic Foundation’s former executive director, Irshad Bacqui, it was important for such organizations to create a new mindset of “how to live according to Islamic values” in the new British environment.⁸⁹ The MCB swiftly repudiated such talk, with spokesman Reefat Drabu saying it was “misguided” and “incorrect” to describe the contract as a “re-invention of sharia” or as a “modern” or “reformist” view of it. In Drabu’s eyes, the Muslim Institute had misinterpreted the sharia: Islamic law is clear that Muslim brides-to-be require male guardians.⁹⁰ His view was supported by other Islamic Movement organizations, including the Islamic Sharia Council, whose logo was also originally attached to the contract.

The MCB gave membership to the Stockwell Green Mosque⁹¹ (discussed further within the Khatme Nubuwwat case study), notorious for displaying leaflets calling for the death of Ahmadis.⁹² In the aftermath of the murder of Assad Shah, the Ahmadi shopkeeper mentioned earlier, the MCB responded by saying, “Muslims should not be forced to class Ahmadis as Muslims if they do not wish to do so”,⁹³

⁸⁶ [Muslim Council of Britain website](#), FAQ section. Accessed 21/11/21

⁸⁷ Peter Clarke, ‘Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the “Trojan Horse” letter,’ *British House of Commons*, 22 July 2014.

⁸⁸ The contract has since been deleted from the internet, but an archived copy from the Muslim Parliament’s website can be [accessed here](#).

⁸⁹ Muslim Council of Britain website, ‘Statement: Muslim Marriage Certificate’, 15 August 2008, [captured here](#).

⁹⁰ Allen Esterson, ‘The MCB and the Muslim Marriage Contract’, *Butterflies and Wheels blog*, 24 August 2008.

⁹¹ The MCB has removed its membership list from the public domain, but it is clear that the Stockwell Green Mosque was a member and it gives every appearance of still being. In 2016, after the *BBC* disclosed the anti-Ahmadi leaflets at the mosque, the MCB issued a “temporary suspension” to the Stockwell Green Mosque, before producing a report in 2019 that said there was “no independent evidence” there had been such leaflets at the mosque. In light of the MCB granting the mosque this clean bill of health, it would be strange if the mosque had been expelled from membership. See: ‘Independent Inquiry on Aalami Majlise Tahaffuze Khatme Nubuwwat, also known as Stockwell Green Mosque’, [Muslim Council of Britain](#), 14 April 2016 [updated 11 November 2019].

⁹² BBC documentary, [in part available here](#).

⁹³ This comment is no longer available on the MCB website but [can be seen in citation here](#). Accessed 20/11/21

and in another comment added: “given this fundamental theological difference with the Ahmadi community, the MCB is not in a position to represent or be represented by the Ahmadi community”.⁹⁴

Siobhan McDonagh, Labour MP for Mitcham and Morden, criticized the MCB in Parliament for not being more active in countering anti-Ahmadi hatred,⁹⁵ and the spokesman for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, Basharat Nazir, wrote in *Huffington Post*:

“The key point (in the statement) was that Muslims should not be forced to accept Ahmadis ... [N]o one is forcing them ... and why should Ahmadis be made to call themselves non-Muslims? ... This is a time to show solidarity against all forms of discrimination, extremism, and hate, rather than make declarations about people’s beliefs.”⁹⁶

Tahir Nasser, journalist and editor of *The Review of Religions*, went further, writing:

“The MCB has taken a position that is fundamentally at odds with the British values the MCB claims to hold dear: namely that a person must be accepted in accordance with their own self-identification. The right to self-identify, and to be acknowledged by others in accordance with that identity, is the cornerstone of religious tolerance.”⁹⁷

Despite the controversies outlined, the MCB continues to deny it has any connection with the MB or its ideology, and gone to considerable lengths to polish its image. The MCB reversed itself over the boycott of Holocaust Remembrance Day, and has worked to counter the widespread impression that it is hostile towards the British Armed Forces by putting out materials highlighting the history of Muslims in the British Army.⁹⁸

Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)

Osama al-Tikriti, who founded and led the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Iraq, became a leader of the Muslim Student Society in 1963 after arriving in Britain, and went on to lead in the foundation of the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS).

FOSIS seeks to represent the interests of Muslim students at universities and colleges in the in the UK and Ireland; to run activities, Qur’an camps, and speaker tours; and to promote Muslim student activism and charitable work.⁹⁹ It has also, by its own reckoning, “relentlessly campaigned for prayer rooms,

⁹⁴ Tahir Nasser, ‘The Muslim Council of Britain is failing Ahmadis like Asad Shah’, *The Guardian*, 25 April 2016. Accessed 20/11/2021

⁹⁵ Siobhain McDonagh, ‘UK Security and Entry Clearance Procedures’, *They Work For You*, 29 June 2016. Accessed 01/11/2021

⁹⁶ Steven Hopkins, ‘Asad Shah Murder Sparks Sectarian Row As Muslim Council Of Britain Rejects Ahmadi’, *Huffington Post*, 7 April 2016.

⁹⁷ Nasser, ‘The Muslim Council of Britain is failing Ahmadis like Asad Shah’.

⁹⁸ ‘Remembering the Brave: The Muslim Contributions to Britain’s Armed Forces’, *Muslim Council of Britain Report*, May 2017. Accessed 16/11/21

⁹⁹ Damon Perry, ‘The Islamic Movement in Britain,’ *ICSR Paper*, 2020. Accessed 10/11/21

freedom of expression, civil liberties, and political engagement of Muslim students across multiple platforms”.¹⁰⁰

FOSIS has called for the “complete abolition” of the government’s pre-criminal counter-terrorism strategy, Prevent. In 2015, its vice president of student affairs, Ibrahim Ali, whilst celebrating the work of CAGE, declared that “Prevent in itself is a racist agenda; it’s an Islamophobic agenda”.¹⁰¹ Also in 2015, the National Union of Students (NUS), with the help of FOSIS, produced the ‘Preventing Prevent Handbook’, the revised version of which states, “Islamophobia is built in to Prevent”.¹⁰²

CAGE, FOSIS, and MEND share and promote this narrative, and regularly work together to oppose Prevent.

Although there may have been some teething issues how the Prevent strategy was initially implemented, the campaign to brand Prevent as part of a state-directed agenda to perpetuate Islamophobia is false.

Often, the cases relied upon by the ‘Preventing Prevent’ lobby demonstrate just how misleading the “evidence” against Prevent is. Two prominent examples will suffice to demonstrate the methodology.

Seeking to portray Prevent as a heavy-handed anti-Muslim policy, the ‘Preventing Prevent’ activists latched onto a Lancashire case where a family allegedly received a Prevent-related home visit after a ten-year-old primary schoolboy accidentally wrote “terrorist house” rather than “terraced house” on his classwork. The issue garnered so much public attention that the government took the unusual step of disclosing the official documentation related to the case, which showed that in fact the case had been handled as a social services matter because the child had written that his uncle beat him.¹⁰³ Undeterred, ‘Preventing Prevent’ continue to peddle the initial, false version.

Another debunked (though still relied upon) episode is the “Palestinian Badge case”. In the ‘Preventing Prevent’ telling, another schoolboy, this time at a high school in Luton, Rahman Mohammadi, was questioned in line with the Prevent strategy over showing his support for the Palestinian cause by wearing a pro-Palestine badge. His school, Challney High School for Boys, has made it clear this was not the source of their concern. Teachers “were not concerned about the nature of the badges and wristbands” that Mohammadi wore, they explained in a statement, and “at no point was the student told not to talk about Palestine in school”.¹⁰⁴

For confidentiality and safeguarding reasons, most of the details about the Mohammadi case cannot be disclosed publicly, and therefore the school gave no further details as to what *did* provoke the referral. As anti-extremism analyst David Toube noted:

“It is futile to speculate as to the factors which did in fact motivate the Prevent referral. However, a number of Mohammadi’s Facebook posts might well have raised concerns. On 2 August 2014, he declared: ‘Long Live Assad!’. On 9 February 2015, he accused ‘the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Hannah Stuart, ‘Understanding Cage: A Public Information Dossier,’ p. 22, *Henry Jackson Society*, 2015.

¹⁰² ‘Preventing Prevent: An Updated Handbook,’ p. 80, *NUS Connect website*, 15 November 2017.

¹⁰³ Adam Withnall, ‘Lancashire police say “terrorist house” incident not about spelling mistake’, *The Independent*, 21 January 2016.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Challney Boys denies claims student was referred to Prevent for wearing “Free Palestine” badge’, *Luton Today*, 17 February 2016.

Jewish Zuckerberg’ of allowing security agencies to spy on him. On 4 July 2015, he greeted a jihadist attack on Israel by Isis with the words ‘Finally!’.”¹⁰⁵

In light of such disclosures, ‘Preventing Prevent’ holding on to these and other claims illuminates just how disingenuous the campaign is. The campaign creates a greater sense of victimhood and otherness among Muslims, again creating a greater vulnerability to radicalization.

Islamist Civil Society Groups

In the 2000s, new Islamist organizations were founded, seeking to correct what they regarded as the failures of older groups. This new wave of Islamist entities had a particular focus on young Muslim, reflecting the relatively low average age of Muslims in the UK, and the changes in youth culture since the 1990s. With a focus on political activism and campaigning around Islamophobia, iEngage/MEND, CAGE, and the media platform *Islam 21c* were founded.

Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

The Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) was originally known as iEngage, until, in 2014, following accusations of association with extremism, it rebranded, under the leadership of Sufyan Ismail.

Accusations of extremism against iEngage were based on a number of issues:

- In April 2010, Hasan Nasrallah, the leader of the Iranian proxy terrorist organization in Lebanon, Hezbollah, was posted to the iEngage website, titled ‘Hizbullah Leader: “If you bomb Beirut, we will bomb Tel Aviv”.’
- In November 2008, a post was published on the iEngage website, titled ‘British Jews seek ban on “Hizbullah” visitor to UK’.
- In December 2008, the iEngage website advertised an event in London with a now-disbanded organization called Dialogue With Islam, which has been accused of being a front group for Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT). Indeed, the particular event in question, promoted by iEngage, featured as a speaker Sajjad Khan, at the time a leading figure in HT Britain. (HT will be discussed in detail as a case study of its own below.)
- In March 2009, iEngage complained to the Home Secretary about the refusal to allow Ibrahim al-Musawi into the UK. As well as being linked to Hezbollah, Al-Musawi has run a television station banned in France, Spain, and the United States for its antisemitic output. Hardly

¹⁰⁵ David Toube, ‘Did police really quiz this student over a “free Palestine” badge?’, *The Spectator*, 7 July 2020.

helping its case, iEngage responded by complaining that the Jews were at it again: “it would appear that the pro-Israel lobby has now been successful in pressuring government”.¹⁰⁶

Once iEngage re-branded as MEND, it sets out its mission statement as one to “empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics”.¹⁰⁷

Despite its ostensibly positive pro-social agenda, MEND generates controversy in relation to its ideological standpoint and the history of some of its leaders, its critical stance towards UK media and Government, and the antisemitic and homophobic views of some of its officials.

MEND’s former director of engagement Azad Ali was filmed at a rally stating that there are not enough prayers being given for the mujahideen in Mosques.¹⁰⁸ Ali lost a libel case against *The Daily Mail* where he was accused of justifying the killing of British troops.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, whilst being filmed by an undercover reporter for Channel 4 Dispatches, Ali was recorded as saying that democracy should be dispensed with if its result is not the imposition of the sharia: “Democracy, if it means at the expense of not implementing the sharia, of course no-one agrees with that”.¹¹⁰

The organizations’ founder and CEO, Sufyan Ismail, who also founded *Islam 21c*, claims that British society “hates us” and that British law has specifically allowed violence against Muslims while protecting other groups: “It’s not a crime to use violent or threatening words or behaviour [against Muslims],” he said.¹¹¹ “It’s perfectly OK under UK law to hate Islam and Muslims, it’s not a problem ... [I]f you’re Muslim, [the law says] you can take liberties big time, that’s why women are getting their hijabs ripped off”.¹¹²

One of the organization’s key narratives is that the government does not support Muslims and that it is purposefully downplaying and ignoring Islamophobia. The narrative promotes the separation of Muslim and British identities, and conforms to MB and JI narratives.

MEND’s popularity among young Muslims, along with its claim to support “British Muslims” broadly, raises concern over the impact it could have on Muslim identity. Professor Dina al-Raffie contends that the growth of Islamist organizations, wherein they seek to act as representatives of the whole Muslim population, creates a greater impact on the conscience of second and third generation immigrants with the “the imposition of a cognitive barrier to social integration among Muslim youth”.¹¹³ She argues that

¹⁰⁶ Tom Wilson, ‘Mend: “Islamists Masquerading As Civil Libertarians”,’ Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism at the *Henry Jackson Society*, 31 October 2017.

¹⁰⁷ *MEND website*, ‘Aims and Objectives’ section. Accessed 21/11/21

¹⁰⁸ Usama Hasan, David Toube, and Muna Khan, ‘Mainstreaming Islamism: Islamist institutions and civil society organisations’, *British Parliament’s Commission for Countering Extremism*, 7 October 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Robinson, ‘Islamist who claimed killing British soldiers was “justified” becomes director of a controversial Muslim pressure group with influence over Westminster’, *The Daily Mail*, 10 April 2017. Accessed 21/11/21

¹¹⁰ ‘Who Speaks for British Muslims?’, *Channel 4*, 12 March 2018; Andrew Gilligan, ‘IFE: not harmless democrats’, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2010.

¹¹¹ Andrew Gilligan and Andrew Gilligan, ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election,’ *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015.

¹¹² Wilson, ‘Mend: “Islamists Masquerading As Civil Libertarians”.’

¹¹³ Dina al-Raffie, ‘Social Identity Theory for Investigating Islamic Extremism in the Diaspora,’ *Journal of Strategic Security*, 2013.

the growth of an Islamist narrative in the West not only affects the less well-integrated but also transforms the identities of better-integrated Muslims. The inherent demonization of the out group (non-Islamist Westerners) encourages intolerance, a lack of integration, and ultimately leaves individuals vulnerable to taking the step from the Islamist “demonization” of the out group to the violent Islamist “dehumanization” of the out group.

Former senior members of MEND regularly appear on *Islam 21c* alongside Islamist preacher Haitham al-Haddad.

Haitham al-Haddad and *Islam 21c*

Al-Haddad sits on the boards of advisors for the Islamic Sharia Council. He is the founder and former chairman of the Muslim Research and Development Foundation (MRDF). He regularly shares his extreme Salafist¹¹⁴ views across a number of media platforms alongside other key Islamist figures who are not seen to challenge his views and at times are seen to endorse them.

In 2001, Haitham al-Haddad allegedly said, “I will tell you the truth about the fight between us and Jews, who are the enemies of God and the descendants of apes and pigs”.¹¹⁵ In an article called, ‘Standing up against Homosexuality’, Haddad wrote of “the scourge of homosexuality”, which he calls a “criminal act”. On women, he declared that “a man should not be questioned why he hit his wife, because this is something between them”.¹¹⁶ In addition to this, he has claimed that “the most honourable and worthy role for a woman is striving to be a fine wife ... this role does not only secure the best for a woman in the hereafter, but also fits perfectly with her natural disposition”.¹¹⁷

Islam 21c describes itself as a digital media platform that articulates Islam for the twenty-first century. The stylistics of the content on its website and YouTube suggest it is aimed at teens and young adults.

A narration by Haitham al-Haddad is first in the video section of the *Islam 21c* website.¹¹⁸ The video claims an “ideological attack” on Islam is underway in the West. It begins by saying that schools are sexualizing young children by introducing them to the potential of same-sex parents and different gender identities, and that this will destroy the traditional family unit. It concludes by suggesting Islamophobia is an industry that threatens the lives of UK Muslims, who can no longer feel safe. The video is intolerant to LGBT communities and suggests the UK is institutionally Islamophobic, with systems in place to spy on Muslims in schools. The “us” versus “them” rhetoric is divisive and promotes intolerance; it appears to echo JI and MB narratives.

Regularly appearing together to discuss topics, particularly via the *Islam21c* podcast, ‘Unscripted,’ are Sufyan Ismael, Salman Butt, Azzad Ali, and Haitham al-Haddad. In May 2021, the podcast hosted

¹¹⁴ Salafism is a reformist/revivalist branch of Sunni Islam that aims to replicate the way of life of the first three generations of Muslims.

¹¹⁵ Michel Hoebink, ‘Cleric did say “Jews are descendants of apes and pigs”’, *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, 17 February 2012. [Available here](#).

¹¹⁶ ‘Haitham al-Haddad: Adulterous western women are begging to be stoned to death,’ *London Times*, 8 October 2018. Accessed 3/12/21

¹¹⁷ Haitham al-Haddad, A Vision for Muslim Women in the West, *Islam21c*, 12 March 2012.

¹¹⁸ ‘The Ideological Attack (UNSEEN FOOTAGE)’, *Islam21c on YouTube*, 21 May 2020. Accessed 21/11/21

Tauqir Sharif. Sharif is a UK-born activist based in Syria who has been unable to return to Britain since 2017 when his British citizenship was revoked on the grounds that he is linked to a group aligned with Al-Qaeda.¹¹⁹ During the part of the conversation that he joined for, Sharif spoke of the importance of building Muslim institutions, however he warned that “we have colonized mindsets in our Muslim community,” claiming that there are only very few Muslim organizations that are brave enough. Later referencing comments made by Al-Haddad, Sharif observed, “the work you guys are doing is vital, like Sheikh Haitham said, it’s a jihad—most people are scared to come on and have a sheikh say the word ‘jihad’!”¹²⁰

Khatme Nubuwwat-Related Organizations

Stockwell Green Mosque

In April 2016, flyers were found in Stockwell Green Mosque (Khatme Nubuwwat Centre, formerly known as Aalami Majlis Tahaffuz-e-Khatme-e-Nubuwwat or AMTKN) in South London saying that Ahmadis should face capital punishment should they refuse to convert to mainstream Islam and in lieu of an Islamic state their businesses should be boycotted and all social ties severed.¹²¹ The leaflets were created by an ex-head of AMTKN in Pakistan, Yusuf Ludhianvi, which until recently listed Stockwell Green Mosque as its “overseas office”.¹²²

Ludhianvi was clear that killing Ahmadis was not something individuals can go around doing in a non-Islamic state. However, his views on the appropriate fate for Ahmadis in an Islamic state is quite different. In a book he has written, Ludhianvi states: “What does the sense of honour and shame demand from Muslims? In fact, it demands that not a single Qadiani should be left alive on earth. Seize each one of these malignant individuals and kill them.”¹²³

Mosque trustee Toaha Qureshi denied all connection to the leaflets and to AMTKN Pakistan, saying that the organization was a hate group and the leaflets may have been left there maliciously.¹²⁴ The problem with this defense is that the Stockwell Green Mosque address was on the leaflets and the mosque’s registered charitable name is the Khatme Nubuwwat Centre.¹²⁵ Qureshi was also recorded speaking at a Khatme Nubuwwat conference in 2018.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ ‘CAGE and Islam21C promote endorsements from alleged Al-Qaeda aligned activist in Syria,’ *Policy Exchange*, 14 May 2021. Accessed 20/11/21

¹²⁰ ‘ISLAM21C UNSCRIPTED LIVE APPEAL’, *Islam21c on YouTube*, 9 May 2021.

¹²¹ ‘Kill Ahmadis’ leaflets in UK mosque’, *BBC*, 10 April 2016. Accessed 20/11/2021

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ ‘A Report on Persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan During the Year 2015’, *Ahmadivya Muslim Jama’at Canada*. Accessed: 10/11/2021

¹²⁴ ‘Kill Ahmadis’ leaflets in UK mosque’.

¹²⁵ ‘Khatme Nubuwwat Centre,’ *Charity Commission*.

¹²⁶ ‘English Khatme Nubuwwat Conference Stockwell 2018,’ *Path TV on YouTube*, 11 July 2018. Accessed 25/11/2021

Khatme Nubuwwat Academy

The Khatme Nubuwwat Academy in Forest Gate, registered as the Islamic Dawah Council UK,¹²⁷ displays a book on its website which speaks in positive terms of how “false prophets” were “confronted” and “crushed”:

“The history of Islam is witness to this, that the Ummah has never accepted any false prophet and whenever anybody stood up to make a false claim of prophethood, the Ummah crushed this false propaganda with all its might. The Battle of Yamama, which was fought in the time of Hazrat Siddique-e-Akbar (ra) also had the same reason behind it, as Musaylama had made false accusations of becoming the last prophet. The Muslims confronted him in a battle in which approximately 700 *huffāz* [people who have memorized the Qur’an] were martyred for the sake of safeguarding the belief of Khatme Nubuwwat. This was the cause of the battle between truth and falsehood. The *Sahabah* [companions of the Prophet] gave sacrifice of their lives to finish off such liars such as Aswaad Ansi and Musaylama Kazzab and to teach a lesson to the rest of mankind until the Day of *Qiyamat* [Resurrection] that the Ummah will not accept any false prophet after the final Prophet, Muhammed, *sallallahu alaihe wassallam*.”¹²⁸

A leaflet on its website reads:



Despite the above, the Khatme Nubuwwat Academy states that it does not condone violence against the Ahmadiyya and declares:

“They are free to follow Mr. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani (and his successors) as long as they make their position clear that they don’t represent Islam or Muslims.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ ‘Islamic Da’wah Council UK,’ *Charity Commission*. Accessed 11/11/2021

¹²⁸ Mufti Muhammed Shafi, ‘Finality of the Prophethood,’ *Islamic Dawah Council UK*, September 2001. Accessed 11/11/2021

¹²⁹ ‘Wifaqul Ulama Expanded Media pack for Press briefings,’ *Khatme Nubuwwat Academy*. Accessed 15/11/21

This, of course, reiterates Khatme Nubuwwat’s view that Ahmadis are not free to identify as Muslim. This is a problem that goes well beyond the fringes. On a national level in the UK, Ahmadis struggle to identify as Muslims, being told they cannot appear on interfaith forums if they include “Muslim” in their name, and there has been a reported lack of governmental support towards the Ahmadiyya in this regard, which potentially highlights the power Islamist organizations have over the national narrative on Islam and Muslims.¹³⁰

Shia Islamist Organizations

Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)

Another clear child of the Rushdie Affair, the IHRC is a London-based advocacy group established in 1997, inspired by the worldview of Ayatollah Khomeini—who declared the fatwa against Rushdie—and the revolutionary, theocratic societal aims he established in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The IHRC has been thoroughly examined by researcher Emma Fox, who summarises the issues pertaining to the group in her report ‘Islamic Human Rights Commission: Advocating For The Ayatollahs’. She highlights how the IHRC has gained prominence in recent years for its pro-Hezbollah Al-Quds Day parades, its controversial ‘Islamophobia Awards’, and the antisemitic rhetoric espoused by the group’s senior figures.¹³¹ She asserts the IHRC to be institutionally pro-terrorist and antisemitic, noting that senior figures have espoused support for violent jihad, expressed sympathy for convicted terrorists, and advocated for the eradication of “Zionists”. Campaigns have supported high-profile associates of Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Hezbollah. Events have hosted representatives from PFLP and Hezbollah, and have been used to seek out those “looking for martyrdom”.¹³²

Fox observes how IHRC advisors have expressed sympathy for martyrdom and jihad, as well as support for militant “resistance movements”. Multiple advisors have been linked to overseas proscribed groups.¹³³ This includes Muhammad al-Massari, a “key influence on young jihadists,” who previously helped establish a press office for Osama Bin Laden in London.¹³⁴

It is not in dispute that IHRC sells literature authored by Islamist and Salafi–jihadist ideologues, among them Syed Qutb’s *Milestones* and Mawdudi’s work on jihad.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Charlotte Littlewood, ‘Indifference to intolerance,’ *Standpoint*, 25 June 2018. Accessed 18/11/21

¹³¹ Emma Fox, ‘Islamic Human Rights Commission: Advocating for the Ayatollahs,’ Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism at the *Henry Jackson Society*, May 2019. Accessed 18/11/21

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

A look on the IHRC website discloses an emphasis on Israel, “imperialism”, the “institutionalization of colonialism”, and its “ongoing oppression”.

A recent IHRC post advertises their upcoming event:

“The annual Islamophobia conference takes place across 11 and 12 December 2021. Co-organised by Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC), and the Decolonial International Network Foundation (DIN), it tackles the issue of Muslim and minoritized community interaction with the Westernised establishment.”¹³⁶

In a related blog post, the question is posed:

“The power imbalance between Muslim and so-called ‘Western’ countries, and between Muslim communities living in the so-called ‘West’ as minorities vis-à-vis the respective dominant societies, coupled with the constant pressures on these countries and communities alike by way of geopolitical impositions and Islamophobia, has spawned considerable soul searching within the Islamicate ...

The question that consumes Muslims caught in these quagmires is one of engagement: should Muslims interact with the very establishment that may be responsible for their marginalization, discrimination, securitization, and even incarceration ... ?”¹³⁷

The emphasis on “us” versus “them” is once again apparent, through the pitting of the West against Muslims and the emphasis on Islamophobia.

Radical Islamist Organizations

Hizb-ut-Tahrir

Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) was founded in 1953 in Jerusalem by Palestinian scholar Taqiuddin al-Nabhani. HT does not fall within the MB- or JI-influenced groups, nor within the Salafist sphere or organizations tied to Khatme Nubuwwat. Al-Nabhani viewed groups such as the MB as having abandoned the fundamental aim of establishing the Islamic caliphate. He insisted that “Islam will not return by constructing mosques or preserving morality” because these are partial solutions that distract Muslims from the true objective, which is to re-establish Islamic government.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ ‘Islamophobia Conference 2021: Working with the Western(ised) Establishment: Yes, No, Maybe?’, *Islamic Human Rights Commission*, 11 December 2021. Accessed 18/11/21

¹³⁷ Saeed Khan, ‘To Engage or Not to Engage with the Establishment: That is The Question,’ *Islamic Human Rights Commission*, 1 October 2021. Accessed 18/11/21

¹³⁸ Commins, ‘Taqi al-din al-Nabhani’, citing Nabhani, Mafahim, found in Hamed, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, pp. 6-7.

Al-Nabhani believed that Western colonialism was responsible for a loss of Muslim power. His vision was to:

“Engender an intellectual revolution by supplanting the erroneous beliefs that have arisen due to the Ummah’s state of decline and colonialist contamination with its own ideology. This ideology construed as a correct representation of a ‘pristine’ Islam cleanses of all distortion.”¹³⁹

Early leaders of HT in the UK included Omar Bakri Muhammad, who would later go on to establish the now-proscribed extremist organization Al-Muhajiroun. Anjem Choudhary, who subsequently led Al-Muhajiroun, has since been convicted under the Terrorism Act 2000 for inviting support to the Islamic State (IS). Raffaello Pantucci, a prominent researcher into and commentator on radicalization and security issues, estimates that individuals who have passed through Al-Muhajiroun have been linked to twenty-three out of fifty-one terror plots—just under half—carried out or intercepted by the police in the twenty-year period up to 2015.¹⁴⁰

A look at the HT-UK website shows a wish to militarily eliminate Israel. A letter on their website aimed at Muslim governments reads:

“The governments in the Muslim world must deploy all resources including the armies they have with immediate effect to end the oppression and liberate Palestine. Most of the regimes in Muslim countries rushed to make alliances with the US on its ‘War on Terror’. If such regimes did not hesitate to support a war that further divided the Muslim world and demonised Islam, they have no excuse not to move their forces to Palestine immediately. Such an act would strike fear into the heart of the Zionist occupation of Palestine to such an extent that many of the occupiers would in all likelihood fly back to their countries of origin like the US, UK, or Europe.”¹⁴¹

Another blog piece entitled, ‘Open Letter to Imams and Muslim Leaders’, calls for support for the Taliban after they took over Afghanistan in August 2021:

“Victory is truly from Allah, the Lord of the Worlds! We have witnessed the military defeat of the world’s mightiest military and its allies by a small group of brave and committed Muslims, the Taliban ... Muslims globally must support the formation of a truly independent Islamic Afghanistan. Following its victory over the US and NATO, the Taliban face significant challenges in establishing Islamic governance in Afghanistan. The Muslims globally must take the opportunity that has arisen to boldly work for the establishment of Islamic governance and the comprehensive implementation of the sharia of Allah in Afghanistan, with a view to spread this new authority beyond the false borders, imposed by the Western imperialists to ‘divide and rule’, and unify the Muslims in the region under the banner of the *Khilafah Rashidah*¹⁴².”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Aji-Farouki, ‘A Fundamental Quest,’ found in Hamed, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁰ Sarah Khan, *The Battle for British Islam*, p. 53, SAQI Press, 2016.

¹⁴¹ Editorial, ‘A New Islamic Order,’ *Hizb-ut-Tahrir Britain*, 2 October 2021. Accessed 10/11/21

¹⁴² *Khalifa Rashidah* refers to the first four of the caliphs after the death of Muhammad.

Campaigns Where Groups Can Be Seen To Converge

As we have seen, the organizations discussed in this chapter regularly converge on narratives they propagate about various topics and directly support each other in shared campaigns.

As Perry so eloquently puts it in his report on the Islamic Movement in the UK:

“The Islamic Movement in Britain is actively involved in initiating and leading a number of inter-related campaigns in the service of Islam as a complete system of life and of the Muslim Umma in Britain and abroad ... [T]he most enduring, well-funded and controversial being ... focus on Palestine, the British government’s counter-radicalization and counter-extremism strategies, and Islamophobia, as well as education and political participation.”¹⁴⁴

As we have observed, campaigns over conflicts abroad, which can be understood within the paradigm of a “war on Islam,” are core to the activities of most of the discussed groups. Supporting Palestine has been seen to include support of and funding for Hamas, and incidents of antisemitism.

All of the discussed organizations are opposed to the UK government’s Prevent program, so much so they have launched a specific campaign known as ‘Preventing Prevent’. The campaign draws in members of the Left, too, and is particularly effective on university campuses and amongst academics. The campaign is underpinned by the belief that the UK is institutionally Islamophobic, with the Prevent program being a tool of that. MEND, CAGE, *Islam 21C*, and FOSIS are particularly focused on countering government counter-extremism and counter-terrorism measures.

The focus on the notion that the UK government is attacking Islam and spying on Muslims feeds into the “us” versus “them” narrative. Violent extremist groups mirror this narrative, creating a sense of separation between Muslims and the societies in which they live, and fostering a sense of being under attack, leaving individuals more vulnerable to radicalization into violent extremist groups.

Finally, these groups converge over Islamic education. As we have seen, *Islam 21C* campaigns against teaching about LGBT and non-binary issues in schools; the MCB published guidance for schools written by the leader of the Trojan horse scandal, Tahir Alam, demanding a strict dress code for girls; and, as for university education, we have seen the above organizations organise tours of extremist speakers.

Al-Raffie uses social identity theory to better explain how these themes fit into the radicalization process:

“Radicalization’s success lies partially in the radical’s ability to provide the radical-to-be with a distinctive identity. The identity is based on a puritanical interpretation of the religion that imbues the radical with a sense of moral and spiritual superiority, setting him/her aside from the rest of society. In this sense, the new radical successfully joins an

¹⁴³ Editorial, ‘Open Letter to Imams and Muslim Leaders,’ *Hizb-ut-Tahrir Britain*, 28 September 2021. Accessed 10/11/21

¹⁴⁴ Perry, ‘The Islamic Movement in Britain’.

imaginary elite social group, and the second task in the recruiting radical's handbook is the slow and steady demonization of the society that exists outside the group.'¹⁴⁵

Taking the evidence above, it is possible to see how each campaign fits into this process, separating Muslims from the rest of society and then demonizing the society that exists outside the group. This process is not easily can be seen to be contributing towards potential radicalization into more dangerous groups.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Raffie, 'Social Identity Theory for Investigating Islamic Extremism in the Diaspora,' p. 68.

A Little on the UK Approach To Tacking Islamism

Islamist organizations' aims adapt to the context they find themselves in. Akin to the JI in India, MB- and JI-related organizations in the UK find themselves working with a minority Muslim population. In this environment, the aims shift from creating an Islamic state to teaching the "correct" interpretation of Islam and encouraging an Islamic way of life. Although some groups, such as Al-Muhajiroun, explicitly call for an Islamic state in the UK, mainstream UK Islamists believe in bringing Islamic values into British society, beginning with what they see as the genuine embrace of authentic Islam in Muslim communities. This is not to suggest that they reject the notion of an Islamic state: although some of them have (in public) downplayed its importance, they typically consider it as the eventual and inevitable outcome of a society in which (their version of) Islamic values have become widespread.

Islamism provides a de-territorialized sense of ideological belonging and has been argued by some academics to provide a place of belonging that is non-violent and therefore a buffer against radical Islamists who advocate for violence. Proponents of this belief see value in working with Islamists in the UK to counter violent extremism. This approach is known as 'Lambertism,' after Robert Lambert of the University of St. Andrews, whose work argues that it is vital to build trust with the communities that have experience in and knowledge of violent extremist propogandists. It will be noted that the implicit assumption here is that Islamists represent the Muslim community, playing directly into the strategies of JI and the MB.

Lambertism was, until relatively recently, the UK approach to counter-terrorism, and it led to Prevent being accused—credibly—of funding Islamist groups that have a questionable commitment to the aspirations of the UK government and of British society. For example, in probably the most high-profile incident, in 2007-8, the London borough of Tower Hamlets gave £38,000 to the Cordoba Foundation.¹⁴⁶ With this money, the Cordoba Foundation held a public debate featuring alleged MB activists and sympathizers against HT and other similar organizations.¹⁴⁷ The MB speakers lost the debate, with HT apparently convincing 78 percent of the mainly-Muslim audience to vote that "political participation had failed Muslims".¹⁴⁸

The cost of funding groups that disseminate ideologies opposed to the values the state stands for is compounded by the harms inherent within this (conditionally) non-violent extremism, notably social division and the targeting of marginalized groups, particularly Jews and homosexuals.

Eventually, the UK government decided that groups placing an emphasis on an "us" versus "them" narrative were not suitable interlocuters. The government no longer works with non-violent Islamist organizations to tackle violent Islamism.

¹⁴⁶ Lorenzo Vidino and James Brandon, 'Countering Radicalisation in Europe,' *ICSR Paper*, 2012. Accessed 07/12/21

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

In 2015, former Prime Minister David Cameron showcased the new counter-extremism strategy, which remains extant:

“In the past, I believe governments made the wrong choice. Whether in the face of Islamist or neo-Nazi extremism, we were too tolerant of intolerance, too afraid to cause offence. We seemed to lack the strength and resolve to stand up for what is right, even when the damage being done by extremists was all too clear. ...

We know that terrorism is really a symptom; ideology is the root cause. ... [T]he sophisticated efforts of extremists to groom and radicalize young British people demands a response of a different magnitude.

Our new strategy ... will vigorously counter extremist ideology ... We will actively support mainstream voices, especially in our faith communities and in civil society. That means supporting all those who want to fight extremism, but are too often disempowered or drowned out in the debate. ... And we will seek to build more cohesive communities, tackling the segregation and feelings of alienation that can help provide fertile ground for extremist messages to take root.”¹⁴⁹

Introducing a counter-extremism strategy that acts to compete in the non-violent extremism space was a strong indicator that the government had turned a corner in how it handles Islamism in the UK, moving to a position of firm opposition. There is a need within the Muslim community in the UK, particularly among the young, to find a way of having a sense of belonging to the country that is at peace with their Muslim identity. The government’s approach now supports Muslim organizations that try to harmonize British and Islamic identities, rather than creating antagonism between them.

¹⁴⁹ ‘UK Counter Extremism Strategy,’ *British House of Commons*, October 2015. Accessed 7/12/21

Conclusion

Islamists draw on the supposed idea of a Western “war on Islam” to create an “us” versus “them” narrative. At its most extreme, Islamism promotes the belief that people cannot be both Muslim and British, and insists that those who do not agree with them are not true Muslims. This practice of some Islamist groups in declaring *takfir* (excommunication) against Muslims who reject the Islamist definition of the faith is extremely dangerous, particularly when applied to whole populations like the Ahmadis, since a charge of apostasy is effectively incitement to murder against the accused.

The case studies have shown a number of worrying trends. Salafi-Islamist Haitham al-Haddad’s lack of firm opposition to domestic violence in marriages creates concern over the actions of the Islamic Sharia Council, which he advises. Support for Hamas and/or Hezbollah and incidents of antisemitism have been reported to have occurred within the IHRC, MEND, and the MCB. The spreading of a narrative wherein the UK state is institutionally Islamophobic has been demonstrated across most of the organizations, and is a key mobilizing tool in these groups’ attempts to frustrate national security measures to counter terrorism. This narrative is a component part of the broader emphasis on a perceived clash of civilizations, understood as Western aggression against Islam and Muslims as a whole, buttressed with exaggerated claims of a UK system that sets out to target Muslims. The dissemination of these ideas creates social division and increases a sense of threat and alienation among Muslims that leaves those affected more vulnerable to radicalization.

The impact of the new counter-extremism strategy, which has broken from the idea that working with non-violent Islamists is the way to neutralize the violent extremists, has yet to be measured. However, at present it would appear that Islamist organizations still have the larger audience, with Muslims that disagree with them being marginalized and not considered true representatives of Islam. The growth of such groups makes them an attractive prospect for young Muslims, and their success feeds back on itself to empower Islamists even further, giving these groups the opportunity to define how more and more UK Muslims identify themselves.

A significant test case is the Ahmadiyya, where the government apparently remains unwilling to support the community’s right to self-identify as Muslim, showcasing the effectiveness of Islamist organizations in dictating who may and who may not call themselves Muslim.

The tide, it seems, has yet to change, with Islamist groups continuing to shout over the mosaic of Muslims living in the UK.

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