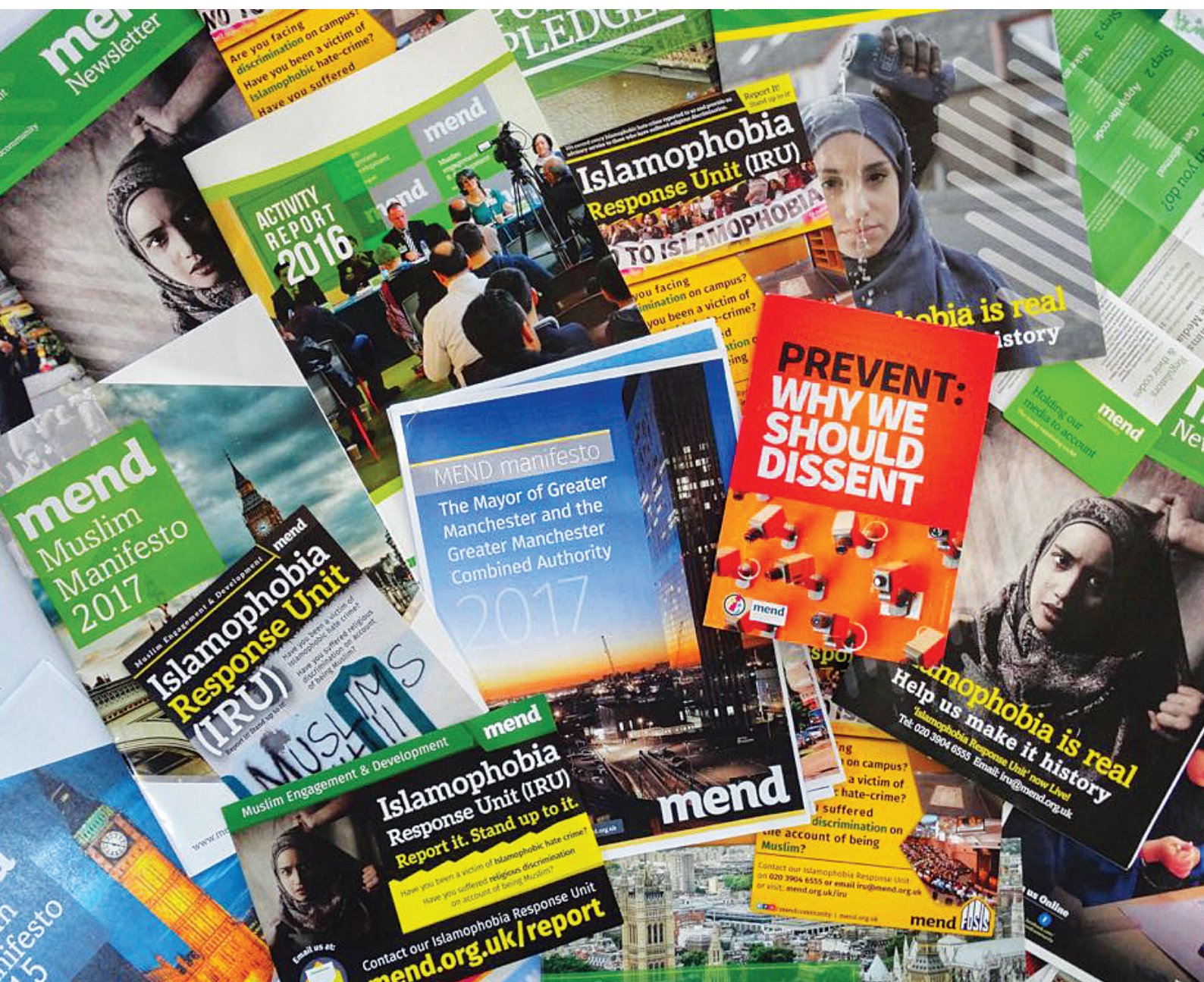


MEND: “ISLAMISTS MASQUERADING AS CIVIL LIBERTARIANS”

Tom Wilson



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Executive Summary

- Mend officials and volunteers have expressed highly concerning views on terrorism. This has ranged from downplaying the terrorist nature of various Islamist terror attacks, or promoting conspiracy theories in relation to those attacks, to suggesting that those returning from fighting in Syria should not be prosecuted, and advocating that British mosques hold prayers for the Mujahedeen (Islamic militias), and, in the case of one senior individual, legitimising the killing of British troops in Iraq.
- Mend has regularly hosted illiberal, intolerant and extremist Islamist speakers at public events. This has included those who have promoted Jihad, homophobia and anti-Semitism, as well as those who have legitimised the killing of adulterers and “infidels”. Mend and its officials have voiced support for Islamist hate preachers banned from entering the UK, and have opposed government policy on this.
- Mend and senior figures in Mend have praised and/or partnered with other groups linked to extremism, such as iERA, Friends of Al Aqsa and, most regularly, the pro-terrorist group Cage. Mend has often promoted Cage’s work, while Mend’s officials have spoken at Cage’s events and alongside its leading figures.
- Mend and its employees and volunteers have attacked liberal Muslim groups and Muslims engaged in counter-extremism, and on occasion Mend volunteers have expressed intolerance towards other Muslim denominations. In particular, groups such as Quilliam and Tell Mama have come under attack, as has a new initiative by British Imams to create a national body promoting progressive Islamic rulings.
- Mend has consistently opposed the government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation, usually without proposing credible alternatives. Mend often casts these measures as an attack on civil liberties, as targeting British Muslims and as an attack on normative Islamic practices. The organisation has played a particularly prominent role in demonising and spreading misinformation about the national counter-radicalisation strategy Prevent.
- Despite this opposition to Prevent, in 2014, when Mend was known as iEngage, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets paid £25,262.40 to iEngage when the organisation was commissioned to evaluate the borough’s “No Place for Hate” campaign, which was part of the borough council’s implementation of the Prevent strategy.
- Mend’s activities on Islamophobia have at times featured the promotion of conspiratorial narratives that have encouraged the belief that Islamophobia is intentionally driven by government policies, the media and other powerful interest groups. Some of these claims have included anti-Semitic components, such as a series of events run by Mend alleging that Zionist groups are one of five interest groups manufacturing Islamophobia.
- A number of the figures in Mend, including senior employees and volunteers, have promoted anti-Semitism and demonisation of Israel, particularly engaging in hate speech and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories over social media, as well as at Mend events.
- Despite the statutory Prevent duty for public bodies, an increasing number of those tasked with upholding the duty have been engaging with Mend. This has particularly been the case with local police forces, Police and Crime Commissioners, and some local councils. Mend’s position on the Manchester Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group gives the organisation particular influence, working alongside Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Police. Mend has also increasingly been looking to move into working with schools.

- Mend has been active in seeking to influence electoral politics, running fringe events at party conferences as well as arranging hustings at election times. However, its officials have previously been recorded advocating a strategy of mobilising a specifically Muslim vote, claiming that this would be the most powerful vote in the country, able to determine which party governs. Clerics who have been associated with Mend have advocated Muslim participation in elections for the purpose of imposing Islamic values on wider society. In the past, one of Mend’s senior figures indicated that he did not agree with democracy if it came at the expense of not implementing sharia law.

Introduction

Muslim Engagement and Development (Mend) is a not-for-profit organisation which presents itself as promoting Muslim engagement in public and political life, as well as fighting islamophobia. Formerly known as iEngage, the organisation has grown to include not only a London-based head office, but also more than 25 voluntary local working groups up and down the country.¹ Since being founded, Mend has run a number of public campaigns and holds numerous events throughout the year. The organisation has, however, been criticised in the press and by public figures multiple times, both for the inflammatory views of its officials and for its own narrative and activities. That narrative is one which on many occasions has crossed the line of extremism as defined by the government’s own Counter-Extremism Strategy, established in 2015. This is a government programme that Mend has opposed with particular ferocity.

Much of Mend’s campaigning in this regard has focussed on opposing the government’s counter-radicalisation programme, Prevent. In an editorial from June 2017, *The Times* observed of Prevent that it had been seized on by “groups such as Cage, Mend and Prevent Watch as a threat to free expression”, when in reality “it is nothing of the sort”.² Pointing to this cottage industry of groups that oppose Prevent, the column noted the presence of “Islamists masquerading as civil libertarians among Prevent’s detractors”, and concluded that “there is no doubt that Prevent is on the side of the public and of safety. Its enemies are accomplices to extremism.”³ Similarly, Mak Chishty, Uformer Metropolitan Police Commander and counter-terrorism official, has warned that “without targeting Islamism and naming and shaming Muslim organisations such as CAGE and Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), we risk having our safety and security threatened forever”.⁴

Mend and its senior figures have a tendency to play down the threat from terrorism, and particularly Islamist terrorism. Often this has revolved around the rhetoric of improbability, assuring the public of how unlikely it is that they would be directly impacted by terrorism, or insisting that Islamist terrorists have only been responsible for a negligible proportion of terror attacks. Individuals in the organisation, such as Mend’s National Community Head and former joint director, Azad Ali, have referred to terrorism dismissively, speaking of it euphemistically as simply people doing “something stupid”, or people “getting into things that they shouldn’t”. Worse, figures in Mend, such as Ali and Sahar Al-Faifi, have indicated that known Islamist terrorist attacks such as those in Mumbai in 2008, or more recently at Westminster and London Bridges, were not terrorism and should instead be referred to simply as “crimes” or “lone wolf” acts. As such, Mend has cast the efforts to counter terrorism and extremism as both an Islamophobic assault by the government on British Muslims and an unnecessary attack on fundamental civil liberties.

The precise nature of Mend’s worldview is difficult to categorise. In terms of the political and ideological views of its leaders, staff members and volunteers, it can be said that they fall across a spectrum of beliefs. However, that spectrum includes those who have promoted conspiracy theories, anti-Semitism and intolerance of other minority Muslim denominations; those who have voiced support for terrorist groups and advocated that British mosques should hold prayers for the Mujahedeen (Islamic militias); and, in the instance of one senior member of staff, someone who has been judged in court to be a “hardline Islamic extremist” who supported the killing of British troops.⁵ Mend has also

¹ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

² ‘Extreme Prejudice’, *The Times*, 3 June 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extreme-prejudice-5zwrjxhw3>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

³ ‘Extreme Prejudice’, *The Times*, 3 June 2017.

⁴ ‘We must reclaim Islam from the extremists, says Muslim Met commander’, *The Times*, 11 June 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-must-reclaim-islam-from-extremists-says-met-commander-0fjsdzbn3>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵ *Ali v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2010] EWHC 100 (QB), 27 January 2010, available at: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2010/100.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

repeatedly associated with, and expressed support for, extremist organisations, including Cage, which has previously been described as a pro-terrorist group.⁶ On several occasions, Mend has defended extremist hate preachers who have been banned from entering the UK. Similarly, Mend has consistently hosted Islamist preachers with a record of voicing intolerant and extreme views.

In the part of her book addressing the convergence between Islamists and Salafists in Britain, the human rights campaigner Sara Khan has raised a number of concerns about Mend and the activities and comments of some of those involved with the organisation.⁷ In particular, she recounts how a change of policy by the Law Society – to ensure equal rights for Muslim women in inheritance matters – was criticised by Mend and described as a “casualty” of the influence of “Islamophobic groups”.⁸ Clearly, campaigning to end bigotry and prejudice against Muslims is something to be applauded. But there must be serious concerns about the way in which Mend and its officials have at times woven an extremist narrative into their messaging on Islamophobia and used discussion of Islamophobia as platform from which to promote inflammatory, extremist and intolerant beliefs. Particularly problematic is the way in which Mend has repeatedly cast counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts as being part of an Islamophobic conspiracy and an attack on Islamic belief itself. Reflecting upon Salafist and Muslim Brotherhood aligned groups, the French scholar Gilles Kepel has written:

Let us note that it was the latter that publicised the term Islamophobia in the 1990s in an attempt to criminalise any criticism of the religious dogma they championed while at the same time constructing a specious symmetry with anti-Semitism so as to benefit from the moral dividends of victimization and turn them against Israel and Zionism.⁹

In the case of Mend, it is particularly notable not only how many of those involved with Mend have been recorded making anti-Semitic comments, but also how Mend’s events and narrative have accused Zionist, Jewish and pro-Israel groups of driving Islamophobia. Speaking in December 2016 before the Home Affairs Select Committee, the campaigner against Islamophobia, Fiyaz Mughal, named Mend and Cage as groups that he claimed attack his organisation, Tell Mama, for working with the Jewish community.¹⁰ During his testimony before that committee, Fiyaz Mughal also spoke of the need for the Home Office to “challenge” and “untangle the narrative of these groups”,¹¹ a narrative which he described as including conspiracies, anti-Semitism, hatred of other communities and a “unipolar view of life”.¹²

Challenging extremist ideas has been made a core part of the government’s Counter-Extremism Strategy. Through the statutory Prevent duty, public bodies are required to avoid providing either legitimacy or uncontested spaces for those who promote extremism. Yet it is a concerning and ongoing reality that those bodies covered by the Prevent duty, as well as public figures and elected officials, have continued to work and cooperate with those who are known to have links and sympathies with extremists. Mend is one example of an organisation which, as well as being overtly hostile to the statutory duty, also promotes an outlook which seems by any measure to be antithetical to the spirit of that duty.

⁶ ‘The evidence shows that Cage is a pro-terrorist group’, *The Telegraph*, 21 July 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/10981050/The-evidence-shows-that-Cage-is-a-pro-terrorist-group.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁷ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam: Reclaiming Muslim Identity from Extremism* (Saqi Books, 2016).

⁸ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam*, p. 141.

⁹ Kepel, G., *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 17.

¹⁰ ‘Fiyaz Mughal (of TellMAMA) attacks Cage and MEND at Home Affairs Committee hearing’, YouTube, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIf7FOFpi6E>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

About this Report

This report regards iEngage and Mend as the same organisation, mostly referring to the group as Mend given that this is its current title. The report does not claim to be an exhaustive account of Mend and all its activities. Rather, it is primarily concerned with the subject of non-violent extremism, as well as the campaign to oppose counter-extremism efforts. The report is interested in Mend in so far as is relevant to these subjects. In seeking to make an assessment of the worldview that Mend holds and promotes as an organisation, the report draws upon a wide variety of sources from the almost decade long period that Mend/iEngage has been operational for. It takes writings produced by Mend, as well as the statements of Mend employees and volunteers when speaking in an organisational capacity, as the primary indicators of Mend’s ideological position. However, it also takes as relevant the views of Mend’s employees and volunteers when they express themselves on subjects related to Mend’s work. Furthermore, the report regards the views and ideological positions of those whom Mend invites as speakers at its events as also being at least partly indicative of the organisation’s own outlook. Additionally, some consideration is given to the views of those individuals and groups that Mend has chosen to partner with or support over the years.

1. Extremism, Intolerance and the Promotion of Hate

1.1 Defining Extremism

In June 2017, following the terror attack at London Bridge, Prime Minister Theresa May spoke about the underlying causes of this wave of terrorism, referencing the safe spaces that exist for extremism, not only online but also in the real world.¹³ “There is – to be frank – far too much tolerance of extremism in our country,” the Prime Minister said. Subsequently, it was announced in the Queen’s Speech of 2017 that the government would establish a new Commission for Countering Extremism, which will be tasked with “reducing tolerance of extremism”.¹⁴ Since 2015, the government has had a Counter-Extremism Strategy in place, one which pledges to ensure that there are no uncontested spaces for extremism.¹⁵ That strategy provides a clear definition of what is meant by extremism, including in its non-violent forms. Consistent with the definition outlined in the 2011 Prevent Strategy, the UK government defines extremism as the:

Vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas.¹⁶

The Counter-Extremism Strategy recognises that there is no one model for how individuals become radicalised, although it acknowledges the role of extremist ideology in the process.¹⁷ As the Counter-Extremism Strategy makes clear, extremism is not only a threat because of the part it can play in drawing individuals toward terrorism, but it is also detrimental because of the damaging impact it has on social cohesion, undermining democracy and encouraging hate crimes.¹⁸ An example of this might be the core Islamic extremist message that there is a war being waged against Islam. This, the strategy explains, contributes to creating the “them and us” mentality that is so divisive.¹⁹

Prior to the publication of the Counter-Extremism Strategy in October 2015, the then Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a speech on 20 July that provided a detailed and comprehensive explanation of his government’s thinking on the question of extremism, particularly in its non-violent and Islamist variety. That speech provides a number of instructive principles and useful examples for considering the issue of extremist narratives, particularly because much of it was concerned with disrupting the activities of those he described as “extremist influencers who are careful to operate just inside the law”.²⁰ As the Prime Minister explained at the time, “You don’t have to support violence to subscribe to certain intolerant ideas which create a climate in which extremists can flourish.”²¹ Accordingly, the strategy

¹³ ‘PM statement following London terror attack: 4 June 2017’, GOV.UK, 4 June 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-following-london-terror-attack-4-june-2017>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴ ‘The Queen’s Speech and Associated Background Briefing, on the occasion of the opening of Parliament on Wednesday 21 June 2017’, available at: https://f.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/3671/files/2017/06/Queens_speech_2017_background_notes.pdf, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁵ ‘Counter-Extremism Strategy’, HM Government, October 2015.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ ‘Extremism: PM speech’, GOV.UK, 20 July 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/extremism-pm-speech>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²¹ *ibid.*

outlined by Cameron stressed the importance of confronting “groups and organisations that may not advocate violence – but which do promote other parts of the extremist narrative”.²²

In his speech, Cameron emphasised the role of extremist ideology and extremist ideas. He broadly outlined these as being “ideas which are hostile to basic liberal values such as democracy, freedom and sexual equality. Ideas which actively promote discrimination, sectarianism and segregation.”²³ However, the remarks in the speech also provide some far more detailed and insightful examples of the kinds of messages and overarching narratives commonly expounded in extremist circles. Mr Cameron noted how this form of extremism often promotes the following:

Ideas also based on conspiracy: that Jews exercise malevolent power; or that Western powers, in concert with Israel, are deliberately humiliating Muslims, because they aim to destroy Islam. In this warped worldview, such conclusions are reached – that 9/11 was actually inspired by Mossad to provoke the invasion of Afghanistan; that British security services knew about 7/7, but didn’t do anything about it because they wanted to provoke an anti-Muslim backlash.²⁴

The constant notion of conspiracy appears as a recurring and especially present theme in the worldview of those moving in extremist circles. A particular fixation with the alleged political power of Zionists, Israel and even prominent Jewish individuals and Jewish communal institutions has become a staple of these conspiracies. As noted, the other core component of Islamic extremist conspiracy theories is the belief that a concerted attack is being organised against Islam. On occasion, these two conspiracies can be combined to create a particularly dangerous and inflammatory message, one that not only threatens cohesion between communities but also risks drawing some towards a violent response. As David Cameron observed in his counter-extremism speech, many of those drawn into terrorism “were first influenced by what some would call non-violent extremists”.²⁵ The then Prime Minister explained that it might begin with “hearing about the so-called Jewish conspiracy and then develop into hostility to the West and fundamental liberal values”, and in this way “the extremist world view is the gateway” that can lead into violence.²⁶ Cameron stated in his speech:

We’ve got to show that if you say “yes I condemn terror – but the Kuffar are inferior”, or “violence in London isn’t justified, but suicide bombs in Israel are a different matter” – then you too are part of the problem. Unwittingly or not, and in a lot of cases it’s not unwittingly, you are providing succour to those who want to commit, or get others to commit to, violence.²⁷

This claim to disavow terrorism, and often Islamic State terrorism in particular, is in many instances contradicted by support for Jihadist groups in other contexts, particularly with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where it will often be legitimised as “resistance”. As part of the effort to counter this worldview, David Cameron explained that “we must demand that people also condemn the wild conspiracy theories, the anti-Semitism, and the sectarianism too”.²⁸ The speech addressed the common claims that Islam is under attack from a conscious effort to target it, including the allegations that the UK’s Prevent strategy is about spying on Muslims. As the Prime Minister told his audience:

We should together challenge the ludicrous conspiracy theories of the extremists. The world is not conspiring against Islam; the security services aren’t behind terrorist attacks; our new Prevent duty for schools is not about criminalising or spying on Muslim children. This is paranoia in the extreme.²⁹

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*

Cameron also addressed the apologetics and tacit legitimisation of terrorism that can be heard from those promoting extremism. The narrative here is one that discounts the role of Islamist and Jihadist ideology, instead pointing to grievances over foreign policy as the underlying cause for individuals committing acts of terrorism. David Cameron stressed unequivocally the role that ideology plays in driving terrorism, stating, “We must be clear. The root cause of the threat we face is the extremist ideology itself.”³⁰ He also noted, “Some argue it’s because of historic injustices and recent wars, or because of poverty and hardship. This argument, what I call the grievance justification, must be challenged.”³¹

Nevertheless, this so-called grievance justification has remained one of the most enduring messages promoted by extremists, violent and non-violent alike. It is one that places culpability for terrorism on Western governments on account of their foreign policy decisions, while prescribing as the solution foreign policy decisions that extremists themselves favour, such as not fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, or changing position on the status of terrorist groups such as Hamas. Non-violent extremism is not only concerned with foreign policy; in its Islamist variety it can also be particularly concerned with a variety of social issues, with Muslim Brotherhood-styled groups often pursuing their objectives through the existing political processes. For adherents of this politicised form of the religion, Islam is not simply a matter of personal faith but rather an all-encompassing project to be imposed to varying degrees on those in wider society. The revised Prevent duty of 2011 states:

Islamism is a philosophy which, in the broadest sense, promotes the application of Islamic values to modern government. There are no commonly agreed definitions of “Islamism” and “Islamist”, and groups or individuals described as Islamist often have very different aims and views about how those aims might be realised. Some militant Islamists would endorse violence or terrorism to achieve their aims. Many Islamists do not.³²

The United Kingdom has no legally binding definition of Islamic extremism, and, to be clear, it is not a criminal offence to hold or express non-violent extremist beliefs. That being said, in 2016 the High Court judge Justice Haddon-Cave established a working definition of Islamic extremism as part of a libel case involving Imam Shakeel Begg and the BBC. The definition compiled by Justice Haddon-Cave consisted of ten points, several of which were concerned with questions surrounding the waging of armed Jihad.³³ Others, however, dealt with attitudes also common among non-violent extremists. The “us and them” mentality is often referenced as being indicative of an extremist worldview, and Justice Haddon-Cave included this in his definition when he noted the role of “a Manichean view of the world” and a strictly “Us versus Them” attitude as an extremist Islamic position.

Another aspect of Islamic extremist ideology included in Justice Haddon-Cave’s definition, and relevant also to non-violent extremists, is the doctrine that places the shared bonds of Islam between Muslims over any other personal connections, such as nationality or even family.³⁴ As Haddon-Cave put it, in this Salafist view, “the precepts of the Muslim faith negate and supersede all other natural ties”.³⁵ Versions of this underlying sentiment can be heard expressed in various ways by proponents of an Islamist worldview. This may be a non-violent position, but nevertheless one that feeds into the rejection of the wider society and its liberal values, as touched upon by David Cameron in his 2015 counter-extremism speech.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government, June 2011, available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf, last visited: 20 October 2017.

³³ *Begg v British Broadcasting Corporation* [2016] EWHC 2688 (QB), 28 October 2016, available at:

<https://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/shakeel-begg-v-bbc-judgment-final-20161028.pdf>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

1.2 iEngage

Established in September 2008,³⁶ iEngage stated its purpose at the time as being “dedicated to promoting greater media awareness, political participation and civic participation amongst British Muslims”.³⁷ In the early years, the organisation’s website appears to have been largely focussed on challenging certain stories in the British media, including coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, as well as promoting anti-Israel news stories and opinion pieces. As it developed, iEngage held an increasing number of public events, including a Media Masterclass Event with the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Muslim Association of Britain³⁸ and a public event called “Freedom of Speech – are Muslims excluded?” where a number of extremist preachers were speakers.³⁹ Indeed, the organisation also had a number of other links to extremism, as was revealed in a piece originally featured in *The Telegraph* in November 2010 in which iEngage was described as “an organisation of Islamist sympathisers which has consistently defended fundamentalist organisations”.⁴⁰

In April 2010, a transcript of a speech by Hasan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese terrorist organisation Hezbollah, was posted to the iEngage website, titled “Hizbullah Leader: ‘If you bomb Beirut, we will bomb Tel Aviv’”.⁴¹ Previously, in November 2008, a post was published on the iEngage website, titled “British Jews seek ban on ‘Hizbullah’ visitor to UK”.⁴² Linking to a piece in the *Jewish Chronicle* newspaper, the post read, “A story in this week’s Jewish Chronicle gives an insight into how Jewish lobby groups work behind the scenes to strongarm the government and try and prevent influential Muslims who support Palestinian rights from visiting the UK.”⁴³ In December 2008, the iEngage website advertised an event in London with a now disbanded organisation called Dialogue With Islam, which has been accused of being a front group for the Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir on account of the number of Hizb ut-Tahrir speakers featured at its events.⁴⁴ Indeed, the particular event promoted by iEngage featured as a speaker Sajjad Khan, at the time a leading figure in Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain.⁴⁵

As Andrew Gilligan’s November 2010 piece for *The Telegraph* noted, as well as promoting material from the Islamist group iERA, iEngage’s chief executive Mohammed Asif had also written to the Home Secretary opposing the ban of the extremist cleric Zakir Naik.⁴⁶ Similarly, in March 2009, iEngage

³⁶ Engage Submission to the Communities and Local Government Committee Inquiry into ‘Preventing Violent Extremism’, 17 September 2009.

³⁷ iEngage webpage, archived 8 November 2008, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20081108032835/www.iengage.org.uk/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

³⁸ ‘MAB Media Masterclass’, Mend Facebook page, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1458320841098748, last visited: 20 October 2017.

³⁹ ‘London Freedom of speech, are Muslims excluded? - 2013’, Mend Facebook page, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1458302837767215, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴⁰ ‘Islamists establish bridgehead in Parliament’, *Andrew Gilligan Wordpress*, 25 November 2010, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/islamists-establish-a-bridgehead-in-parliament/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴¹ ‘Hizbullah leader: “If you bomb Beirut, we will bomb Tel Aviv”’, Engage Forum, archived 3 April 2010, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100403033006/http://www.iengage.org.uk:80/forum?func=view&catid=3&id=167#167>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴² ‘British Jews seek ban on “Hizbullah” visitor to UK’, Engage Forum, archived 2 January 2009, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090102130839/http://www.iengage.org.uk:80/forum?func=view&catid=3&id=33#33>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ ‘Dialogue With Islam is a Hizb ut Tahrir Front Organisation’, *Harry’s Place*, 22 March 2007, available at: <http://hurryupharry.org/2007/03/22/dialogue-with-islam-is-a-hizb-ut-tahrir-front-organisation/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴⁵ ‘Monthly View’, iEngage website, archived 24 December 2008, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20081224114653/http://www.iengage.org.uk:80/politics/events-calendar/18>, last visited: 23 October 2017.

⁴⁶ ‘Islamists establish bridgehead in Parliament’, *Andrew Gilligan Wordpress*, 25 November 2010, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/islamists-establish-a-bridgehead-in-parliament/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

complained to the Home Secretary about the refusal to grant entry into Britain to Ibrahim Al-Musawi.⁴⁷ As well as being linked to Hezbollah⁴⁸, Al-Musawi has run a television station banned in France, Spain and the United States for its anti-Semitic output.⁴⁹ Yet iEngage complained that “it would appear that the pro-Israel lobby has now been successful in pressuring government”.⁵⁰ While iEngage defended these extremist figures, it is notable that it attacked liberal Muslim voices such as Yasmin Alibhai-Brown.⁵¹

Indeed, the Muslim counter-extremism organisation Quilliam was repeatedly attacked by iEngage, just as it has continued to receive attacks from the group once iEngage rebranded as Mend. In a piece published on the iEngage website in April 2009, titled “Quilliam stooges target the Islam Channel”, the Quilliam Foundation is accused of being on a “quest to foster a craven Muslim identity submissive to the warmongers”.⁵² Also in 2009, iEngage reproduced a piece on its website attacking Quilliam for “fearmongering” when the foundation, along with British Muslims for Secular Democracy, raised concerns about extremist speakers being invited to speak at Green Lane Mosque.⁵³ Similarly, in 2010, iEngage criticised both Quilliam and British Muslims for Secular Democracy, as well as the British government, for favouring a ban on Anjem Choudary’s extremist Al Muhajiroun front group, Islam4UK.⁵⁴

iEngage had for a period served as the Secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia. Issues over iEngage’s extremism would come to a head in 2011 when a number of MPs and peers resigned from the APPG in protest. Eventually, when MPs voted 60–2 against iEngage’s role, the organisation ceased to hold the Secretariat position in July 2011.⁵⁵ At the time, iEngage claimed that it was under attack by “right-wing bloggers and the pro-Zionist lobby”.⁵⁶ However, it would not be until the summer of 2014 that iEngage would relaunch under its current brand as Mend.⁵⁷

1.3 Mend Employees and Volunteers, Past and Present

1.3.1 Azad Ali

One of the longest-serving and most prominent figures in Mend is Azad Ali, who joined the organisation when it was still called iEngage and has been involved since at least as early as 2012.⁵⁸ Until

⁴⁷ ‘Jacqui Smith rejects Ibrahim al - Musawi’s visa application’, Mend, 13 March 2009, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/jacqui-smith-rejects-ibrahim-al-musawis-visa-application/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴⁸ ‘Ibrahim Moussawi denied visa over Hezbollah’, *The Telegraph*, 13 March 2009, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/4986476/Ibrahim-Moussawi-denied-visa-over-Hezbollah.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁴⁹ ‘Campaigners will seek arrest of Islamic radical’, *The Telegraph*, 7 March 2009, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/law-and-order/4953470/Campaigners-will-see-arrest-of-Islamic-radical.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵⁰ ‘Jacqui Smith rejects Ibrahim al - Musawi’s visa application’, Mend, 13 March 2009, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/jacqui-smith-rejects-ibrahim-al-musawis-visa-application/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵¹ ‘Islamists establish bridgehead in Parliament’, *Andrew Gilligan Wordpress*, 25 November 2010.

⁵² ‘Quilliam stooges target the Islam Channel’, Mend, 30 April 2009, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/quilliam-stooges-target-the-islam-channel/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵³ ‘Green Lane Mosque (Birmingham) responds to the Quilliam Foundation’s “al-Qa’eda” allegations’, Mend, 21 December 2009, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/green-lane-mosque-birmingham-responds-to-the-quilliam-foundations-al-qaeda-allegations/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵⁴ ‘Govt faces widespread criticism for “futile” ban on Islam4UK but gains support of QF and BMSD’, Mend, 15 January 2010, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/govt-faces-widespread-criticism-for-futile-ban-on-islam4uk-but-gains-support-of-qf-and-bmsd/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵⁵ ‘Islamophobia group relaunched’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 November 2011, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/islamophobia-group-relaunched-1.29531>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵⁶ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam*, p. 67.

⁵⁷ MENDUK LIMITED, Filing history, Companies House, available at: <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/09094528/filing-history>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁵⁸ ‘Islamophobia @2012: Challenges and Strategies’, Muslim Council of Britain, 24 November 2012, available at: http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ReDoc-Islamophobia_2012.pdf, last visited: 20 October 2017.

recently, Ali held the position of Mend’s Head of Community Development and Engagement; however, his position is now listed on the organisation’s website as National Community Head.⁵⁹ In March 2017, Ali was made a director of Mend for a period of several months.⁶⁰ This promotion came despite the fact that he has a considerable and lengthy record of troubling extremist statements and associations. His senior position in an organisation that presents itself as seeking to engage Muslims in democracy might also be considered problematic given comments he had made, which came to light in 2010, when he had said “Democracy, if it means not implementing the sharia, of course nobody agrees with that.”⁶¹ The suggestion here being that democracy should be subordinate to Islamic religious law.

Azad Ali’s apparent sympathies with extremist sentiments gained national attention in January 2010 when he lost a libel case against the *Daily Mail* in the High Court.⁶² At the time, Ali was a civil servant working in the treasury, and president of the Civil Service Islamic society,⁶³ a position from which he had previously been suspended with reference to extremist statements he had written on his blog hosted by the Islamic Forum of Europe.⁶⁴ Ali disputed the *Daily Mail’s* description of him as a “hardline Islamic extremist who supports the killing of British and American soldiers in Iraq”⁶⁵. Yet, writing on his blog in November 2008, he had previously undertaken a discussion of offensive and defensive Jihad with reference to the views of Abdullah Azzam (one of Al-Qaeda’s founding figures of global Jihadism) and his son Huthaifa Azzam⁶⁶. In that post, Ali quoted the younger Azzam as saying:

If I saw an American or British man wearing a soldier’s uniform inside Iraq I would kill him because that is my obligation. If I found the same soldier over the border in Jordan I wouldn’t touch him. In Iraq he is a fighter and an occupier, here he is not. This is my religion and I respect this as the main instruction in my religion for jihad.⁶⁷

Ali also appeared to commend Abdullah Azzam for providing “balance” on the matter of Jihad⁶⁸. As such, the judge concluded of Azad Ali that “the Claimant was in November 2008 and for so long as the blog remained available, taking the position that the killing of American and British troops in Iraq (whether before or after the 2005 elections) would be justified by his middle or ‘balanced’ interpretation of jihad”.⁶⁹

Justice Eady also noted that, on his blog, Ali had expressed disapproval of the Foreign Secretary for describing Hamas as a terrorist organisation, while at the same time Ali had referred to Israel as “the Zionist terrorist state of Israel”.⁷⁰ Although this was not the point on which Ali ultimately lost his libel case, these sentiments may also be seen as indicative of a wider worldview. Indeed, in the same post Ali complained: “Self-censorship has taken many Muslims to the point where you can almost feel the contempt they have for jihad. We have had

⁵⁹ ‘Meet the Team’, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/about-mend/meet-the-team/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁶⁰ ‘Extremist leads Muslim lobby group’, *The Times*, 10 April 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extremist-leads-muslim-lobby-group-7q2hg30zc>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁶¹ ‘Police Muslim forum headed by Islamic extremist’, *The Telegraph*, 24 July 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/andrew-gilligan/7908273/Police-Muslim-forum-headed-by-Islamic-extremist.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁶² *Ali v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2010] EWHC 100 (QB), 27 January 2010.

⁶³ ‘ENGAGE Exclusive: Azad Ali cleared of wrongdoing by Civil Service investigation’, Mend, 27 June 2009, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/engage-exclusive-azad-ali-cleared-of-wrongdoing-by-civil-service-investigation/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁶⁴ *Ali v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2010] EWHC 100 (QB), 27 January 2010.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

campaign after campaign that tells people Islam is peace ... What peace does a man have when he is oppressed?”⁷¹

In another post he referred to non-Muslims as “sinners”, and wrote, “Some may argue that the word infidel ... is a bit offensive – so what?”⁷² He clarified this point by saying, “We should in general ‘hate’ the disbelieving actions of the non-Muslims but not them as a person.”⁷³ Also, writing on the Islamic Forum of Europe blog in 2008, Ali praised the Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, even arguing that Haniyeh should be the leader of a future caliphate.⁷⁴ In answering the question who would be best placed to take the position, Ali wrote:

My vote for the title of Amir al-Mu’mineen would have to go to the Palestinian Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh. Not only is a motivational leader, with political depth and skill, but also he is a Hafiz of the Qur’an, Mashallah! Name me one other Muslim leader that is currently leading his people in salat al-Tarawih? I cannot think of another single leader that can lead his people like this!⁷⁵

As well previously having had a leading role at the Muslim Safety Forum, and being a Vice Chair of the far Left Unite Against Fascism,⁷⁶ Ali has also previously served as community affairs coordinator at the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE), based at the East London Mosque.⁷⁷ The IFE has been described in *The Telegraph* by Andrew Gilligan as a group that “wants to create a Sharia state in Europe”.⁷⁸ The group has its ideological origins based in the beliefs of the South Asian Islamist movement Jamaat-e-Islami.⁷⁹ A 2010 Channel 4 *Dispatches* documentary noted the IFE’s record of hosting extremist preachers and reported that the IFE was pursuing an agenda of seeking to create a sharia-observant Islamic State in Britain.⁸⁰

More far reaching still were the objectives set out in an earlier IFE document which stated that the group “strives for the establishment of a global society, the Khilafah ... comprised of individuals who live by the principles of ... the Shari’ah”.⁸¹ A transcript from a 2009 IFE training course reported a speaker explaining that the group’s goal was to “create the True Believer, to then mobilise those believers into an organised force for change who will carry out da’wah, hisbah [enforcement of Islamic law] and jihad [struggle]. This will lead to social change and iqamatud-Deen [an Islamic social, economic and political order].”⁸² An IFE leaflet was also found to have outlined the intention to transform the “very infrastructure of society, its institutions, its culture, its political order and its creed ... from ignorance to Islam”.⁸³

⁷¹ ‘Mayor gives £30,000 of taxpayers’ money to Muslim group led by “extremist”’, *Evening Standard*, 12 March 2009, available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/mayor-gives-30000-of-taxpayers-money-to-muslim-group-led-by-extremist-6938333.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ ‘Focus on Islamism: A reduction of reality at the Guardian?’, *Standpoint Magazine*, 5 August 2010, available at: <http://standpointmag.co.uk/node/3267>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ ‘Our Officers’, Unite Against Fascism website, available at: <http://uaf.org.uk/about/our-officers/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁷⁷ ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Telegraph*, 22 March 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/11488175/The-baroness-Islamic-extremists-and-a-question-of-free-speech.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Bowen, I., *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (C. Hurst & Co, 2014), p. 98.

⁸⁰ *Dispatches: Britain’s Islamic Republic*, Channel 4, 2010.

⁸¹ Gilligan, A., ‘IFE: not harmless democrats’, *The Guardian*, 4 March 2010, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2010/mar/04/islamic-forum-europe-dispatches-gilligan>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁸² *ibid.* (bracketed text in source).

⁸³ *ibid.*

The 2010 *Dispatches* documentary found that one method by which the IFE sought to achieve these goals was through efforts to influence existing political structures and democratic processes.⁸⁴ Indeed, at the time of the documentary, the local Labour MP, Jim Fitzpatrick, complained of extremist entryism into his party and claimed that his party was being “infiltrated” by individuals from the IFE.⁸⁵ Fitzpatrick also noted claims by the IFE of being able to achieve the “mass mobilisation” of voters,⁸⁶ a claim not dissimilar to one made by senior figures in Mend during the 2015 general election, when Sufyan Ismail spoke of being able to give a political party as many as 30 seats.⁸⁷

The IFE was also accused by the *Dispatches* documentary of bringing extremist speakers to the East London Mosque.⁸⁸ Included among these speakers was Anwar Al Awlaki, a jihadist preacher who would go on to assume a prominent position within Al Qaeda.⁸⁹ In November 2008, Azad Ali had written of his admiration for Anwar Al Awlaki, describing him as “one of my favourite speakers and scholars”, and stressing, “I really do love him for the sake of Allah, he has an uncanny way of explaining things to people which is endearing.”⁹⁰ On his blog, Ali also disputed whether the Mumbai attacks should be referred to as terrorism, and instead described the attacks as “crimes”.⁹¹ More recently, following the March 2017 Westminster Bridge attack, Ali wrote on his Facebook page that the incident had been “a lone wolf act, and not terrorism”.⁹² In the wake of that attack, Ali shared a video on his Facebook page, which he urged his followers to “share widely”, in which Rizwaan Sabir describes terrorism as “political violence, or a militarised form of activism by Muslims”.⁹³ In the video, Sabir claims these acts of violence have become “more normalised” because “the structures, geopolitical situation and international structures of the world powers essentially exclude Muslims from articulating an identity that seeks to govern according to a political interpretation of their faith.”⁹⁴ Arguably, a clear instance of apologetics for terrorist acts when in the service of Islamist objectives.

Azad Ali has regularly spoken out against counter-terror legislation, and particularly against the national counter-radicalisation programme Prevent, as is in line with Mend policy. However, he has even expressed opposition to legislation prohibiting the glorification of terrorism on the grounds that it impacts free speech at universities and pushes discussions “underground”, but has also claimed that this is part of an attempt to censor what Muslims can say.⁹⁵ Speaking in May 2011, Ali said of counter-terrorism legislation, “There’s a purpose to all of this. The first purpose is really self-censorship. Early in 2005 when the counter-terrorism legislations were being built, specifically the 2006 act about

⁸⁴ *Dispatches: Britain’s Islamic Republic*, Channel 4, 2010.

⁸⁵ Gilligan, A., ‘Islamic radicals “infiltrate” the Labour Party’, *The Telegraph*, 27 February 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/7333420/Islamic-radicals-infiltrate-the-Labour-Party.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing up to 30 seats at the election and acting as “kingmaker”’, *Daily Mail*, 4 April 2015, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3025812/Muslim-group-links-extremists-boasts-influencing-30-seats-election-acting-kingmaker.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁸⁸ “‘Britain’s Islamic republic’”: full transcript of Channel 4 Dispatches programme on Lutfur Rahman, the IFE and Tower Hamlets’, *Andrew Gilligan Wordpress*, 22 October 2010, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/22/britains-islamic-republic-full-transcript-of-channel-4-dispatches-programme-on-lutfur-rahman-the-ife-and-tower-hamlets-the-full-transcript/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ ‘Great news: Islamists lose their Parliamentary foothold’, *Andrew Gilligan Wordpress*, 8 December 2010, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/tag/anwar-al-awlaki/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁹¹ ‘Mayor gives £30,000 of taxpayers’ money to Muslim group led by “extremist”’, *Evening Standard*, 12 March 2009.

⁹² Azad Ali, Facebook, 26 March 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155177409858383&set=a.10150155899253383.333086.616153382&type=3&theater>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁹³ Azad Ali, Facebook, 24 March 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10155171616783383>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ ‘Azad Ali Muslim Safety Council Islamophobia Global Threats Confronting Anti Muslim Hatred in Britain and Europe 21 05 11’, YouTube, 28 May 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpDp1155X3A>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

glorification and everything else, we had big major concerns. Because what it was doing is taking people’s ability to speak openly and freely.”⁹⁶

In recent years there have been a number of instances where Ali has appeared to publicly express his support for terrorist groups and activities overseas. He has spoken at a conference event for the controversial and extremist campaign group Cage, whose research director Asim Qureshi in February 2015 described the Islamic State executioner Mohammed Emwazi as a “beautiful young man”.⁹⁷ Speaking at the Cage event later that year, in November 2015, Ali lamented the fact that more Muslim organisations had not supported Cage, and he complained that counter-terrorism legislation had frightened imams and mosques into not holding prayers for “the Mujahedeen”⁹⁸ – usually understood as referring to Islamic militias; in 2015 possibly a reference to those operating in Syria and Iraq at that time. When giving a talk on Islamophobia as a representative of the Muslim Safety Forum in 2011, again complaining of the absence of prayers for the Mujahedeen in British mosques, Ali specified that this referred to Palestinian groups and those “who are resisting occupation”.⁹⁹ Ali had made similar comments when delivering a talk on Islamophobia at the Lewisham Islamic Centre as part of iEngage, as the organisation was then known. Blaming counter-extremism efforts, Ali bemoaned, “I don’t know about this Masjid, many masjids I know don’t use the word ‘Mujahedeen’ in their Khutbah/dua. The Mujahedeen has become a mustadafin, that’s what they have become. Why? Because you might be labelled an extremist. To make dua, you might be labelled an extremist.”¹⁰⁰ On that occasion it was left to the audience’s imagination which “Mujahedeen” were being referred to.

In July 2017, Azad Ali posted on Facebook expressing support for the proscribed terrorist group Hamas. The post concerned a speech given by Tariq Ramadan at the London Palestine Expo event organised by Friends of Al-Aqsa, which has itself been accused of having links with Hamas.¹⁰¹ During his speech, Tariq Ramadan had spoken about the question of terrorism in Israel and terrorism in other Western countries. Referring to efforts by Israeli politicians to draw a parallel between these two types of Jihadism, Ramadan said:

In 2001, what we heard is “what you got in the states is what we are getting in Israel” as if Al Qaeda is exactly like Hamas and the Palestinian resistance. By saying that they are all terrorist, that’s exactly the game. And we are saying we condemn terrorism, but there is a legitimate resistance to your state terrorism. Your state terrorism! What you are doing with the civilians in Gaza or in the West Bank, the way you are treating the Palestinians. This is something that has to be said. And we know that there is a connection; this playing with the word terrorist is that yesterday you were a terrorist, today you are a freedom fighter, the way they did with Mandela.¹⁰²

While it seems clear that Tariq Ramadan was seeking to legitimise the acts of Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups, Azad Ali’s take on Ramadan’s words went even further. Posting about the speech on Facebook, Ali wrote, “Fantastic speech by Tariq Ramadan”, and with specific reference to Ramadan’s Hamas comments, Ali wrote, “Hamas and others that resist the occupation and state

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ ‘IS “Jihadi John” suspect “a beautiful young man” – Cage’, *BBC News*, 26 February 2015, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-31650427/is-suspect-a-beautiful-young-man>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁹⁸ ‘We Need to Engage with the Mainstream | Azad Ali | Citizens Not Subjects’, YouTube, 24 November 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blG1R9U-rA>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

⁹⁹ ‘Azad Ali Muslim Safety Council Islamophobia Global Threats Confronting Anti Muslim Hatred in Britain and Europe 21 05 11’, YouTube, 28 May 2011.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre - The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqJwuNR9eUU>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰¹ MacAskill, E., ‘Palestinian event in London faces ban over Hamas links’, *The Guardian*, 25 June 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/25/palestinian-event-in-london-faces-ban-over-hamas-links>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰² ‘PALEXPO – Professor Tariq Ramadan – Democratic Engagement & Justice for Palestinians – 08/07/2017’, YouTube, 8 July 2017, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVkvuJW_Szc, last visited: 20 October 2017.

terrorism of Israel is JUST, LEGAL and we need to support that.”¹⁰³ Ali takes the sentiments in Ramadan’s speech a step further in calling for his followers on social media to support Hamas.

At times, Azad Ali has been fiercely hostile in his attitude towards liberal Muslims, such as in a 2008 blog post in which he is reported as having described moderate Muslims as “nothing but self-serving vultures, feeding on the dead flesh of the Palestinians”.¹⁰⁴ Ali has also been extremely critical of Muslim groups working on counter-extremism, groups such as Quilliam. In May 2017, he posted an article on Twitter, titled “Blowback in Manchester and why Quilliam should be investigated”.¹⁰⁵ As the title suggests, the article claimed that the bombing at the Manchester Arena concert was “blowback” from foreign policy actions in Libya, but it also makes a series of conspiratorial claims against the Quilliam Foundation.¹⁰⁶ In another post, this time on Facebook, in June 2014, Ali attacked the anti-Islamophobia organisation Tell Mama, writing of the group, “Why would I want to go and listen to an organisation that was constructed by Zionists with a Zionist chair, and an activist that equates Islam to Nazism?!”¹⁰⁷

In April 2016, Ali tweeted an article from the Islamist blog Coolness of Hind that attacked both Quilliam and Tell Mama, with Ali stating, “Tell Mama exposed in detail.”¹⁰⁸ In reality, the piece primarily attacked Tell Mama on the grounds that it had not unequivocally opposed Prevent and for allegedly aligning with those opposed to Islamism.¹⁰⁹ Ali has also claimed that moderate Muslims praised in the media are not really people who would be considered Muslim.¹¹⁰ Indeed, speaking at an event in 2011, he remarked, “As Yvonne Ridley said, I don’t understand the concept of a moderate Muslim, when you’re pregnant you’re pregnant, you can’t be moderately pregnant. And it’s true, how do you become a moderate Muslim?”¹¹¹

Azad Ali has also spoken out in support of David Ward, the former Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament, when he was disciplined by his party over anti-Semitism in 2013. In January of that year, shortly before Holocaust Memorial Day, Ward accused Jews of not having learned the lessons of the Holocaust. The then Bradford East MP had said that “within a few years of liberation from the death camps”, Jews had gone on to “inflicting atrocities on Palestinians in the new State of Israel”.¹¹² In a subsequent statement, Ward repeated the charge, saying, “When faced with examples of atrocious behaviour, we must learn from them. It appears that the suffering by the Jews has not transformed their views on how others should be treated.”¹¹³ Months later, in July, the party whip was removed from Ward when he tweeted, “Am I wrong or are am I right? At long last the Zionists are losing the battle – how

¹⁰³ Azad Ali, Facebook, 8 July 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155536653258383&set=pb.616153382-2207520000.1499788679.&type=3&theater>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Mayor gives £30,000 of taxpayers’ money to Muslim group led by “extremist”’, *Evening Standard*, 12 March 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Azad Ali, Twitter, 30 May 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/869585088295690240>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Blowback In Manchester And Why Quilliam Must Be Investigated’, *Medium*, 28 May 2017, available at: <https://medium.com/@jonasspooner/blowback-in-manchester-and-why-quilliam-must-be-investigated-f9472be1f26c>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Archived image, Azad Ali Facebook post, 10 June 2014, available at: <https://snag.gv/52c8Ax.jpg>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Azad Ali, Twitter, 11 April 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/719443035931676672>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Prevent – Supporting Fiyaz Mughal and Political Opportunism’, 11 April 2016, available at: <https://coolnessofhind.wordpress.com/2016/04/11/prevent-supporting-fiyaz-mughal-and-political-opportunism/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁰ ‘Sheffield Stand Up To Racism Rally’, YouTube, 28 February 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mqfXo0ofzs>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹¹ ‘Azad Ali Muslim Safety Council Islamophobia Global Threats Confronting Anti Muslim Hatred in Britain and Europe 21 05 11’, YouTube, 28 May 2011.

¹¹² ‘Liberal Democrat MP David Ward in row over Holocaust remarks’, *The Times*, 26 January 2013, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/liberal-democrat-mp-david-ward-in-row-over-holocaust-remarks-g9bhnrwffw>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

long can the apartheid state of #Israel last?”¹¹⁴ However, despite the anti-Semitism scandal, Azad Ali came out advocating for Ward, and wrote on Facebook, “I wrote a message of support to David Ward after the cowardly actions of the Lib Dems – please take a moment to do the same if you agree that he has been unfairly treated.”¹¹⁵ Later that month, Ali wrote another post, saying, “Zionist are attacking David Ward for his humanity in recognising & speaking out against the Israeli massacre. Please write to the @nick_clegg showing your support to David Ward.”¹¹⁶

1.3.2 Sufyan Ismail

Sufyan Ismail was the founding CEO of Mend following iEngage’s relaunch as Muslim Engagement and Development in 2014, before handing over that position to Shazad Amin in 2016. Although the Mend website does not list him as having any official role in the organisation, Mend’s Companies House page does give Ismail as a “person with significant control”.¹¹⁷ He first became a director of iEngage at the time of its creation in November 2008.¹¹⁸ During the period that Ismail held the position of CEO, he was recorded on a number of occasions making concerning comments, several of which subsequently drew public criticism. During a talk at a mosque in Cheadle in November 2014, Ismail praised the extremist group Cage and the Islamist iERA, saying that they “do a really good job”.¹¹⁹ On another occasion in 2014, he praised the pro-Hamas¹²⁰ organisation Friends of Al-Aqasa to an audience in Bolton, saying, “They do brilliant work.”¹²¹

Similarly, speaking at Bolton’s Zakariyya Central Mosque in 2014, Ismail made comments that both appeared to draw an equivalence between the Israeli military and terrorist groups in Syria, while also advocating against intervention by UK authorities to prevent British Muslims from going to fight in Syria.¹²² During his presentation, Sufyan Ismail told listeners:

Do you know that David Cameron recently said in Haaretz newspaper, that British Jews coming back from Israel, fighting for Israel, killing Palestinians, remember, blowing up hospitals, killing Palestinians on beaches; all fine, as far as he’s concerned. He said British Jews who’ve been fighting for the Israeli Defence Force will not be prosecuted! They had immunity from prosecution. But British Muslims going to Syria, fighting against Assad – whatever the rights and wrongs are – as we saw with Moazzam Begg and others, will definitely face interrogation.¹²³

In addition to these claims about British Jews and the Israeli army, and the troubling comparison between that army and militant groups in Syria, Ismail suggested that through exercising their electoral influence, the Muslim community could ensure that the government would not take measures against British Muslims going to fight in Syria. Indeed, the CEO of Mend followed the above comment by saying, “Now do you think that if we landed those 20 seats or 30 seats, he [Cameron] would have the audacity to say that to the Muslim community? Not a chance!”¹²⁴

¹¹⁴ David Ward, Twitter, 13 July 2013, available at: <https://twitter.com/DWard/status/356132369117351936>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁵ Azad Ali, Facebook, 19 July 2013, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10151790314548383>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁶ Azad Ali, Facebook, 23 July 2013, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10152644346268383>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁷ MENDUK LTD, Persons with significant control, Companies House, available at: <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/09094528/persons-with-significant-control>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁸ IENGAGE, Filing history, Companies House, available at: <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/06743280/filing-history?page=1>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹¹⁹ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQIbBkfZ0II>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹²⁰ MacAskill, E., ‘Palestinian event in London faces ban over Hamas links’, *The Guardian*, 25 June 2017.

¹²¹ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojugvuZdJek>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

These views appear to have been held not only by Mend’s then CEO, but also apparently by Mend itself. In September 2014, the Mend Twitter account posted a tweet saying, “In light of this #IraqDebate, it should be noted how eager the govt is to strip citizenship of those who fight for #ISIS but not for the IDF.”¹²⁵ Mend also retweeted a tweet that was sent in reply, which read, “Anybody that joins a Terrorist organisation such as Israel & Isis should be dealt with equally. Simple.”¹²⁶

During the presentation at Bolton Mosque, Sufyan Ismail made a number of other remarks that have been widely understood as being anti-Semitic. Talking about organising Muslim community lobbying in Parliament, Ismail launched an attack on what he referred to as “the Israel lobby”; however, there has been subsequent speculation that this was a thinly veiled euphemism for the British Jewish community. Ismail told the audience at the Cheadle Mosque:

Have a look at this, in 300 years the Israeli lobby has not lost a vote in Parliament, for 300 years since it’s been in any serious organised fashion it has not lost any serious vote. A few weeks ago a vote was carried out on recognising Palestine ... The Israeli lobby wasn’t just beaten, they were battered, absolutely battered. It shows you, when we’re organised we can achieve results. All they’ve had for these years, and I mean “they” in a collective sense of the word, and we haven’t, is a game plan and a strategy.¹²⁷

This statement drew particular concern from the British Jewish community, with the Board of Deputies of British Jews commenting, “We remain greatly disturbed by statements attributed to MEND such as one by its CEO Sufiyan Ismail.”¹²⁸ The Board of Deputies went on to note, with regard to the reference to a 300-year-old Israel lobby, “Given that the state of Israel has only existed since 1948, the ‘Israeli lobby’ in this quote can only be a synonym for British Jews, of which Ismail celebrates that ‘they were battered, absolutely battered’.”¹²⁹ Almost as concerning is Ismail’s conjecture that this “Israeli lobby” has up until now never lost a vote in Parliament, once again encouraging anti-Semitic notions of political power and influence.

Yet these appear not to have simply been throwaway remarks on a single occasion. Speaking on another occasion in November 2014 at a mosque in Bolton, Ismail repeated this anecdote. With the same use of language and euphemistic reference to a 300-year-old Israeli lobby, Ismail said:

The other night in Parliament, for the first time in British history, first time in 300 years of the Israeli lobby’s presence in the United Kingdom, first time in British history they lost a vote in Parliament. Do you know this? And the Muslim community didn’t just beat the Israeli lobby, we battered them, by 274 votes to 12.¹³⁰

Once again, using precisely the same choice of words, Ismail told his audience at the Bolton Mosque of how “the Israeli lobby was battered in Parliament”.¹³¹ Adding to speculation that Ismail was not talking about Israeli groups, but really British Jews, he referenced a number of Jewish community groups saying, “The Board of Deputies, the Jewish Leadership Council, key people in the Conservative Party, all like mad lobbied for this motion not to be passed.”¹³²

¹²⁵ Mend community, Twitter, 26 September 2014, available at:

<https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/515544289544515584>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹²⁶ Fariha Moghul, Twitter, 28 September 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/farihamoghul/status/516134195374997504>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹²⁷ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

¹²⁸ ‘Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Board of Deputies of British Jews’, Parliament UK, 2016, available at: http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/written/46147.html#_fm6, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

¹³¹ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

¹³² ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

Sufyan Ismail has endorsed a certain impression about the influence of Jewish lobbies when referencing the subject of ritual slaughter in Europe, which plays to anti-Semitic stereotypes. Warning about a rise in measures outlawing Islamic practices, Ismail said, “You have in Denmark a ban on Halal meat. So people said don’t worry, the Jewish lobby is so strong, Halal meat will never be – sorry Kosher meat will never be banned across Europe.”¹³³ And just as Ismail had drawn an equivalence between the Israeli army and terror groups operating in Syria, so too he appeared to insinuate a comparison between Zionists and Jihadists. Condemning an offensive tabloid headline that read “how to spot the Jihadi next door”, which had been accompanied by a caricature of a Muslim figure, Ismail asked his audience, “Do you think they would dare put a picture of a Jew and say how do you spot the Zionist next door?”¹³⁴

During a talk at a mosque in Bolton in 2014, Ismail was asked why Mend puts so much focus on the Palestinian issue, compared to events in a country such as Egypt.¹³⁵ Ismail replied by saying that it was partly because this was an issue that has “been there for 50 or 60 years now”.¹³⁶ It was not clear whether he was simply referring to Gaza and the West Bank, or all of Israel. However, far more troubling is that he went on to say of Israel, “It’s a non-Muslim enemy, really trying to destroy for all intents and purposes – and white wash – in the most inhumane fashion, a group of Muslims.”¹³⁷ Of Egypt, Ismail lamented what was happening to the Muslim Brotherhood in the country at that time, presumably a reference to the Islamist organisation’s removal.¹³⁸

1.3.3 Jewel Mahmud

Jewel Mahmud states that he has held the position of Graphic and Web Designer for iEngage and Mend since February 2014.¹³⁹ He appears to be listed on the Mend website as Abul Jewel¹⁴⁰ and tweets under the handle @jaymahmud.¹⁴¹ Over the years, Mahmud has made a number of posts on social media referencing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, some which have taken on an anti-Semitic tone.

In August 2014, Mahmud wrote a post on Facebook addressed to the head of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In the post he wrote, “British Jews feel like they have to defend Israel.. from Britain. If I did that as a Muslim in Britain for another Muslim country abroad, I would be branded, labelled and arrested as a Terrorist.”¹⁴² In the post he also demanded, “Arrest all British IDF Soldiers!”¹⁴³ That same month Mahmud also posted on Twitter a picture of a cartoon of a Jewish figure taping the world’s mouth shut with a sticker saying, “Anti-Semitism”.¹⁴⁴

In July 2014, Jewel Mahmud made a series of posts that pushed an anti-Semitic message. In one case, he posted an anti-Semitic cartoon to Facebook which equated Nazism and Zionism. Above the image Mahmud captioned, “Jewish Fascism. Spot the difference.”¹⁴⁵ In the same month, he also tweeted, “Why are Zionist so blind? and what lessons if any has been learnt from Facism. Does jewish Facism

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Jewel Mahmud, LinkedIn, available at: <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/jewel-mahmud-968b9894>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Meet the Team’, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/about-mend/meet-the-team/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴¹ Jay Mahmud, Twitter, available at: <https://twitter.com/JayMahmud>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴² Jewel Mahmud, Facebook, 1 August 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/clickgfx/posts/10154419466530128?match=anV3ZWwgbWFobXVvLkGpld3M%3D>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴³ Jewel Mahmud, Facebook, 1 August 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/clickgfx/posts/10154419466530128?match=anV3ZWwgbWFobXVvLkGpld3M%3D>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Jay Mahmud, Twitter, 7 August 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/JayMahmud/status/497174857160081408>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Jewel Mahmud, Facebook, 20 July 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154376082225128>

exist? Is it possible.. ?”¹⁴⁶ In July 2014, he replied to a tweet by @tweet_Palestine about the conflict in Gaza, saying, “they are Nazi Jews”.¹⁴⁷ In October 2015, he tweeted, “Israeli Apartheid.. And the world still protects these Zionist scumbags. #WeNeverLearn.”¹⁴⁸

1.3.4 Amar Alam

Amar Alam was previously a research assistant with Mend: he was listed on the Mend website as holding that position into spring of 2016.¹⁴⁹ Writing about Mend in her book on British Islam, Sara Khan raised concerns about sentiments expressed by Amar Alam, who is also a contributor for the Islamist website Islam21c.¹⁵⁰ In October 2014, Alam wrote a piece for the 5Pillars website responding to the arrest of Tarik Hassane, who was at the time accused of being part of an Islamic State terror plot.¹⁵¹ The piece was titled “Justice for Tarik Hassane – A politically motivated arrest by a police state”.¹⁵² In his piece, Alam told Muslims that they “cannot sit silently while their community is victimised, abused and subjugated by the government”.¹⁵³ Attacking moderate and liberal Muslims, Alam wrote, “While some from the Muslim community are happy to embrace secular values, and follow a government set agenda by condemning anything they feel does not follow their interpretation of ‘Britishness’, those who follow an orthodox interpretation of Islam must make a stand by campaigning and defending their fellow Muslims.”¹⁵⁴

In the same piece, Alam compared the case of Tarik Hassane to an earlier incident in which he described Moazzam Begg as “falsely arrested”.¹⁵⁵ However, Tarik Hassane was indeed an Islamic State-directed jihadist who had travelled to Syria in 2013 and was leading a terror plot planning to carry out drive-by shootings on British police officers and soldiers.¹⁵⁶ Sara Khan noted that after Hassane was found guilty in court, Alam’s piece disappeared from the 5Pillars website.¹⁵⁷

In October 2015, the National Secular Society was also critical of Amar Alam with regard to comments he posted on Facebook which appeared to indicate that he was in favour of outlawing all negative comments about Islam.¹⁵⁸

1.3.5 Siema Iqbal

Siema Iqbal is a prominent activist within Mend and chair of Mend’s working group in Manchester.¹⁵⁹ She also regularly speaks at Mend events and at other public events as a representative of Mend.

¹⁴⁶ Jay Mahmud, Twitter, 18 July 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/JayMahmud/status/490095913332146176>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Jay Mahmud, Twitter, 20 July 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/JayMahmud/status/490818925605957632>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Jay Mahmud, Twitter, 14 October 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/JayMahmud/status/654234224824860672>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Mend Team, Mend, archived page 5 March 2016, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160305183812/http://mend.org.uk:80/community/mend-team/>

¹⁵⁰ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam*, p. 74.

¹⁵¹ ‘Justice for Tarik Hassane – A politically motivated arrest by a police state’, 5 Pillars, archived page 30 October 2015, available at: <https://web-beta.archive.org/web/20151030222126/http://5pillarsuk.com/2014/10/10/justice-for-tarik-hassane-a-politically-motivated-arrest-by-a-police-state/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ ‘British Jihadi dubbed “the Surgeon” led gang plotting drive-by shootings of police officers and soldiers in the first terror plot to be funded and directed by ISIS from Syria’, *Daily Mail*, 23 April 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3553717/Tarik-Hassane-Turnup-Terror-Squad-jailed-life.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam*, p.74.

¹⁵⁸ ‘SNP to host Muslim group whose staff member calls for prosecution of anyone who criticises Islam’, National Secular Society, 15 October 2015, available at: <http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/10/snp-to-host-muslim-group-whose-staff-member-calls-for-prosecution-of-anyone-who-criticises-islam>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

Following the March 2017 Westminster terror attack, she tweeted¹⁶⁰ an article from the website of Cage, titled “After Westminster: It’s going to take courage to break the cycle”.¹⁶¹ The article blames Western foreign policy and counter-terrorism efforts as the underlying causes for attacks on civilians, such as the one carried out by Khalid Masood. In its conclusion, the piece states, “We must begin to openly discuss the root causes of violent incidents in a balanced and intelligent manner. This in turn, must prompt a re-examination of the neo-conservative and violent Western foreign and domestic policy towards Muslims.”¹⁶² In her tweet, Iqbal wrote, “No matter what you might think of @UK_Cage you cannot disagree with this article ... Time to ask brave questions.”¹⁶³

Also at the time of the Westminster Bridge attack, Siema Iqbal gave endorsement to some highly concerning comments by Rizwaan Sabir. Criticising the Prevent strategy on the BBC’s Victoria Derbyshire programme, Sabir dismissed the use of the words “extremism” and “radicalisation” as being merely polemical, and instead referred to terrorism as “political violence, or a militarised form of activism by Muslims”.¹⁶⁴ In what appeared to be apologetics for terrorism when undertaken on behalf of Islamist objectives, Sabir claimed that these violent acts by Muslims are becoming more “normalised” because “the structures, geopolitical situation and international structures of the world powers, essentially exclude Muslims from articulating an identity that seeks to govern according to a political interpretation of their faith”.¹⁶⁵ Iqbal wrote underneath a Facebook video of these comments, “Well done Rizwaan Sabir,” and, “13000 views. 12500 are probably the home office watching it on loop.... Need to start addressing the real issues and soon.”¹⁶⁶

Siema Iqbal was involved with the campaign to boycott the Israeli business Kedem in Manchester. As with several of the figures in Mend, she has made a number of social media postings that raise concerns about anti-Semitism. On 29 January 2017, shortly after international Holocaust Memorial Day – a point she references with a hashtag – Ms Iqbal reposted a tweet by the Israeli Prime Minister and wrote, “#Trump behaves like #HitlerinTheMaking and @netanyahu supports him? IRONY IS UNREAL. Remember #Holocaust? #MuslimBan #HMD2017 #maytrump”.¹⁶⁷ In August 2014, she tweeted the same image which would later bring the Bradford MP Naz Shah into disrepute, showing an outline of Israel superimposed onto a map of the United States and advocating the transference of Israel.¹⁶⁸ In the post Iqbal, wrote “the solution to #Gaza crisis”.¹⁶⁹ That same month, Iqbal retweeted a tweet that read, “Truce in Gaza? Don’t you believe it! The Jews are shopping around for cheaper bombs.”¹⁷⁰ Another tweet she is reported to have retweeted depicted a blood-stained Star of David with the words, “When a people who survived a genocide use it as an excuse to commit genocide”.¹⁷¹

Dr Iqbal’s anti-Semitic posts have been called out by campaigners from the Manchester Jewish community as well as from publications such as the *Jewish Telegraph*. However, Mend has responded to those who have sought to raise concerns about this anti-Semitism by accusing them of Islamophobia.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Manchester’, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/working-groups/manchester/>, last visited 24 October 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Siema Iqbal, Twitter, 25 March 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/siemaiqbal/status/845766291856207875>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁶¹ ‘After Westminster: It’s going to take courage to break the cycle’, Cage, 25 March 2017, available at: <https://cage.ngo/article/after-westminster-its-going-to-take-courage-to-break-the-cycle/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Siema Iqbal, Twitter, 25 March 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/siemaiqbal/status/845766291856207875>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Azad Ali, Facebook, 24 March 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10155171616783383>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Siema Iqbal, Facebook, 29 January 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10158199537070077&set=a.10150656195380077.697690.661600076&type=3>

¹⁶⁸ Archived screenshot from Twitter, 4 August 2014.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ ‘Doctor who advised mayoral hopefuls on hate crime tweeted anti-Semitic messages’, *Jewish News*, 27 June 2017, available at: <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/doctor-mayoral-hate-crime-sent-anti-semitic-messages/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

In a Mend video, titled “Professional Islamophobia”,¹⁷² released in July 2017, it is claimed that Siema Iqbal is being harassed simply because she has protested Israel’s actions in Gaza. The video makes no mention of anti-Semitism, instead focussing on Dr Iqbal’s anti-racism work. It suggests that there is an Islamophobic campaign against Iqbal as a Muslim to marginalise her from civic life.¹⁷³

1.3.6 Abdul Qudues Zafar

Abdul Qudues Zafar was Mend’s Midlands Regional Manager¹⁷⁴ until March 2017.¹⁷⁵ In September 2012, days before the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Zafar posted a link on his Facebook page to the Immortal Technique song “Bin Laden”.¹⁷⁶ The song promotes a series of extremist conspiracies, including that George Bush was responsible for the attack on the World Trade Center, that Osama Bin Laden was a CIA “tactician”, and that the masonic order has engineered fear of terrorism and the war on terror.¹⁷⁷ The song’s lyrics also offer justification for the violence of Iraqi insurgents and includes the line, “I don’t rap for dead presidents, I’d rather see the president dead.”¹⁷⁸ In his post, Zafar simply commented, “Immortal Technique, interesting tune.”¹⁷⁹

Later that month, Abdul Qudues Zafar posted a link to a YouTube video, titled “Not for the immature! Zionist Antichrist will rule the NWO”.¹⁸⁰ This virulently anti-Semitic video, featuring the race theorist and Holocaust denier Eustace Mullins, opens with Mullins claiming that Israel seeks to exterminate the entire Muslim population of the world and that, as such, Jihadism is justified as an effort to survive.¹⁸¹ In the first minutes of the video, Mullins claims that in a “ruthless” and “calculated” move, the state of Israel has created a war between Muslims and Christians and that, as such, the real enemy is “World Zionism”.¹⁸² Zafar accompanied his posting of the video with the words, “How much truth in this...how the world financial system was created...”¹⁸³

1.3.7 Sahar Al-Faifi

Another figure involved with Mend at the local level, who has been responsible for a number of extreme and prejudiced statements, is Sahar Al-Faifi. As well as holding the position of the Assistant General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Wales, she has also been Chair and Group Coordinator of the Cardiff Mend working group.¹⁸⁴ Previously, Al-Faifi was an official in the Muslim student group FOSIS¹⁸⁵ and sat on the youth division of the Citizens UK Muslim Leadership Group.¹⁸⁶ In 2017, she was listed as sitting on Citizens UK’s Muslim Leadership Group, which assisted with the creation of the organisation’s report “The Missing Muslims: unlocking British Muslim potential for the benefit for

¹⁷² ‘Professional Islamophobia’, Facebook, 3 July 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/videos/1907527929511368/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Mend, Archived Webpage 27 November 2016, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20161127232154/http://mend.org.uk/community/mend-team/>

¹⁷⁵ Mend, Stand Against Racism and Islamophobia, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/event/stand-against-racism-and-islamophobia/>

¹⁷⁶ Archived screenshot from Facebook, 9 September 2012.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Immortal Technique – Bin Laden ft. Eminem , Mos Def and Jadakiss (including Lyrics)’, YouTube, 15 November 2008, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r2vSEWeU5o>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Archived screenshot from Facebook, 9 September 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Archived screenshot from Facebook, 20 September 2012.

¹⁸¹ ‘NOT for the immature! Zionist Antichrist will rule the NWO’, YouTube, 1 August 2011, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oq0_n7ZBX_c, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Archived screenshot from Facebook, 20 September 2012.

¹⁸⁴ Cardiff, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/working-groups/cardiff/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Muslim Leadership Group, Citizens UK, available at: http://www.citizensuk.org/muslim_leadership_group, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

all”.¹⁸⁷ In August 2017, Al-Faifi was featured in a BBC Three video of Muslim women discussing wearing the burqa.¹⁸⁸ Both Citizens UK and the BBC have engaged with Al-Faifi, despite the long list of extremist and intolerant views that she has expressed in recent years.

In March 2013, in what appeared to be support for Islamism and an expression of sentiments against both Shia and secular Muslims, Al-Faifi tweeted, “Nothing worse than a Shia who flipped and became a secularist attacking Islamists! Combining the worst of the two!”¹⁸⁹ In December 2013, she tweeted in praise of Abdul Qadar Mollah, a Bangladeshi Islamist of Jamaat-e-Islami and convicted war criminal. In her tweet, Al-Faifi wrote, “A symbol of resistance against oppression #AbdulQuaderMolla was just executed! The #Bangladeshi Omar Al-Mukhtar! To Allah we shall return!”¹⁹⁰ In August 2014, she tweeted a cartoon that, while evidently opposed to ISIS, nevertheless insinuated the conspiratorial trope that the group is in some way loyal to the United States. In the cartoon, Muslims are shown praying in Mecca. An individual, who, we are to assume, is an ISIS fighter, prays with his back to the Karba and with an American flag for a turban. Above the image, Al-Faifa wrote, “The reality of #ISIS! A picture is worth a thousand words”.¹⁹¹

On social media, Al-Faifi has posted a number of anti-Semitic tweets. Responding to a piece about the Bible and genetics that had been tweeted by Abul Azim in August 2013 in September, of that year Al-Faifi tweeted, “@AbdulAzim what about the Rothschild Jews and their branches in Palestine, would such genetic research effect their banking empire ...”¹⁹² In November 2012, at the time of a conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, Al-Faifi tweeted, “Zionists ran away since the first rocket fell! YOU KNOW WHY? Because it is not their land! They do not know HOW to die for it #GAZA”.¹⁹³

Sahar Al-Faifi was a speaker at a particularly controversial event at SOAS in November 2015. The event, titled “Muslim Women in the West”, also featured Zara Huda Faris of the Muslim Debate Initiative.¹⁹⁴ During the event, Faris is reported as having compared Islamophobia in contemporary Britain to the anti-Semitism directed at Jews in Germany during the rise of the Nazis.¹⁹⁵ Al-Faifi is reported as having promoted a number of conspiracy theories at the event, claiming that Islamic State was created by “power structures” in the West, and also that “it’s within their interest to fuel Islamophobia. It’s within their interest to sell more weapons. It’s within their interest to make the Middle East unstable.”¹⁹⁶ Mend told the *Daily Mail* that it denied having any role in organising the event at SOAS.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the Facebook event page for “Muslim Women in the West” states that the event was being hosted by the SOAS Islamic Society “in association with Mend and FOSIS”.¹⁹⁸ The

¹⁸⁷ ‘The Missing Muslims’, Citizens UK, available at: http://www.citizensuk.org/missing_muslims, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Things Not To Say To Someone Who Wears A Burqa’, YouTube, 1 August 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUVWVBrPsTM>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Sahar Al-Faifi and the Muslimah’s Renaissance’, Student Rights, 5 February 2014, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2171/sahar_al_faifi_and_the_muslimah_s_renaissance, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Sahar Al-Faifi, Twitter, 12 December 2013, available at: <https://twitter.com/SaharAlFaifi/status/411174689189670912>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹¹ Sahar Al-Faifi, Twitter, 15 August 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/saharalfaiifi/status/500405510945140736>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹² Sahar Al-Faifi, Twitter, 3 September 2013, previously available at: <https://twitter.com/SaharAlFaifi/statuses/375003573903695872> (Archived Screenshot 3 September 2013)

¹⁹³ Sahar Al-Faifi, Twitter, 19 November 2012, available at: <https://twitter.com/SaharAlFaifi/status/270644415738044416>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Muslim Women in the West’, Facebook, 25 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/926920947396639/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹⁵ “‘It’s fine to hit a wife who doesn’t please you’: What Islamic cleric is telling students as he tours British universities unchallenged... and he’s not alone”, *Daily Mail*, 9 January 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3391194/Speaker-tells-students-s-fine-hit-wife-doesn-t-string-extremists-touring-British-universities-unchallenged.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ ‘Muslim Women in the West’, Facebook, 25 November 2015.

event poster also carries Mend’s Islamophobia Awareness Month logo,¹⁹⁹ and a picture from the event shows Mend’s logo and presentation material projected above the panel of speakers.²⁰⁰ The promotional video produced by FOSIS for Islamophobia Awareness Month 2015 also states that the campaign was being presented “in association with Mend” and featured Mend’s Azad Ali.²⁰¹

The notion of a conspiracy to stoke Islamophobia in conjunction with foreign policy was repeated by Sahar Al-Faifi in April 2017 during a BBC radio interview. She stated, “There is a multi-million pound islamophobia industry. Hate and bigotry has become accepted more than ever. People have become socially conditioned to accept an anti-Muslim narrative...” and went on to specify, “We’ve got the *Sunday Times*, we’ve got the *Daily Mail*, we’ve got also the Henry Jackson Society that has links to the far-Right institutions and Think Tanks such as Gatestone Institute, also links with the arms industry, that they benefit from the war on terror, they benefit from demonising and alienating Muslims, including Muslim women.”²⁰²

Sahar Al-Faifi also advocates conspiracy theories with regard to terrorism, including ones with a clear anti-Semitic component to them. On 4 June 2017, following a spate of Islamist terrorist attacks in the UK, she posted a long Facebook note about terrorism, titled “London Bridge attack, who is to blame?” in which she tagged several people in Mend, including Azad Ali.²⁰³ In her writing, Al-Faifi linked the terror attacks to the 2017 general election and suggested that the recent attacks were linked to “power structures”, which seemed to include several prominent Jewish philanthropists, as well as the British Conservative party.²⁰⁴ She explained:

You know this is how it works in simple terms. Security companies and arms industries make profits of creating threat and fear. They are part of social and political power structures, named as the establishment. Scaremongering is what keeps the power structures alive. Labour and the Tories are both products of the establishment and had Corbyn not been elected a leader of the Labour party, the difference between Tories and Labour is non-existent. Tories are knowingly linked to many corporates, including arms and pharmaceutical ones like MERCK and funded by pro-Zionists pro-war individuals such as Robert Rosenkranz, Lord Ashcroft and Lord Kalms the owner of Dixons. These people make money from wars and it is within their interest to make the world unstable by funding fear via morons and militias. The Tories are desperate to win this elections coming and with more young people registered to vote and the possibility of a coalition government between Labour and SNP, the scene is not looking great for Tories. So what shall Tories do to win?!²⁰⁵

In her post, Al-Faifi noticeably avoided identifying the attacks as terrorism, and instead repeatedly referred to them as crimes. However, employing a version of the commonly heard extremist libel that the authorities know about upcoming attacks and intentionally choose not to prevent them, Al-Faifi claimed that this was the case with the Manchester Arena bomber. She wrote of the authorities’ strategy, “If there are horrific crimes about to be committed by people of colour or happened to have a Muslim name, do not take them seriously and disregard the threat. This is exactly what happened with Salman Abeidi who was reported by the community repeatedly but ignored.”²⁰⁶ She went on to claim that when “crimes” are committed, “whether driving over people in a bridge, knife attacks or suicides”, then the

¹⁹⁹ ‘Muslim Women in the West’, Facebook, 25 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/soasisoc/photos/gm.926920970729970/547653505383369/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁰⁰ Archived screenshot SOAS event, 26 November 2015.

²⁰¹ ‘FOSIS Presents #IAM2015’, YouTube, 8 November 2015, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YX_yxylZqc, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁰² ‘Tom Wilson, HJS Research Fellow, speaks to BBC Wales after UKIP say they would ban the Niqab’, YouTube, 24 April 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4LW9hRzzgU>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁰³ Sahar Al-Faifi, Facebook, 4 June 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/sahar.alfaiifi/posts/10154832688204247>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

strategy is not to “treat it as just a crime” but to instead exploit the events to increase fear “in order to engineer the public opinion and make them buy into the national security meta-narrative of the Tories to justify their manifesto”.²⁰⁷ After all, Al-Faifi jested of the recent terror attacks, “ISIS is going to claim anything and everything even my burnt samosas in Ramadan.”²⁰⁸

Like other figures in Mend, Sahar Al-Faifi pushes the argument that terrorism – or “crimes”, as she called it – are caused by Britain’s foreign policy and that it is part of the government’s strategy to deny this fact. She made the accusation that the establishment has a strategy to “unequivocally deny the role of Britain’s foreign policy and their support of dictatorships across the world as they are their main beneficiaries of arms deals”.²⁰⁹ Having advocated this conspiratorial explanation for Islamist terror attacks, Al-Faifi asked her readers, “So after this, do you not think that Westminster attack, Manchester bombing and London Bridge are timely and their purpose is clear? This is not some sort of conspiracy theory. This is called mimetic warfare!”²¹⁰

In her post, Al-Faifi criticised the government’s response to the terror attacks by identifying them as Islamist terrorism and pledging to confront extremism:

The identity and the nature of the attacks have not been revealed, yet Theresa May promised to step up efforts to combat so called “Islamist” ideology and work with other countries to prevent terrorists. What does that mean?! Selling arms to Saudi for 38 billion pounds as Trump did. Probably yes.

She also said there was “too much tolerance of extremism in our country” and while it would involve “some difficult and embarrassing conversations”, that must change. Does this mean more discriminatory laws and laws that undermine our civil liberties. Probably yes.²¹¹

Towards the end of her post, Al-Faifi wrote, “Muslims for once stop apologising for things that have nothing to do with you! Unless every white Christian apologises for the KKK and white supremacists and every Jew apologises for the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).”²¹² She also explained that, owing to “white privilege”, the establishment does not politicise attacks when the “criminals are white”, and in the comments section detailed this alleged double standard by claiming that there are several examples where white supremacist attacks were not labelled terrorism, or “hardly made headlines”.²¹³ She listed Timothy McVeigh and Anders Breivik among the examples.

1.3.8 Heena Khaled

Heena Khaled was the Mend Group Coordinator for Waltham Forest, holding the position into spring of 2017,²¹⁴ and is a Program Administrative Assistant at the Open Society Foundation.²¹⁵ She has also been described in the press as a “human rights activist”.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the past, Ms Khaled has authored several anti-Semitic tweets. On 20 November 2012, at the time of an Israeli incursion into

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² *ibid.*

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ ‘Extremist leads Muslim lobby group’, *The Times*, 10 April 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extremist-leads-muslim-lobby-group-7q2hg30zc>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²¹⁵ Heena Khaled, Open Society Foundation, available at: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/people/heena-khaled>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²¹⁶ ‘Human rights activist says “attitudes need to change” towards Muslim women’, *East London and West Essex Guardian*, 26 August 2016, available at: http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/14707347.Human_rights_activist_says_attitudes_need_to_change_towards_Muslim_women/, last visited: 20 October 2017.

Gaza, Khaled repeated the historic blood libel: “They call us savages while they rip our flesh and drink our blood! #gaza #israel #zionist #iraq #afghanistan #war #justice”.²¹⁷ On 14 November 2012, the day on which fighting in Gaza first broke out, she tweeted to President Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron, “Shame on you- Just bow down to Israel a bit more if we fought for one #holocaust why not another?! #Gaza”.²¹⁸ That month she also tweeted, “Seems the #holocaust taught no humility to #israel! They forget who fought for their causes!”²¹⁹

During the Gaza war of 2014, Khaled repeated her anti-Semitic allegation that Israel is perpetrating a Holocaust: “#ICC4Israel me thinks it’s time people wake up. This is the Holocaust again.”²²⁰ More recently, she appeared to endorse an essentially conspiratorial explanation of events when, in the spring of 2016, a number of student unions voted to disaffiliate from the National Union of Students. Ms Khaled responded by tweeting, “The disassociation from @nusuk by certain student unions @Cambridge_Uni reflects the power of #zionism, #conservatism and #colonialism”.²²¹

1.3.9 Sheikh Suliman Gani

Until early 2017, Sheikh Suliman Gani was listed on Mend’s website as the Group Coordinator for South London.²²² Although it is not clear when he first became involved with Mend, he was already listed on the website in October 2015,²²³ and in February 2015 he sat on a panel opposing the Counter Terrorism and Security Bill with Asim Qureshi of Cage, while Mend’s London Regional Manager Shiplu Miah was introduced as the speaker representing Mend.²²⁴ Suliman Gani has opposed homosexuality, described women as subservient to men²²⁵ and reportedly supports the creation of an Islamic state.²²⁶ He was for several years Imam of the Tooting Islamic Centre, and in 2010 encouraged worshippers there to boycott businesses owned by Ahmadiyya Muslims,²²⁷ a minority sect that has faced considerable discrimination and persecution within the wider Islamic community. Using a derogatory term to refer to Ahmadis, Gani explained he had discouraged worshippers from buying in their shops, saying that “the Qadianis are routinely deceptive about their religion”, and suggested that the meat they sold might not be Halal.²²⁸

²¹⁷ Heena Khaled, Twitter, 20 November 2012, previously available at: <https://twitter.com/HeenaKhaled/status/270926232575676416> (Archived Screenshot 20 November 2012)

²¹⁸ Heena Khaled, Twitter, 15 November 2012, previously available at: <https://twitter.com/HeenaKhaled/status/268975965944823808> (Archived Screenshot 14 November 2012)

²¹⁹ Heena Khaled, Twitter, 15 November 2012, previously available at: <https://twitter.com/HeenaKhaled/status/269096283799695360> (Archived Screenshot 15 November 2012)

²²⁰ Heena Khaled, Twitter, 26 July 2014, previously available at: <https://twitter.com/HeenaKhaled/status/493194348524474368> (Archived Screenshot 26 July 2014)

²²¹ Heena Khaled, Twitter, 21 April 2016, available at: <http://archive.is/SQwhW>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²²² Mend, archived webpage 20 October 2015, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151020142038/http://mend.org.uk:80/locworkgroup/south-london/>, last visited: 25 October 2017.

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ ‘Counter Terrorism and Security Bill’, YouTube, 8 February 2015, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voQ_FeZtrFQ, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²²⁵ ‘Jeremy Corbyn reminds David Cameron the “extremist” imam he just described is a Tory’, *Independent*, 4 May 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-reminds-david-cameron-suliman-gani-pmqqs-video-extremist-imam-tory-conservative-voter-a7012941.html>, last visited: 23 October 2017.

²²⁶ ‘Suliman Gani sues Michael Fallon over claim he backed Isis’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/may/11/muslim-cleric-suliman-gani-sues-michael-fallon-claim-he-backed-isis>, last visited: 23 October 2017

²²⁷ ‘Worshippers told at Tooting Islamic Centre to boycott Ahmadiyya shops’, *Wimbledon Guardian*, 14 October 2010, available at: http://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/8451539.Worshippers_told_to_boycott_Ahmad%20diyya_shops/, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

A recording from 2010 shows Gani delivering a sermon on “voting in Islam”, in which he again makes an attack on the Ahmidiyya.²²⁹ In his speech, Gani warned, “If one of the candidates is a Qadiani ... people ... may think that he is a Muslim ... we know what is the hidden agenda of these people ... who can challenge the divine laws of Allah?”²³⁰ During the same address, Gani also complained of “moderate Muslims” being elected to Parliament:

Unfortunately the conditions of the Muslims have become such that there are people, because of not voting, people get elected, and sometimes a person is elected he may be a very moderate Muslim, he may be from a foundation probably more affiliated with Quilliam foundation who are creating the impression that these are the moderate Muslims, and that is why we have to stand up to the challenge.²³¹

Elsewhere in the talk, Gani explained the importance of voting:

Who makes the laws? And that is what we want to challenge, when legislations are being introduced in Parliament it’s going to affect every Muslim living in this country ... we are worried that they are going to increase the protection that has been given to homosexuality, we are worried about the alcohol, the gambling, the drugging. And these laws, are passing those laws, so then our children, growing up in such an environment.²³²

In March 2010, Suliman Gani spoke at a gender-segregated rally in solidarity with the convicted Al Qaeda terrorist Aafia Siddiqui,²³³ who that year was convicted in the United States on seven counts of attempted murder.²³⁴ At the rally, Gani spoke of religious duty to try to “speed up the release of those prisoners who have been incarcerated”.²³⁵ He further warned his listeners against inclining themselves “toward those people who are committing oppression”.²³⁶

In 2013, Gani released a video message calling on Muslims to support the charity HHUGS.²³⁷ This is a group which exists to support individuals and families affected by arrests made over terrorism charges. In 2012, HHUGS posted a piece by Haitham al-Haddad criticising the conviction of Munir Farooqi,²³⁸ who the year before had received four life sentences for preparing acts of terrorism, soliciting to murder and disseminating terrorist literature.²³⁹ The group also encouraged supporters to write to Osama Bin Laden’s UK spokesman Khalid Al-Fawwaz.²⁴⁰ HHUGS has in the past been affected by banking restrictions, when the charity had its accounts closed by HSBC and Lloyds TSB.²⁴¹

²²⁹ ‘Suliman Gani’s hate-filled remarks on Ahmadis - “Voting in islam debate”’, YouTube, 21 April 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2q0aYhg5JE>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ ‘JFAC London Solidarity Rally - Suliman Gani - Aafia Siddiqui Day March 28th 2010’, T Channels, 2010, available at: https://www.tchannels.tv/open/?type=related&vid=iKf_BvqYcZ0, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²³⁴ ‘Aafia Siddiqui Sentenced in Manhattan Federal Court to 86 Years for Attempting to Murder U.S. Nationals in Afghanistan and Six Additional Crimes’, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 23 September 2010, available at: <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/newyork/press-releases/2010/nyfo092310.htm>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²³⁵ ‘JFAC London Solidarity Rally - Suliman Gani - Aafia Siddiqui Day March 28th 2010’, T Channels, 2010.

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ ‘Shaykh Sulaiman Ghani - Support HHUGS this Ramadhan 2013!’, YouTube, 15 July 2013, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEKx7M6HcGU>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²³⁸ ‘The Munir Farooqi Issue by Sheikh (Dr) Haitham Al Haddad’, HHUGS, 14 February 2012, archived webpage, 9 August 2012, available at: <http://www.web.archive.org/web/20120809000846/http://www.hhugs.org.uk/the-munir-farooqi-issue-by-sheikh-dr-haitham-al-haddad/383>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²³⁹ ‘Munir Farooqi given four life sentences for terror charges’, *BBC News*, 9 September 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-14851811>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁰ Dyer, E., ‘Banking Restrictions on Extremist-Linked Muslim Groups’, The Henry Jackson Society, 17 November 2014, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Banking-Restrictions-on-Extremism-Linked-Muslim-Groups.pdf>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

In 2016, pictures came to light that are believed to show Suliman Gani attending a 2005 Saviour Sect/al-Muhajiroun rally outside the US embassy.²⁴² The following year the group was proscribed under new terror laws banning the glorification of terrorism.²⁴³ The rally in question was led by Anjem Choudary, who has been linked to more than a hundred people involved in terrorism, and who in 2016 was imprisoned for inviting support for Islamic State.²⁴⁴

1.4 Associated Extremist Speakers

Over the years that it has been operating, Mend has had a record of hosting speakers who have espoused extremist and intolerant views. For the most part, these individuals have been Islamic religious leaders who endorse an interpretation of Islam that is not simply conservative but also at times illiberal and hostile to Western values. Judging by the consistency with which these kinds of speakers have spoken at Mend events, it appears that the choice of speakers has been no accident. Rather, it would seem that Mend, and iEngage before that, has chosen to provide a platform for speakers who largely align with a particular worldview, one that clearly crosses the line into extremism. Furthermore, the decision to repeatedly host speakers of this kind, as opposed to those who offer a more liberal or conciliatory message, would seem to be indicative of Mend’s own ideological outlook. In any case, repeatedly exposing public audiences to speakers known for these kinds of views at the very least risks the promotion of extremism, even if only in its non-violent form.

1.4.1 “Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims excluded?”

In November 2013, iEngage organised a large public event, titled “Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?”²⁴⁵ The event was chaired by Azad Ali and appears to have repeated a familiar grievance narrative in which Britain’s Muslims were presented as being uniquely persecuted on account of their faith.²⁴⁶ What is most striking is the number of speakers with a record of extreme statements who had been gathered for this one event. Co-chairing along with Azad Ali was Yusuf Chambers of iERA, an organisation which has been described as a hate group by some secularists²⁴⁷ and which was banned from University College London in March 2013 for its attempts to impose gender-segregated seating at its events.²⁴⁸ Yusuf Chambers has himself been at the centre of controversy in the past over allegations that he had expressed support for the killing of homosexuals²⁴⁹ and those who commit adultery.²⁵⁰

Abdur Raheem Green, the founder of iERA, was also a speaker at the iEngage event.²⁵¹ Long before 2013, it was publicly known that Green had advocated violent Jihad, stating that “Islam teaches its

²⁴² ‘Is this Suliman Gani?’, *Harry’s Place*, 6 October 2016, available at: <http://hurryupharry.org/2016/10/06/is-this-suliman-gani/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴³ ‘Groups banned by new terror law’, *BBC News*, 17 July 2006, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5188136.stm, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁴ ‘Anjem Choudary: a hate preacher who spread terror in UK and Europe’, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/16/anjem-choudary-hate-preacher-spread-terror-uk-europe>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁵ ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?’, Facebook, 21 November 2013, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/439552059484409/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁶ ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims excluded?’, *5 Pillars*, 22 November 2013, available at: <http://5pillarsuk.com/2013/11/22/freedom-of-speech-are-muslims-excluded/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁷ ‘Ex-Muslims call for Islamic education charity to be classified as a “hate group”’, National Secular Society, 23 May 2014, available at: <http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2014/05/ex-muslims-call-for-islamic-education-charity-to-be-classified-as-hate-group>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁸ ‘iERA’s Yusuf Chambers claims UCL ban is Islamophobic’, Student Rights, 11 March 2013, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2060/iera_s_yusuf_chambers_claims_ucl_ban_is_islamophobic, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁴⁹ ‘University of York Islamic Society invites Yusuf Chambers’, Student Rights, 12 June 2012, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/1929/university_of_york_islamic_society_invites_yusuf_chambers_update_statement_from_university_of_york_lgbt_officer_and_islamic_society, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁰ ‘Interfaith events host intolerant speakers’, Student Rights, 13 November 2014, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2230/interfaith_events_host_intolerant_speakers, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵¹ ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?’, Facebook, 21 November 2013.

followers to seek death on the battlefield”,²⁵² that the conflict between Islam and the West is ordered by the Quran, and that “dying while fighting jihad is one of the surest ways to paradise and Allah’s good pleasure”.²⁵³ The Charity Commission has noted Green’s extremism,²⁵⁴ particularly with regard to his statement that homosexuals and adulterers should be punished with a “slow and painful death by stoning”,²⁵⁵ as well as an instance of anti-Semitic abuse in which he referred to a Jewish individual by saying, “Why don’t you take the Yahoudi [Jew] over there, far away so his stench doesn’t disturb us?”²⁵⁶

Shakeel Begg was another extremist speaker at the November 2013 event. Begg’s extremism, including his support for Jihad, was well known in November 2013; earlier that month it had even been discussed by Andrew Neil on the BBC’s *Sunday Politics* programme.²⁵⁷ In 2006, Begg had advocated making armed Jihad to a group of university students²⁵⁸ when he referred to Jihad as “the greatest of deeds” a person can take part in,²⁵⁹ accused Muslims who work with the police on counter-terrorism of having sided with the “enemies of Islam”,²⁶⁰ and quoted approvingly of “fighting the Jews in an Islamic Jihad”.²⁶¹

Another extremism-linked speaker at iEngage’s free speech event was Hamza Tzortzis,²⁶² who had previously said, “We as Muslims reject the idea of freedom of speech, and even of freedom.”²⁶³ Tzortzis has also called for the creation of an Islamic state, and was a trustee of the charity Green Crescent, from which he stepped down when the charity’s head was arrested and charged with terrorism offences.²⁶⁴ Formerly a member of the extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tzortzis has voiced support for the criminalisation of homosexuality, as well as for amputation as a religious punishment.²⁶⁵ Also speaking at the event was Sheikh Shams Ad Duha, who has previously been described as an extremist,²⁶⁶ an example of this being that when asked if infidels should be killed, he responded by saying that “there is no yes or no answer”.²⁶⁷ Duha has also stated that “the most logical thing for anyone to want to protest against and to want to be critical about is homosexuality”.²⁶⁸ He has written that “homosexuality is a symptom of the bigger problem and Islam has always acknowledged its existence in people as a vice among vices”.²⁶⁹ Despite these views, Duha was also a speaker at a joint conference held by Mend and the National Association of Muslim Police in 2014.²⁷⁰

²⁵² ‘BBC Promotes “Radical” Preacher in Documentary’, Student Rights, 22 July 2011, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/1694/bbc_promotes_radical_preacher_in_documentary, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵³ ‘Muslim preacher “who advocated dying while fighting jihad” given platform at London university’, *Evening Standard*, 24 November 2016, available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/muslim-preacher-who-advocated-dying-while-fighting-jihad-given-platform-at-london-university-a3400911.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁴ ‘Leading Islamic charity told by watchdog to distance itself from extremism’, *The Telegraph*, 12 November 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/12/leading-islamic-charity-told-by-watchdog-to-distance-itself-from/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁵ ‘Terrible and brutal Islamic punishments or wise and just guidance from Allah?’, Islam’s Green, 14 February 2006, available at: http://www.islamsgreen.org/islams_green/2006/02/terrible_and_br.html, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁶ ‘Leading Islamic charity told by watchdog to distance itself from extremism’, *The Telegraph*, 12 November 2016.

²⁵⁷ ‘Imam loses libel action against BBC over “extreme” claim’, *BBC News*, 28 October 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37798201>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁸ *Begg v British Broadcasting Corporation* [2016] EWHC 2688 (QB), 28 October 2016, available at: <https://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/shakeel-begg-v-bbc-judgment-final-20161028.pdf>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*

²⁶¹ *ibid.*

²⁶² ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?’, Facebook, 21 November 2013.

²⁶³ ‘Speaker with extremist links to address Detroit bomber’s former student group’, *The Telegraph*, 18 January 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/7012827/Speaker-with-extremist-links-to-address-Detroit-bombers-former-student-group.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ ‘Hamza Tzortzis begins university speaking tour’, Student Rights, 29 January 2013, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2028/hamza_tzortzis_begins_university_speaking_tour, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁶⁶ Dyer, E., ‘Banking Restrictions on Extremist-Linked Muslim Groups’, The Henry Jackson Society, 17 November 2014.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ ‘The Report Episode 123 | Part 3/3 (25/11/14) - Islamophobia Awareness Month’, YouTube, 26 November 2014, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ALcSXzuezo>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

Dr Abdul Wahid was another speaker at the 2013 iEngage event. He was there as the head of Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain, an Islamist organisation that calls for the creation of a global caliphate and which has refused to condemn suicide bombings.²⁷¹ Wahid is recorded as having attacked Muslim Members of Parliament for “selling out” by not defending sharia, as having said that religious obedience is more important than freedom of speech, and having stated that the only solution to British society’s social problems is the institution of Islamic principles.²⁷² Also speaking at the conference was Abdullah al-Andalusi, who has written that “democracy, secularism, feminism, humanism, and freedom” are all “blatantly un-Islamic concepts”.²⁷³ Furthermore, it has been reported that Andalusi has taught that the British government wants to destroy Islam.²⁷⁴

The extremist cleric Haitham al-Haddad was another prominent speaker at the event on free speech. On the killing of apostates from Islam, Haddad has said, “From my angle it does make perfect sense.”²⁷⁵ Haddad has taught that “a man should not be questioned why he hit his wife, because this is something between them”.²⁷⁶ Having voiced support for the terrorist organisation Hamas, Haddad has claimed that the West only opposes Hamas out of anti-Muslim hatred, saying, “The only way we can understand this is the fact that there is a high level of enmity and hatred against Hamas as a Muslim group, rather than Hamas as a group. And this amount of hatred and fear, maybe, from Islam pushed them to support Fatah.”²⁷⁷

Haddad has said that homosexuality is a “scourge” and a “criminal act”, and is also reported to have defended female genital mutilation.²⁷⁸ He has complained that Zionists are attempting to smear him because he teaches what he claims are orthodox Islamic beliefs.²⁷⁹ At a press conference in 2012, he talked about his alleged misrepresentation in the media: “I think there is a group of, maybe, Zionists who are trying to spoil my reputation because I’m trying to present orthodox Islam in a very intellectual way, and they don’t like this.”²⁸⁰ Subsequently, Azad Ali has appeared alongside Haitham al-Haddad in discussion programmes for the Islamist website Islam21c, both in the lead-up to the London mayoral election of 2016²⁸¹ and at the time of the 2017 general election.²⁸² Taking an Islamist stance on elections, Haddad has previously said that it is permitted for Muslims to vote because in 50 years it may bring about a Muslim government.²⁸³

Given the views of the speakers invited to iEngage’s freedom of speech event, it is not surprising that much of the narrative that emerged during the event complemented an essentially extremist worldview, primarily one of victimhood in which the Islamic faith is under siege, as well as one that is hostile

²⁷¹ Dyer, E., ‘Banking Restrictions on Extremist-Linked Muslim Groups’, The Henry Jackson Society, 17 November 2014.

²⁷² Ahmed, H. and Hannah Stuart, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir: Ideology and Strategy’, The Centre for Social Cohesion, 2009, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/HIZB.pdf>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷³ ‘CAGE events feature roster of extremists’, Student Rights, 3 September 2014, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2218/cage_events_feature_roster_of_extremists, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁴ ‘Dangerous ideas can’t go unchallenged’, *The Telegraph*, 12 July 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11733678/Dangerous-ideas-cant-go-unchallenged.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁵ ‘Dr. Haitham al-Haddad Press Conference in Norway’, YouTube, 22 December 2012, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aQrx9L79yM>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁶ ‘Haitham Al-Haddad invited to address Essex University Islamic Society’, Student Rights, 4 March 2013, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2055/haitham_al_haddad_invited_to_address_essex_university_islamic_society_update_event_cancelled, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁷ ‘Hamas and the West: A call for justice’, YouTube, 29 June 2007, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9EESFO5MIIE, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁸ ‘Jihadli John’s former university postpones talk by extremist cleric Haitham Al-Haddad’, *The Telegraph*, 26 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11438622/Jihadli-Johns-former-university-postpones-talk-by-extremist-cleric-Haitham-Al-Haddad.html>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁷⁹ ‘Dr. Haitham al-Haddad Press Conference in Norway’, YouTube, 22 December 2012.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ ‘London Mayor Election – The Muslim Vote pt 1 | The BIG Discussion’, YouTube, 4 May 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akWCVq2i8AA>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁸² ‘General Election 2017 | Islam21c Big Discussion | Sh Dr Haitham al-Haddad | Azad Ali | Dr. Salman’, YouTube, 14 May 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vraPL1uP2yk>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁸³ ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Telegraph*, 22 March 2015.

towards liberal notions of freedom of expression, despite claiming to be an event on free speech. Abdul Wahid is reported as telling the conference, “Unrestricted freedom brings harm to society. The freedom to insult undermines and harms society. Do not allow our values and standards to be changed. Carry Islam as an invitation. We face a global attack on Islam to change the values that we hold.”²⁸⁴

Haitham al-Haddad is recorded as saying:

This society does not accept freedom of political allegiance. If someone sides with the enemy that is restricted by anti-terror legislation. Freedom of speech is restricted. We believe the restrictions of the Creator are in the best position to restrict freedom. You can insult God but not the Queen. We believe in freedom to speak but not to insult. Will they restrict it to such an extent that to say “A’uthoobillah – I seek refuge from Shaitan” will be seen an insult (perhaps to satanism)?²⁸⁵

Shakeel Begg told the audience at the event:

I tell my wife and children sleep the night with the expectation that my door will be smashed in by the police. This is the pressure on me as an imam. Sadly, every bad action that a Muslim does is attached to the masjid he or she attends. Why? When a person of another faith commits a crime, do they go to his church, temple or synagogue?²⁸⁶

Abdullah al-Andalusi took the opportunity to attack the Muslim think-tank Quilliam in, from an Islamic perspective, the strongest possible terms. He conjectured that if Quilliam were to go back in time he could imagine the foundation telling the Sahabah (the companions of Muhammed) that they “have an extremism problem”.²⁸⁷

1.4.2 Losing My Religion and Other Mend Speakers

Since becoming Mend, the organisation has continued to host religious speakers with a troubling record of promoting Islamist and extremist positions. These kinds of speakers have often featured at some of Mend’s larger events, such as its Islam in Britain Conferences in 2015 and the Islam Under Attack event in 2014. Mend reports the 2015 conference attracting over 1000 attendees.²⁸⁸ In April 2017, Mend arranged and hosted the Losing My Religion Conference, which was held in both Yorkshire and London.²⁸⁹ Several of the speakers at that conference have extremist links or are on record as having made extremist statements. Again, the choice of such speakers by Mend appears to be indicative of Mend’s wider ideological worldview as an organisation.

1.4.2.1 Abu Eesa Niamatullah

A regular speaker at Mend events has been Abu Eesa Niamatullah. He was a guest speaker at Mend’s Losing My Religion Conference in April 2017, during which he indicated to his audience that believing in “absolute rights”, allowing “women to be free”, being homosexual, or taking people with different beliefs as friends were all part of Muslims losing their religion.²⁹⁰ In October 2014, Niamatullah was a speaker alongside Sufyan Ismail at a Mend event in Bolton titled “Islam Under Attack – What Can You

²⁸⁴ ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims excluded?’, *5 Pillars*, 22 November 2013.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸⁸ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

²⁸⁹ Losing My Religion Conference, available at: <http://losingmyreligionconference.com/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁹⁰ ‘Abu Eesa Niamatullah Losing My Religion’, YouTube, 29 April 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMTpuSgf9dU>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

Do About It?’²⁹¹ Niamatullah has also spoken at Mend’s Islam in Britain Conferences, held in Manchester²⁹² and London²⁹³ in April 2015, as well as at Mend’s London Professionals’ Fundraising Dinner that same month.²⁹⁴

Niamatullah might be regarded as a strange choice of speaker for an organisation advocating engagement in the electoral process. In the past, he has condemned democracy, criticising what he described as “the inherent weakness of democracy” and complaining that in democracy “it’s all down to the masses, to the people, to decide what is right and what is wrong”.²⁹⁵ In the same talk, he went on to say that it should be up to “the Creator [who] is the one who should decide what the laws should be”.²⁹⁶ He has also said that people living in Britain are like “animals ... there is very little difference between our behaviour and the behaviour of dogs or animals and that’s why Sharia is so noble”.²⁹⁷

Abu Eesa Niamatullah is another advocate for HHUGS and supporting those arrested under terror legislation. In a 2013 promotional video for HHUGS, Niamatullah refers to those imprisoned for terror offences, using scare quotes to refer to UK counter-terror laws, he says, “When you are thrown into prison, for no reason, complete injustice, lies a lot of the time as well. Whether that be the extreme treatment of the gulag of Guantanamo, or whether that be in the prisons in this country under ‘anti-terrorism laws’ it’s an incredible difficulty.”²⁹⁸ Invoking religious justification for Muslims to provide financial support to HHUGS, Niamatullah refers to a hadith and states, “Whoever conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah (Subhanahu wa Ta’ala) will conceal the faults of that believer”.²⁹⁹

It has also been reported that Niamatullah has expressed his support for blasphemy carrying the death penalty. In 2007, a piece appeared on the website *Prophetic Guidance* – it has subsequently been taken offline³⁰⁰ – in which Niamatullah is reported to have written, “For the record, the Fuqahā’ (experts in jurisprudence) have agreed that the intentional istihzā’ (insulting) of the Prophets (upon whom be peace) is an act which leads to the death penalty, whether the perpetrator is a Muslim or non-Muslim.”³⁰¹

Considerable exposure has also been given to Niamatullah’s extensive anti-Semitic statements, many of which appeal to a theological form of anti-Semitism by framing Jews as prophet killers, while also referencing the Israeli–Palestinian dispute, to create a particularly potent extremist narrative. In one lengthy diatribe from the time of the Gaza conflict of 2014, Niamatullah draws on religious scripture to claim that a “decree” has been brought upon “the children of Israel”, whom he describes as having a “track record in this insanity”.³⁰² He continues:

Look at them today. Look at the way that they massacre. They blow up babies like as if it’s a computer game. They have no humanity, no morality, no ethics, no deen, no guidance, no light, nothing. So don’t be surprised by what’s going on out there from them. We expect nothing less from them. And they’re killing the prophets without any right, Allah says. To

²⁹¹ ‘MEND: Islam Under Attack - What Can You Do About It?’, Facebook, 19 October 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/297230067145928/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁹² ‘London Professionals’ Dinner’, Facebook, 4 April 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/416873498477370/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁹³ ‘Islam In Britain - London Conference’, Facebook, 4 April 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/937601589618389/>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁹⁴ ‘London Professionals’ Dinner’, Facebook, 4 April 2015.

²⁹⁵ ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Telegraph*, 22 March 2015.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

²⁹⁸ ‘A Message from Abu Eesa Niamatullah’, YouTube, 22 July 2013, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XR8oVUAsu2c>, last visited: 20 October 2017.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ ‘Teddy Bears, Picnics and other Delusions of Grandeur’, article removed from Prophetic Guidance website, http://propheticguidance.co.uk/pdf/Teddy_Bears,_Picnics_and_other_Delusions_of_Grandeur.pdf

³⁰¹ ‘The Wisdom of Abu Eesa Niamatullah’, *Harry’s Place*, 23 March 2015, available at: <http://hurryupharry.org/2015/03/23/the-wisdom-of-abu-eesa-niamatullah/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁰² ‘The Decree Upon Israel - For Killing #FREEPALESTINE’, YouTube, 22 July 2014, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ-z8GTszgo>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

murder the best of people walking, the prophets, that’s what they did. So what of a few Arabs and their kids these days? So what?³⁰³

In the same recording on the war in Gaza, Niamatullah also says, “Let’s talk about the resistance, let’s talk about our heroes instead,”³⁰⁴ an apparent reference to Hamas or the other Jihadist groups involved in the Gaza conflict at that time. Then, moving into wider foreign policy issues, Niamatullah touches on familiar themes of grievance that have been used by extremists to create a sense of a global persecution of Muslims:

Whether they’re our brothers and sisters in Pakistan who are bombed in their sleep by US drone strikes, or our people in Rouhingya being burnt alive by Buddhist monks, or the Sunnis being slaughtered in Iraq and Syria at the hands of ISIS, or those in the Central African Republic being literally butchered by militant Christians, or Ahle-Sunnah in Yemen, or Iran, or Egypt, by again so-called Muslims, or the innocent being massacred by the murtad Basshar Assad. And then the rest of the believers being trialled in various ways, its not always murder and death and destruction. Various tests and trials all around the world, even here in the West.³⁰⁵

Abu Eesa Niamatullah has opposed the role of women in the workplace, saying, “Women should not be in the workplace whatsoever. Full stop. I simply can’t imagine how we will safeguard our Islamic identity in the future and build strong Muslim communities in the West with women wanting to go out and becoming employed in the hell that it is out there.”³⁰⁶ He further stressed, “I am an absolute extremist in this issue in that I don’t have any time for the opposing arguments.”³⁰⁷

On other occasions, Niamatullah has attacked Western tolerance for homosexuality, making a comparison with incest.³⁰⁸ Equally, liberal Muslims are another group particularly condemned by Niamatullah. He has claimed that such moderate elements are “the biggest danger within our community at the moment” and referred to them as “brown sahibs as we used to call them, or as Malcolm X used to call them, house negroes”.³⁰⁹ He accused such Muslims of being “closer to kufr than iman” and claimed they are “trying to hijack” Islam, their objective being “to dilute Islamic religious practice.”³¹⁰ They want to try and get away with individual cultural expression in a multicultural society.³¹¹ Attacking Muslim progressives, Niamatullah states, “If this is progression then we need the stone age, definitely. The stone age is definitely better for our deen and our dunya”.³¹² Niamatullah further claimed that liberal Muslims wish to create a “new Western Islam” that will be in line with those “who want Islam to be washed away”.³¹³

1.4.2.2 Yasir Qadhi

Another speaker who has delivered speeches at a number of Mend events is Yasir Qadhi. Most recently, Qadhi spoke at Mend’s Losing my Religion Conference in April 2017,³¹⁴ and he previously

³⁰³ *ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *ibid.*

³⁰⁶ ‘The baroness, Islamic extremists and a question of free speech’, *The Telegraph*, 22 March 2015.

³⁰⁷ *ibid.*

³⁰⁸ ‘The Decree Upon Israel - For Killing #FREEMUSLIMS’, YouTube, 22 July 2014.

³⁰⁹ ‘Abu Eesa - Progressive Muslims’, YouTube, 15 May 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYBFjUH3fkU>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *ibid.*

³¹² *ibid.*

³¹³ *ibid.*

³¹⁴ Losing My Religion Conference.

spoke at Mend’s Islam in Britain Conferences in Manchester³¹⁵ and London³¹⁶ in April 2015. Another Mend event addressed by Qadhi that month was the London Professionals’ Fundraising Dinner.³¹⁷ Yet Yasir Qadhi is someone who has expressed a number of extremist and hateful views, including against homosexuals, having claimed that modern social attitudes toward homosexuality are a regression.³¹⁸ In the past, Qadhi has referred to the Holocaust as a hoax and propaganda, and claimed that most Islamic studies professors in the United States are Jews who “want to destroy us”.³¹⁹ However, he later retracted these views.³²⁰ Nevertheless, in July 2014 he posted an article to his Facebook page about Palestinian casualties in Gaza, saying, “If this is not a holocaust then what is? Intentionally targeting innocent people, most of whom are women and children, merely for being ‘the Other’. Demonizing an entire population. Stereotyping an entire religion. Dehumanizing an entire ethnicity. ‘Never again!’ they said. Until they started doing it themselves.”³²¹

1.4.2.3 Omar Suleiman

Another of the speakers at Mend’s April 2017 conference was the American-based Imaan Omar Suleiman. In 2013, Suleiman publicly referred to homosexuality as being both a “disease” and a “repugnant shameless sin”.³²² He is also reported to have advocated for implementing sharia law in the United States and to have compared Israel to the terrorist group Islamic State.³²³

1.4.2.4 Zahir Mahmood

Zahir Mahmood has been a guest speaker at several Mend events. Most recently, in November 2016, he was a speaker at Mend Cardiff’s annual dinner.³²⁴ Previously, in April 2015, he spoke at Mend’s Islam in Britain Conferences, both in Manchester³²⁵ and in London³²⁶. Earlier than this, in 2013 when the organisation was still branded as iEngage, Mahmood spoke at the event “Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?”³²⁷ Mahmood has made a number of remarks that are highly problematic, as well as having other concerning connections.

One video from 2009 shows Zahir Mahmood giving an impassioned speech where he claims British soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan have been treated like heroes for occupations that resulted in the deaths of thousands of people in those countries, while he also voiced enthusiastic support for the

³¹⁵ ‘Islam In Britain – Manchester Conference’, Facebook, 3 April 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/931496183550588/>, last visited: 23 October 2017.

³¹⁶ ‘Islam In Britain – London Conference’, Facebook, 4 April 2015.

³¹⁷ ‘London Professionals’ Dinner’, Facebook, 17 February 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/gm.417258391772214/1559700717627426/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³¹⁸ ‘Anti-Gay Islamist Preacher Led Conference in a Bid to Affect UK Elections’, *Huffington Post*, 8 June 2015, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dan-littauer/antigay-islamist-preacher_b_7018216.html, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³¹⁹ ‘Why Yasir Qadhi Wants to Talk About Jihad’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 17 March 2011, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/magazine/mag-20Salafis-t.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²⁰ *ibid.*

³²¹ Yasir Qadhi, Facebook, 16 July 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/yasir.qadhi/posts/10152351034493300>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²² “Trojan Horse” fear over six leading Muslim schools: Ofsted to warn Minister of “serious concerns”, *Daily Mail*, 21 November 2014, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2841916/Islamic-extremism-rife-CofE-school-East-London-institution-special-measures-inspectors-discovered-pupils-segregated-sixth-formers-posted-links-hardline-preachers-Facebook.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²³ ‘Who is Omar Suliman’, *Harry’s Place*, 29 May 2016, available at: <http://hurryupharry.org/2016/05/29/who-is-omar-suleiman/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²⁴ ‘Cardiff: MEND Annual Dinner & Exhibition – #iam2016’, Facebook, 27 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1803713103206101/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²⁵ ‘Islam in Britain – Manchester Conference’, Facebook, 3 April 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/931496183550588/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²⁶ ‘Islam In Britain – London Conference’, Facebook, 4 April 2015.

³²⁷ ‘Freedom of Speech – Are Muslims Excluded?’, Facebook, 21 November 2013.

terrorist organisation Hamas.³²⁸ Mahmoud says explicitly of the internationally proscribed terrorist organisation, “ Hamas are not terrorists, they’re freedom fighters, they’re defending their country.”³²⁹ Later in the same speech he veers into a familiar anti-Semitic trope, stating that Palestinians have spent sixty years living in an “open concentration camp”.³³⁰ In other recordings, Mahmood again claimed that Palestinians are living in an open concentration camp, and it is noticeable that he refers to Israelis simply as “the Jews”, or otherwise uses the terms “Israeli” and “Jewish” interchangeably,³³¹ while also accusing the EU and America of trying to starve the Palestinians.³³² In April 2015, Mahmood spoke at a fundraising event for the extremist organisation Cage.³³³ This event came just months after Cage caused public outrage in February 2015 when its Director, Asim Qureshi, described Islamic State executioner Mohammed Emwazi as a “beautiful young man”.³³⁴

³²⁸ ‘Zahir Mahmood – “ Hamas are freedom fighters”’, YouTube, 19 October 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4jW5vtB1Lo>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³²⁹ *ibid.*

³³⁰ *ibid.*

³³¹ ‘The Palestinian Struggle – Sheikh Zahir Mahmood’, YouTube, 17 January 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZYw7EV-ges>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³³² ‘Talk about Palestine by Sheikh Zahir Mahmood’, YouTube, 24 September 2011, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7UEIZIL_KY, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³³³ ‘Event hosted by Muslim charity fundraised for Cage’, *The Telegraph*, 6 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/investigations/12085794/Event-hosted-by-Muslim-charity-fundraised-for-Cage.html>, last visited: 23 October 2017.

³³⁴ ‘Cage: the extremists peddling lies to British Muslims to turn them into supporters of terror’, *The Telegraph*, 28 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11442602/Cage-the-extremists-peddling-lies-to-British-Muslims-to-turn-them-into-supporters-of-terror.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

2. Counter-Terrorism and Islamophobia

It is difficult to separate out Mend’s work on Islamophobia from the organisation’s campaigning against counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation. Mend has portrayed much recent counter-terrorism legislation as essentially a form of state sponsored Islamophobia. Mend events on Islamophobia have given significant time to condemning schemes such as the counter-radicalisation strategy Prevent, while the organisation’s campaigning against Prevent has often made charges of Islamophobia a core part of its anti-Prevent message. Key figures in Mend, as well as literature produced by the organisation, have portrayed the government’s counter-extremism efforts as essentially a form of state-sponsored Islamophobia in which Muslims and the Muslim community are unfairly singled out and targeted, with their civil liberties and freedoms being taken from them. Azad Ali told a 2017 report by Just Yorkshire, opposing Prevent, “It’s institutionalised a lot of marginalisation, a lot of demonisation of the community. It’s made a lot of confident people become people who now have to bury their head in the sand.”³³⁵

Still more problematic has been the suggestion that both Islamophobia, and counter-extremism as a form of systematic Islamophobia, are aimed at attacking Islam. The claim has been made that Prevent is seeking to criminalise normative Islamic beliefs and practices by labelling them as extreme. The claim being that free expression for Muslims is being limited, along with the suggestion that there is an attempt to push Muslims towards a manufactured version of Islam. More broadly, Mend has also accused counter-extremism measures of being part of an attempt by the state to seize powers for itself, essentially subverting the democratic process, enforcing thought policing, unlawfully curtailing academic freedoms³³⁶ and criminalising dissent generally. These various allegations are melded together in a conspiratorial narrative in which powerful interest groups, Zionist lobbies and liberal Muslim organisations are involved in this effort to increase hatred against Muslims and to attack normative Islam.

2.1 Prevent, Counter-Radicalisation and Counter-Terror Legislation

Opposition to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation has been a staple of Mend’s message and its campaign work. One of Mend’s directors, Azad Ali, has claimed to have been working on challenging the government’s counter-radicalisation strategy Prevent since as early as 2005.³³⁷ Much of Mend’s messaging on the government’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism apparatus has taken on exaggerated and even alarmist tones. Senior figures in Mend have adopted particularly hostile rhetoric against counter-extremism schemes. Speaking in 2014, Mend’s CEO at the time, Sufyan Ismail, told an audience at a mosque in Cheadle that taking government money, such as Prevent funding, would be like adding urine to water.³³⁸

Mend’s opposition to the national counter-radicalisation strategy sits within a much wider campaign in which a loose alignment of groups and organisations voice their criticism of the scheme. While these groups may have different motivations for opposing the strategy, they tend to deploy a shared set of arguments in their campaigning. At the beginning of June 2017, *The Times* ran a series of pieces about the campaign against Prevent. A leader in that issue stated that the move to make Prevent a statutory duty had been seized upon “by groups such as Cage, Mend and Prevent Watch as a threat to free expression. It is nothing of the sort”, and concluded, “Prevent is on the side of the public and of safety.

³³⁵ Rethinking Prevent: an alternative approach, available at: <http://rethinkingprevent.org.uk/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³³⁶ ‘Problems with PREVENT’, Mend, 2017, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Problems-with-PREVENT-Textual-Version-01.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³³⁷ ‘Prevent, the Extremism Bill and the defence of Civil Liberties’, YouTube, 11 October 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62guzzHVP1Q>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³³⁸ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

Its enemies are accomplices to extremism.”³³⁹ In the same issue of the newspaper, Mend was named along with Cage and Prevent Watch in a side box adjoined to a piece featuring an interview with Nazir Afzal, formerly the chief executive of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. In that piece, Afzal protested the role of an anti-Prevent “industry” of organisations responsible for undermining Prevent.³⁴⁰ Afzal blamed this campaign for creating distrust and for promoting “myths” that distorted the reality with regard to Prevent.³⁴¹

Mend has also repeated distorted and misleading claims about Prevent, including such notorious examples as the “terrorist house case”. Referring to that case³⁴² on its website on a number of occasions,³⁴³ Mend has repeated the claim that Muslim pupils can be referred to Prevent over innocent spelling mistakes, such as the case of a ten-year-old Muslim boy who had written that he lived in a “terrorist house”, rather than a “terraced house”. Both the local police and council explained at the time that the story had been reported that safeguarding measures had been taken in this case not simply because of a spelling mistake but because there had also been concerns about domestic violence. Despite this clarification having been given in January 2016, Mend continued to reference this case on its website in August of that year.³⁴⁴

Particularly concerning is the insistence from key figures in Mend and Mend literature that counter-radicalisation efforts have really been about attacking normative Islamic beliefs and practices. While the revised Prevent duty guidance of May 2015 clearly outlines an understanding of extremism that is not specific to any one ideology and which is equally applicable to far right groups,³⁴⁵ Mend has continued to claim that the scheme targets the Islamic religion. Information on the Mend website claims that the Prevent strategy has an unjustified “focus upon religion and theology”³⁴⁶ and that it has “caused widespread alienation and mistrust amongst Muslim communities for conflating religion with extremism”.³⁴⁷ Mend has argued that Muslims are treated as a so-called “Suspect Community”, and claims that Prevent created a “‘pre-criminal space’ wherein innocent individuals are treated with suspicion of probable crimes”.³⁴⁸ In this way, Mend’s case against the Prevent duty tends to swing between the claim that the scheme singles out or targets Muslims specifically, and the claim that it jeopardises the civil liberties of the wider society.

2.1.1 The Case Against Prevent in the High Court

Many of the allegations made by Mend and others against Prevent were raised and addressed in a recent legal challenge to the government’s counter-radicalisation strategy. In 2016 Dr Salman Butt, chief editor of the Islamist website Islam21c, brought a case against the Home Secretary in the High Court which made a number of claims against the Prevent strategy, particularly with reference to its application in places of higher education.³⁴⁹ The case brought against the government claimed that the Prevent duty guidance was exceeding the government’s legal powers and limiting free speech, as well as affecting

³³⁹ ‘Extreme Prejudice’, *The Times*, 3 June 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extreme-prejudice-5zwrjxhw3>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁴⁰ “Myths” by Muslims hit Prevent campaign to fight terror’, *The Times*, 3 June 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/myths-by-muslims-hit-anti-terror-campaign-0lqf9jl5s>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁴¹ *ibid.*

³⁴² ‘Channel - now it’s getting worse’, Mend archived page, 24 August 2016, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170814164716/https://mend.org.uk/news/channel-now-its-getting-worse/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁴³ ‘UN special rapporteur warns Prevent strategy risks “promoting extremism, rather than countering it”’, Mend archived page, 22 April 2016, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170814165027/https://mend.org.uk/news/un-special-rapporteur-warns-prevent-strategy-risks-promoting-extremism-rather-than-countering-it/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁴⁴ ‘Channel - now it’s getting worse’, Mend archived page, 24 August 2016.

³⁴⁵ ‘Revised Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales’, HM Government, March 2015

³⁴⁶ ‘Problems with PREVENT’, Mend, 2017.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Butt v the Secretary of State for the Home Department*, [2017] EWHC 1930 (Admin) (26 July 2017), available at: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/1930.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

rights to free assembly and freedom of religion. A number of the points argued by Dr Butt’s legal team were made on the same grounds as those found in Mend literature on the subject, as well as in speeches made by leadership figures in the organisation. Notably, however, on each of these points, Justice Ouseley was unpersuaded, and in his ruling in July of 2017 he dismissed the claim made against the government.³⁵⁰

Before reviewing the details of Mend’s own campaign against Prevent, it is instructive to consider what was found in the High Court with regard to the same kinds of arguments as deployed by Mend. As mentioned, in the Dr Butt case the judge concluded that the statutory measures in Prevent do not in fact exceed the legitimate need for the government to guard against individuals being drawn into terrorism.³⁵¹ Specifically addressing the question of whether or not the Prevent duty guidance serves a legitimate purpose, and whether it does so proportionately, Justice Ouseley stated, “I regard it as obvious that understanding why people are drawn into terrorist-related activity, and seeking to prevent them from being drawn into that activity, is a proper and necessary activity of the state.”³⁵² Ouseley concluded that, in his judgement, the government had presented a “sound rationale” for the Prevent duty guidance in its 2015 Counter-Extremism Strategy. While Dr Butt’s lawyer called into question the underlying premise that there is necessarily a relationship between non-violent extremism and terrorism – just as Mend has similarly done – the judge concluded that Parliament was entitled to have taken view that there can be causality between the two.³⁵³

Justice Ouseley appears to have been similarly satisfied on the question of proportionality concerning whether the Prevent duty guidance had met the requirement to strike a “fair balance between the rights of the individual and the interests of the community”.³⁵⁴ Indeed, Ouseley observed that it was “clear that the importance of freedom of speech was very much to the fore in Parliament’s concerns” when approving the Prevent duty guidance and the measures in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act.³⁵⁵ However, Dr Butt’s lawyer claimed that Prevent had breached the law on the protection of free speech, and that in regard to higher education it had failed to comply with the duty to ensure free speech at universities.³⁵⁶ This claim is reminiscent of those made by Mend and the wider anti-Prevent campaign, which has alleged that Prevent has had a “chilling effect” on free speech on campus. While Justice Ouseley recognised that the duty might create time-consuming bureaucracy around external speakers visiting campus, he nevertheless stressed, “I am quite unable to accept that this evidences some general chilling effect,” and further stressed, “The Prevent duty does not require freedom of speech to be interfered with.”³⁵⁷ Indeed, Justice Ouseley pointed out that no university had challenged the Prevent duty “or provided, as an institution, evidence that it has created difficulties in practice for the values of freedom of speech and academic freedom”.³⁵⁸

The emphasis in the external speaker policies adopted by higher education bodies has not been on banning speakers, but rather on seeking balanced platforms and encouraging that expressions of extremism not be left unchallenged. Regarding the possible repercussions on freedom of speech for visiting external speakers who might be deemed non-violent extremists, Justice Ouseley noted that “the restriction may only bite to the extent that an external speaker may meet a controlled challenge to his views, or speakers expressing an alternative view as part of reasoned public debate”.³⁵⁹ As Justice Ouseley pointed out, external speakers who may be affected by the policy “remain free to express his or

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*
³⁵¹ *ibid.*
³⁵² *ibid.*
³⁵³ *ibid.*
³⁵⁴ *ibid.*
³⁵⁵ *ibid.*
³⁵⁶ *ibid.*
³⁵⁷ *ibid.*
³⁵⁸ *ibid.*
³⁵⁹ *ibid.*

their beliefs through all other means of communication at their disposal, including to students off campus or via social media. The adverse effect is very limited.”³⁶⁰

The case in the High Court also touched on another allegation levelled by Mend against Prevent, which is that the duty particularly negatively impacts Muslim communities. Dr Butt’s legal team argued that the Prevent duty guidance should warn those implementing it “of the risk that it would have a disproportionate impact on Muslims”. However, to this point Justice Ouseley responded that this was “not a matter of law” and that “no claim is made that it leads to unlawful indirect discrimination. I regard it as obvious that one target of the guidance is Islamist terrorism, and preventing Muslim and non-Muslim people being drawn into it through non-violent Islamist extremism.” Nevertheless, the claim has been made by Mend – and other anti-Prevent campaigners – that Britain’s counter-radicalisation strategy ends up being an attack on conservative Islamic practice, and even on normative Islam itself, just as Mend has also claimed that Prevent penalises those expressing dissenting views on foreign policy matters.

An element of these complaints were touched on by Dr Butt’s lawyer when he criticised the definition of extremism used by the Prevent duty guidance as being overboard and too vague.³⁶¹ He suggested that it was “unclear whether characterising homosexuality as a sin or opposing UK foreign policy in the Middle East would amount to non-violent extremism”. Here Justice Ouseley raised an objection that would equally apply to many versions of this criticism of Prevent, remarking that “put in those deliberately simplistic terms, the question cannot be answered”. As he went on to point out, “Language may or may not amount to non-violent extremism or risk drawing people into terrorism, depending on what is actually said about those matters.”³⁶²

In a line of reasoning that remains pertinent to the question of Islamic extremism, Justice Ouseley reflected on Islamic religious attitudes to adultery with regard to the government’s definition of extremism. In his judgement, Ouseley writes that, “Arguing that adulterers should be stoned to death is violent extremism. Arguing that the law should be changed through non-violent democratic parliamentary means, so that adulterers can be stoned to death in fulfilment of a divinely given law, could be non-violent extremism.”³⁶³

However, Justice Ouseley went on to say that this second approach could still be seen to create a risk of drawing people into terrorism, as “the argument might lead others, persuaded by it of merit of the aim, to reject the means, as an impious impediment to God’s rule on earth”. In doing so, the judge acknowledged the dangers that non-violent Islamists pose even while they purport to disavow terrorism, instead advocating the democratic process as the means by which to enforce religiously inspired laws across the wider society.

Through its literature and campaigning against counter-terror legislation and the Prevent duty, Mend has employed many of the same civil liberties arguments that are commonly heard from the wider anti-Prevent movement. However, as a group that frames itself as being particularly concerned with Islamophobia, Mend has focussed much of its criticism of these laws on their alleged repercussions for Muslims. Broadly, Mend has adopted a narrative with three dubious themes or messages. The first encourages British Muslims to perceive this area of legislation as discriminatory and specifically targeted at them and their religion. The second, addressed more in tone to policymakers and observers, explains that the problem with programmes such as Prevent is that they are perceived by the Muslim community as discriminatory and specifically targeted at them and their religion, which results in them feeling alienated. The third claims that it is actually this sense of alienation that can make people susceptible to being radicalised, and that as such programmes like Prevent are counterproductive.

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*

³⁶¹ *ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *ibid.*

Naturally, these three messages may not always be presented consecutively, but taken together they raise the question of what role Mend and associated groups have in fostering the very perceptions and attitudes that they themselves reference as being problematic. It was notable in the Salman Butt case that the judge raised the possibility that some witnesses from a “broad coalition” of critics of Prevent who complained of the duty being counterproductive might in fact “have made it so, deliberately or through misunderstanding it”.³⁶⁴ In short, it has often been those who have called for this scheme to be scrapped, on the grounds that a toxic public image renders it counterproductive, who have themselves been at the forefront of the effort to give the scheme that toxic image.

2.1.2 Campaigning Against the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act

In the months leading up to the passing of the Counter-Terrorism Act passed by Parliament in early 2015, Mend undertook various types of campaigning against the legislation, as is the legitimate right of any civil society group to do. However, the message and narrative that Mend has adopted in its opposition to the Act has been problematic. At times, Mend’s claims against the counter-terrorism legislation have been alarmist and misleading; more concerning is that it has included elements of the extremist narrative, as described in David Cameron’s counter-extremism speech. Equally, Mend’s campaigning against counter-extremism efforts have often brought it into collaboration with those who are clearly themselves extremists. On multiple occasions, Mend representatives have shared platforms with Cage, which has been described as a pro-terrorist group, such as in December 2016 when Mend’s director Shazad Armin joined Cage’s “National Prevent Tour”³⁶⁵ in Manchester and sat on a panel with Asim Qureshi, who has previously supported Jihad in Iraq and Afghanistan.³⁶⁶

In February 2015, as part of the Stop the Bill Campaign, Mend released a video featuring Sufyan Ismail, titled “MEND’s Action Alert on the Counter Terrorism Bill”.³⁶⁷ At the time, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 was going through Parliament, and in the video Mend’s then CEO warned of the legislation, “the reality is it’s going to curb Muslim civil liberties in a massive fashion to say the least”.³⁶⁸ Ismail discussed a number of measures set out in the Bill. These were measures that were clearly devised by the government to be used in exceptional circumstances against individuals where there was reasonable evidence to suspect they had involvement in terrorist activities.³⁶⁹ Yet, Mend’s CEO encouraged the impression that such measures as the confiscation of passports or Temporary Exclusion Orders would potentially be used against ordinary British Muslim families going on such legitimate trips as holidays, Hajj or Umrah.³⁷⁰

Sufyan Ismail’s more serious distortions about the legislation, however, came with regard to the aspects relating to the Prevent statutory duty. In this section of the video, Ismail reiterates the claim that Prevent is concerned with targeting certain Islamic practices. In doing so, the video endorses misinformation promoted by some extremist elements who have attempted to frame Prevent in essentially conspiratorial language as a concerted effort by the British government to outlaw aspects of the Islamic faith. The claim that Prevent was targeting Islamic religious belief was one of the earliest claims made

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*

³⁶⁵ Cage, Facebook, 22 December 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/CageUK/photos/a.152434384770077.30185.122052607808255/1489394647740704/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁶⁶ ‘Jihadi John: Activist who praised Mohammed Emwazi as “beautiful” caught on video backing jihad’, *The Telegraph*, 27 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11440808/Jihadi-John-Activist-who-praised-Mohammed-Emwazi-as-beautiful-caught-on-video-backing-jihad.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁶⁷ ‘MEND’s Action Alert on the Counter Terrorism Bill - #StopTheBill’, YouTube, 6 February 2015, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_PqzYK6EWM, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

³⁶⁹ ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015’, legislation.gov, available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/6/contents/enacted>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁷⁰ ‘MEND’s Action Alert on the Counter Terrorism Bill - #StopTheBill’, YouTube, 6 February 2015.

against the scheme by Islamists such as Hizb ut-Tahrir from 2008 onwards.³⁷¹ Although Sufyan Ismail was still endorsing such sentiments in the 2015 video, in reality the government’s Channel Duty Guidance – used as part of the counter-radicalisation strategy for assessing indications of whether an individual may be at risk of being drawn into extremism – makes no reference to observance of Islam or Islamic religious practice as an indicator of extremism.³⁷² Furthermore, the guidance quite explicitly states, “Outward expression of faith, in the absence of any other indicator of vulnerability, is not a reason to make a referral to Channel.”³⁷³ Despite this, Mend’s then CEO tells viewers:

The biggest issue, the most significant issue here with Prevent, is that it may well wind up potentially criminalising the actions of socially conservative Muslims; certain things we like to do in terms of how we pray, where we pray, our beards, the niqab women wear. It may well wind up criminalising potentially some of these actions. Looking at all of them through the sphere of radicalisation, us being radicalised Muslims, potentially Islamists on the way to extremism. Unfortunately the programme has that rather unhealthy tendency and track record when it comes to dealing with the Muslim community, and that’s why it’s now becoming a statutory requirement across universities, schools, hospitals, nurseries, councils and many, many more institutions is deeply concerning in terms of the impact it could well wind up having on socially conservative Muslims.”³⁷⁴

Ismail concluded the video with a call to action, referring to the new counter-terror legislation as “insanity and madness”, he tells viewers that the only way they can stop this from going ahead is by meeting with their Member of Parliament to urge them to vote down the legislation.³⁷⁵

More recently, in the approach to the 2017 general election, Mend produced a video reiterating this misleading impression about Prevent.³⁷⁶ The video in question stated that all Muslims need to know about counter-terrorism laws, including Prevent, which it implied would involve doctors, teachers and nurses reporting Muslims for reasons such as a woman starting to wear a headscarf, a man growing a beard, or a Muslim man praying.³⁷⁷

At the time when this legislation was first being prepared, Mend produced a paper for the #StopTheBill website. The “Counter Terrorism and Security Bill Briefing 2014” couched most of its opposition to the legislation in concerns about civil liberties, while also making a series of allegations about how the Bill would be inclined to detrimentally impact Muslims specifically.³⁷⁸ Parts of the document also presented an incredulous tone about the threat from Islamist terrorism. So for instance, when referring to the government’s reasons for introducing the Bill, the paper talked merely about “reports of British citizens travelling abroad to engage in ‘terror-related activity’” and of “perceived threats from those British citizens returning home from conflict zones where they are suspected of having undergone radicalisation”.³⁷⁹

Mend’s briefing paper claimed that powers in the Bill such as the seizure of passports and Temporary Exclusion Orders were “liable to discriminatory application” and were “effectively measures to strip

³⁷¹ Sutton, R., ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to the Prevent Strategy’, The Henry Jackson Society, September 2016, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Myths-and-Misunderstandings-PREVENT-Report-Final-29.09.2016.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁷² ‘Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, April 2015, available at: https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁷³ *ibid.*

³⁷⁴ ‘MEND’s Action Alert on the Counter Terrorism Bill - #StopTheBill’, YouTube, 6 February 2015.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*

³⁷⁶ ‘Get Out and Vote’, Facebook, 1 June 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/videos/1891431304454364/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill Briefing 2014’, Mend, 2014, available at: http://stopthebill.co.uk/file/CTSB2014_Briefing_Pa_v3.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁷⁹ *ibid.*

British citizens of their citizenship rights by rendering them stateless”.³⁸⁰ The paper warned of Temporary Exclusion Orders, stating that there is reason to believe that the Home Secretary may have a high propensity to use arbitrary exclusion.³⁸¹ However, in late May 2017, the current Home Secretary Amber Rudd confirmed that Temporary Exclusion Orders had been used only once since being introduced in February 2015.³⁸²

The document also complained of already existing powers available to the government to refuse entry to the UK to foreign nationals where it is judged that “their presence not be conducive to the public good”.³⁸³ The Mend briefing claimed the case of Sheikh Raed Salah as an example of the “abuse” and “politicisation” of such powers:

Given the sometime arbitrary nature in which exclusions to entry have been applied, eg Sheikh Raed Salah, it is clear that the powers are open to abuse with the Home Secretary effectively permitted to deny the right to travel without demonstration of just cause or reason for preventing passage. The power is further open to abuse considering the politicisation of decisions on denying entry to the UK as evidenced in the Sheikh Raed Salah case.³⁸⁴

Sheikh Raed Salah is an extremist leader of the Islamist group the Islamic Movement in Israel and is notorious for his hate preaching, which has included promotion of the anti-Semitic blood libel.³⁸⁵ He has also been convicted of fundraising for Hamas, of assaulting a police officer and of incitement to violence.³⁸⁶ When the decision by the Home Office was initially challenged, an immigration tribunal ruled that the Home Secretary had been justified in her decision and confirmed that Salah had “engaged in the unacceptable behaviour of fostering hatred which might lead to intercommunity violence in the UK” and that his “words and actions tend to be inflammatory, divisive, insulting and likely to foment tension and radicalism”.^{387 388}

The Mend paper expressed particular opposition to the part of the Bill relating to Prevent and the introduction of a new statutory duty on public services to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”.³⁸⁹ While this safeguarding against terrorism would seem a responsible and uncontroversial provision, the Mend briefing objected on the grounds that Home Office oversight of ensuring the duty is implemented “raises considerable concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of the Home Secretary” and claimed that this represents a “centralisation of power in the Home Office and away from institutions”.³⁹⁰ On the matter of Prevent and civil liberties, the briefing repeated another of the more farfetched claims that were commonly made by those in the anti-Prevent campaign at the time, relating to freedom of expression. With

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*

³⁸¹ *ibid.*

³⁸² ‘Rudd admits anti-terror exclusion powers used only once since 2015’, *The Guardian*, 29 May 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/29/uk-used-anti-terror-exclusion-powers-once-since-2015-amber-rudd-admits>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁸³ ‘Exclusion from UK’, Home Office, 13 April 2017, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/608797/exclusion-from-the-uk-v1.0EXT.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁸⁴ ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill Briefing 2014’, Mend, 2014.

³⁸⁵ ‘Questions over Sheikh Raed Salah’s UK ban’, *BBC News*, 30 June 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-13969105>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁸⁶ ‘Sheikh Salah jailed for Jerusalem “incitement”’, *Ma’an News Agency*, 5 March 2014, available at: <http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=678727>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁸⁷ ‘Banned preacher can be removed says tribunal’, *The Telegraph*, 27 October 2011, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/8851362/Banned-preacher-can-be-removed-says-tribunal.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁸⁸ Two further appeals regarding wrongful detention and the question of Sheikh Salah being expelled from the UK found in his favour.

³⁸⁹ ‘The Prevent duty: Departmental advice for schools and childcare providers’, Department for Education, June 2015, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/439598/prevent-duty-departmental-advice-v6.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁹⁰ ‘Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill Briefing 2014’, Mend, 2014.

particular reference to pre-existing guidance given to universities on external speakers and extremism, the Mend paper complained that the new Bill now “raises the spectre of a further narrowing of civil society and an encroachment on the right to dissent”.³⁹¹

The document also claimed, however, that Mend’s concerns about the statutory duty “largely rest on the fact that the Government has done counter-radicalisation very badly”.³⁹² The briefing then framed its issue with Prevent within the familiar claim that the programme will alienate British Muslims, and asserted, “Placing a statutory duty on a range of specified bodies will do nothing to dispel fears that Muslim communities are being ‘spied on’ by agencies delivering key good and services.”³⁹³ In the same section on Prevent, the briefing went on to claim, “The Bill will exacerbate the problems of an already disenfranchised community and worsen of the ‘suspect community’ narrative causing further polarisation in communities.”³⁹⁴ Adopting some of the language of Prevent itself with regard to the principle that certain factors can contribute to making individuals more “vulnerable to radicalisation”, the briefing implied that the government’s counter-radicalisation efforts could in fact contribute to radicalising people:

Studies show that political marginalisation and exclusion exacerbate the dislocation that can make people vulnerable to radicalisation. By issuing guidance and placing counter-radicalisation requirements on a statutory footing the Bill could prove counter-productive by deepening the very chasms that feed radicalisation, a sense of exclusion.³⁹⁵

In making the above claims and focusing primarily on accusations about exclusion, Mend avoided all mention of the role of extremist and Islamist ideology in radicalising people. Rather, the narrative favoured here leans towards that used by extremist groups such as Cage, which have claimed that it is actually Britain’s efforts to counter terrorism that cause individuals to be pushed into terrorism, as Cage claimed of Islamic State executioner Mohammed Emwazi and Lee Rigby killer Michael Adebolajo.³⁹⁶

Encouraging opposition to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill also became a subject addressed during Mend events on Islamophobia. For instance, while giving a Mend presentation for the Muslim group City Circle in January 2015, titled “Challenging Islamophobia”, Azad Ali devoted a portion of his remarks to attacking Prevent. Repeating the notion that Prevent was being advanced by those with an interest in promoting fear, Ali claimed that “the fact that this can be debated in Parliament, the fact that there’s politicians who think it’s a good idea shows really how bad our society has got, shows how powerful the fear mongering industry has become”.³⁹⁷ He also specifically spoke about the Channel panel process for those cases being referred to Prevent, although it wasn’t explained to the audience present that those referred to the process may simply be offered such support as mentorship or career guidance on a voluntary basis. Instead, Ali spoke of how he had seen an early pilot of Channel in 2004, and told those at the event:

It’s scary, a room full of all the professionals in that local borough, with a case, with a name and everything else; they said this in the playground. And then you have the police, you have the security services, you have the doctors, you have the social workers, everyone deciding what shall we do with this person. You know that’s where we are going as a society. Unbelievable.³⁹⁸

³⁹¹ *ibid.*

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *ibid.*

³⁹⁶ ‘Jihadi John identity revealed: Cage claims that MI5 drove Mohammed Emwazi to extremism are “pathetic”’, *The Telegraph*, 26 February 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11437703/Jihadi-John-identity-revealed-Cage-claims-that-MI5-drove-Mohammed-Emwazi-to-extremism-are-pathetic.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁹⁷ “Challenging Islamophobia”, YouTube, 22 May 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nznmcXnHcdc>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*

Ali also made a series of claims about how the new Prevent duty would allegedly have an impact upon doctors and their patients. He told those at the event that with the duty becoming statutory, “When you’re a doctor, if you don’t report something, you can lose your job. What kind of society is that going to create?”³⁹⁹ Ali continued by suggesting that patient confidentiality would be harmed, claiming that doctors would be reporting their patients to MI5. As he put it:

I go to the doctors for medical treatment and I want to be open and frank. You know, maybe I am going loopy in my head and I want to tell my doctor. But then if I’m thinking, hold on, wait a minute, if I tell the doctor and he’s going to tell MI5 and he’s going to tell the police and everything else. It’s going to destroy our society. But this is exactly what’s happening.⁴⁰⁰

During his critical comments on Prevent and the government’s counter-terrorism efforts, Ali once again pushed the claim that the underlying cause was foreign policy, suggesting that the government should take responsibility for causing this, rather than blaming the Muslim community, as Ali seemed to allege to be the case. He told his audience:

That’s not to say we don’t want to challenge terrorism. That’s not to say that. That’s also to say let’s have an honest conversation about it. You know, the reason. And if you look at every single terrorist that did something stupid, what did they say? “Because you’re in Iraq, because you’re in Pakistan, because you’re in Afghanistan.” Foreign policy! We’re not naive enough to know and not understand that our government needs a foreign policy for economic purposes. We know that. But we also expect our government to say to us, “Yeh that’s going to bring a bit of blowback, but we’re not going to scapegoat you as a community for it.” That’s all we want; fairness. A mature discussion. But that ability is being taken away day in day out.⁴⁰¹

2.1.3 Collaboration with Stand Up To Racism and the National Union of Teachers

As part of the campaign against the Prevent Duty, Mend has at times combined forces with those in trade unions, such as the National Union of Teachers, as well as the far left campaign group Stand Up To Racism. Prevent has faced particularly strong opposition from within the NUT, and in November 2015 Sufyan Ismail was invited by the NUT as a keynote speaker at the annual Black Teachers Conference, where he spoke specifically about Prevent in schools.⁴⁰² In January 2016, it was revealed in *The Telegraph* that there had been significant cooperation between Mend and senior members of the NUT as part of an effort to oppose and undermine the counter-radicalisation strategy.⁴⁰³ According to those reports, Rob Ferguson, a prominent NUT activist in London, along with Alex Kenny of the NUT’s national executive and NUT assistant secretary in Newham Ian Hale, had been working with Mend, and also Cage, on a campaign against Prevent.⁴⁰⁴ In addition, it was reported that the former Hizb ut-Tahrir member Yusuf Patel had been part of the communications of those behind the campaign.⁴⁰⁵

In the communications seen by *The Telegraph*, Rob Ferguson had been in communication with Mend’s working group chair in Newham, Tahir Talati, as part of the writing of a statement condemning Prevent.⁴⁰⁶ Supported by Ian Hale and Imams in the Newham area, the statement made unsubstantiated claims that Prevent was seeking to ban Friday prayers and Islamic dress at local schools. It also claimed

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰² ‘Report on the Black Teachers’ Conference 2015’, National Union of Teachers, November 2015, available at: <https://www.teachers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2014/btc-2015-report-website-version.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁰³ ‘NUT leaders “colluding to undermine anti-terror policies”’, *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2016, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/12117736/NUT-leaders-colluding-to-undermine-anti-terror-policies.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

that Prevent attacks “normal Muslim religious practice” and targets Muslims “for the views they hold on issues such as government foreign policy”.⁴⁰⁷

Alex Kenny has had other connections with Mend and the campaign against Prevent, including having spoken against the counter-radicalisation scheme at the Mend event “The Five Pillars of Islamophobia” in Ilford in September 2015.⁴⁰⁸ Both Alex Kenny and Rob Ferguson wrote sections for Mend and Stand Up To Racism’s joint booklet *Prevent: why we should dissent*.⁴⁰⁹ Rob Ferguson, who has said that Prevent “effectively criminalises people for being Muslims”,⁴¹⁰ is also a member of Stand Up To Racism’s Newham branch and has spoken at a number of Stand Up To Racism national events.⁴¹¹

Through 2016 and 2017, Mend has undertaken an increasing amount of collaboration with Stand Up To Racism, specifically with regard to campaigning against Prevent, as well as on the issue of prejudice against Muslims. In addition to participating in a number of events, Mend and Stand Up To Racism have jointly produced the already mentioned pamphlet attacking the counter-radicalisation strategy, titled *Prevent: why we should dissent*. Azad Ali in particular has played a prominent part in this collaboration, jointly authoring the booklet on Prevent with Rob Ferguson and speaking at some Stand Up To Racism’s major events, such as the rally against President Trump in Whitehall in March 2017.⁴¹²

Similarly, Siema Iqbal spoke at a Stand Up To Racism anti-Trump rally in Manchester, where she was joined by Cage’s Moazzam Begg.⁴¹³ Mend’s Sahar Al-Faifi spoke at a Stand Up To Racism event in Cardiff in November 2016, where she claimed that “Islamophobia has become accepted and a lot of people have become socially conditioned to accept it as the norm. This is as a result of the multimillion Islamophobia industry out there and Robert Murdoch media industry, and not only this, but also by the politicians of fear across the political spectrum.”⁴¹⁴ Mend was also listed as being featured at a Stand Up To Racism meeting in Tooting in December 2016, where Moazzam Begg of Cage was included among the panellists, and one of the chairs was Suliman Gani, an Imam who is also on record for having made a number of extremist statements over the years.⁴¹⁵

Mend has collaborated on arranging a series of joint events with Stand Up To Racism, including in March 2017 in both Birmingham⁴¹⁶ and Walsall.⁴¹⁷ In February 2017, Azad Ali participated in an anti-Prevent panel event jointly hosted by Stand Up to Racism and the pro-terrorist group Cage.⁴¹⁸ The event took place in Sheffield and Azad Ali was joined on the panel by Cage’s outreach director, the former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg, as well as by Louise Regan, the senior vice president of the

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Prevent – We can beat this racist clampdown’, *Socialist Worker*, 22 September 2015, available at: <https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/41349/Prevent+-+We+can+beat+this+racist+clampdown>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁰⁹ *Prevent: why we should dissent*, Mend and Stand Up To Racism, 2017.

⁴¹⁰ ‘NUT leaders “colluding to undermine anti-terror policies”’, *The Telegraph*, 23 January 2016.

⁴¹¹ ‘Stand up to Racism – Islamophobia Burkini Bans and the Rise in Islamophobic Hate Crimes’, YouTube, 11 October 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNvf9UczApE>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹² ‘Stop Trump’s Muslim Ban’, YouTube, 23 March 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4awYoUjvoM>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹³ ‘After Trump’s Inauguration: Manchester Stands up to Racism Rally’, Eventbu, 2 March 2017, available at: <https://gb.eventbu.com/manchester/after-trump-s-inauguration-manchester-stands-up-to-racism-rally/1082099>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹⁴ ‘Anti Racism Cardiff: SUTR / MEND’, YouTube, 19 November 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e42AdqppwM4>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹⁵ ‘South London SutR – Public Meeting’, YouTube, 13 December 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jRwqAa3r70>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹⁶ ‘Birmingham: Stand Against Racism and Islamophobia’, Facebook, 2 March 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/212935002513033/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹⁷ ‘Walsall: Stand Against Racism and Islamophobia’, Facebook, 13 February 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/gm.1723856520973440/1838718919725603/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴¹⁸ ‘Prevent: Why We Should Dissent’, Facebook, 21 January 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SheffieldSUTR/photos/gm.713248112175818/1673936706238055/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

National Union of Teachers.⁴¹⁹ During that event, Ali spoke about Prevent and suggested that the right to dissent was being taken away, warning that this would lead to fear and dictatorship.⁴²⁰ Ali also spoke about the media’s portrayal of Muslims and claimed that the positive stories in the media were about Muslims whom most Muslims would not consider to be Muslim.⁴²¹ He also claimed that this had been an underlying purpose of Prevent, to try to coerce Muslims into adopting a “manufactured” version of Islam.⁴²² As he put it:

Even that one positive – if you like – or moderate story about the Muslim, is about the Muslim who the media considers a Muslim, meaning most Muslims wouldn’t recognise that person as a Muslim. So there is this manufacturing of what Islam should be, what a Muslim should be. And then the community is being pushed towards that. And if you don’t meet what the media say are Muslims, then you get labelled, and those labels are what? What are the labels Muslims get? Terrorist and extremist. The very thing that Prevent has been created to do.⁴²³

Mend participated in the Stand Up To Racism national conference in October 2016, where Mend’s Siema Iqbal spoke on a panel chaired by Azad Ali.⁴²⁴ The conference was attended by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as well as Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott.⁴²⁵ Azad Ali was also a speaker on another panel at the conference, this one specifically on the subject of Prevent. In that session, Ali spoke alongside the former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg of Cage.⁴²⁶ Begg referred dismissively to terrorists and terrorism as “the actions of perhaps a handful of people from our community who do ridiculous things”, and complained of being targeted by the police as a result.⁴²⁷ Begg also told the conference, “The Prevent strategy has introduced something that has clearly failed, those people who instituted it and who were leading on it, like Sir Peter Fahy who was the lead on Prevent, have said now that Prevent has started to make this country look like a police state that is governed by a thought police.”⁴²⁸ In reality, while in 2014 Sir Peter Fahy had warned that to avoid thought policing, defining extremism shouldn’t be left to the police,⁴²⁹ Fahy has otherwise been a vocal defender of Prevent,⁴³⁰ including supporting the programme’s expansion.⁴³¹ Yet, adding to the sense of conspiracy, Moazzam Begg claimed that the government was creating “a state of fear and terror for ordinary people” through “its arms that exist within the media and beyond” in an attempt to “seize power” for itself.⁴³³

Another panellist, Unite Against Fascism’s assistant secretary Brian Richardson, referred to “the horrors of Prevent” and remarked that Prevent had been created as part of a “supposed counter-terror strategy”.⁴³⁴ As well as contending that Prevent is really about spying and “snooping”, his other claims included that the legislation is a threat to trade unionists and those with dissenting views on foreign policy.⁴³⁵ Richardson also claimed that David Anderson, the former independent reviewer of terror

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁴²⁰ ‘Sheffield Stand Up To Racism Rally’, YouTube, 28 February 2017.

⁴²¹ *ibid.*

⁴²² *ibid.*

⁴²³ *ibid.*

⁴²⁴ ‘Stand up to Racism – Islamophobia Burkini Bans and the Rise in Islamophobic Hate Crimes’, YouTube, 11 October 2016.

⁴²⁵ *Prevent: why we should dissent*, Mend and Stand Up to Racism, 2017.

⁴²⁶ ‘Prevent, the Extremism Bill and the defence of Civil Liberties’, YouTube, 11 October 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62guzzHVP1Q>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴²⁷ *ibid.*

⁴²⁸ *ibid.*

⁴²⁹ ‘Chief constable warns against “drift towards police state”’, *The Guardian*, 5 December 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/dec/05/peter-fahy-police-state-warning>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴³⁰ ‘Policing Prevent’, Wadham College, 23 February 2016, available at: <https://www.wadham.ox.ac.uk/news/2016/february/policing-prevent>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴³¹ ‘Anti-extremism drive puts British values at risk, says police chief’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2015, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/oct/19/government-extremism-crackdown-hurt-uk-values-peter-fahy-manchester>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴³² Later, in 2016, Sir Peter Fahy signed a joint statement raising concerns about aspects of the proposed counter-extremism Bill; however, no version of the Bill has so far ever been put before Parliament.

⁴³³ ‘Prevent, the Extremism Bill and the defence of Civil Liberties’, YouTube, 11 October 2016.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

legislation, had said that Prevent “demonises Muslim communities”,⁴³⁶ when there is no evidence to suggest that David Anderson has made such a statement.

During his remarks, Azad Ali spoke of having been involved with challenging Prevent since 2005 and suggested that at that time there was widespread agreement among experts that counter-radicalisation efforts would actually be the cause of radicalisation. As he put it, “In the early days the police, the terrorist experts, they all disagreed with it, they said it doesn’t stop terrorism, it doesn’t work, it’s never going to work, all you’re doing is actually increasing the likelihood of people getting more radicalised, angry, and perhaps getting into things that they shouldn’t get into.”⁴³⁷ Ali also responded to a question about Muslim community engagement with the Prevent strategy. Asserting that some Muslim individuals and organisations who cooperate with Prevent do so for the financial benefits of government funding, he then continued by saying, “But also, I don’t want to make excuses for them, there are Muslims who sell out as well.”⁴³⁸

2.1.4 Prevent: Why We Should Dissent

In January 2017, both Azad Ali and Brian Richardson – along with NUT leader Rob Ferguson and Ben Windsor – authored a pamphlet published jointly by Mend and Stand Up to Racism, called *Prevent: why we should dissent*. The pamphlet has subsequently been included among the literature distributed by Mend at events and from information stands run by the group. This document explains that it builds on the panel event at the 2016 Stand Up to Racism conference and is aimed at “exposing the fallacy and divisive nature” of the Prevent agenda, stating that the pamphlet’s contributors are “united in their belief that Prevent demonises Muslims and divides communities”.⁴³⁹

Prevent: why we should dissent provides a comprehensive account of the two organisations’ attitudes towards the UK’s counter-radicalisation strategy; it is also filled with grossly misleading and unsubstantiated allegations. Among the most outlandish of claims are those in a section attributed to Michael Mansfield QC, in which the UK’s counter-extremism strategy is compared to the brainwashing of “totalitarian nightmares”, with references to intellectuals incarcerated in “the gulags of the Soviet Union”.⁴⁴⁰ Later, the same document claims that Prevent “has tried to stop community opposition to Nazis”.⁴⁴¹ Another part of the pamphlet argues that Prevent is based on a “discredited notion of ‘pre-crime’ that belongs more in the realms of science fiction not a free society”.⁴⁴²

Much of the document is devoted to making the case that the counter-radicalisation programme restricts basic political freedoms, with Rob Ferguson claiming that “Prevent and Channel are a breach of basic civil rights”.⁴⁴³ In a section attributed specifically to Mend’s Azad Ali, it is alleged that Prevent has turned professionals in a range of public services into “thought police”, and accuses it of “undermining civil society”.⁴⁴⁴ The pamphlet explicitly states that Prevent undermines free speech and democracy, claiming that the scheme has “led to closing down of space for political debate, particularly on Prevent, Islamophobia and civil liberties”, and that Prevent could also lead to measures for suppressing “meetings on anti-fracking campaigns, climate change or Palestinian rights”.⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, it is wrongly claimed that “support for Palestine, or identifying innocent victims of war in the Middle East as victims of government foreign policy”, are seen by Prevent as indicators of extremism.⁴⁴⁶ In reality, there is

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*

⁴³⁹ *Prevent: why we should dissent*, Mend and Stand Up to Racism, 2017.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁴² *ibid.*

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*

nothing in the Channel Duty Guidance to indicate that these things would be considered as grounds for a referral to the scheme.⁴⁴⁷

The other major accusation against Prevent – one made throughout the pamphlet – is that the scheme is responsible for increasing hatred and division, primarily against Muslims. Although it is also worth noting that the document also claims that Prevent demonises people with mental health problems.⁴⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the charge that Prevent is singling out Muslims is an overriding one, with the claim repeatedly made that Prevent treats British Muslims as a suspect community. This is despite the fact that the working definition of extremism used by the government’s Prevent Duty Guidance not only avoids referencing any one section of society, but it even leaves out any mention of specific extremist ideologies.⁴⁴⁹ Yet, as Michael Mansfield QC puts it in the section of the pamphlet written by him, “effectively, whole communities are being demonised and criminalised on the suspicion that terrorism can be spotted in this way”.⁴⁵⁰

Rather than explaining the way in which Prevent seeks to safeguard educational institutions from becoming spaces in which extremists could prey on young people, the pamphlet instead claims that Prevent obliges teachers to “differentiate between ‘good Muslims’ and ‘bad Muslims’”.⁴⁵¹ In his section, Azad Ali claims that “Muslim parents live in fear of their children being singled out for ‘deradicalisation’ programmes just because they give legitimate voice to burgeoning political interests and causes”.⁴⁵² Indeed, more broadly, Ali asserts that Prevent has “rendered British Muslims fearful of exercising their civil and political rights”.⁴⁵³

Other contributors focus on the claim that Prevent is part of a wider trend that particularly discriminates against Muslim women. Much of this claim appears to be based on the myth that wearing items of religious clothing is viewed by Prevent as an indication of radicalisation. Tayyabah Ahmed writes that Prevent is “degrading Muslim women, young and old alike; under the guise of promoting ‘women’s liberty’, real freedom of choice and individual liberty are curtailed”. She further implies that her decision as a teenager to wear a hijab, if made now, might be enough to have her referred to the Channel programme.⁴⁵⁴ Similarly, referring to former Prime Minister David Cameron – who introduced Prevent as a statutory duty – and his alleged attitude toward Muslim women, Heena Khaled writes, “It appears that for David Cameron, ‘British values’ now consists of passing judgement on individuals based on their identity, physical appearance, dress or pronunciation.”⁴⁵⁵

Prevent: why we should dissent even goes so far as to suggest that the thinking behind Prevent is contributing to a rise in the extreme right; this is despite the fact that the far right is one of the primary forms of extremism that Prevent works to guard against. Yet the pamphlet claims, “The narrative of suspect community upon which Prevent is based, is both shared by and fuels the growth of the far-right, fascists and the likes of Donald Trump across Europe and beyond.” Indeed, the pamphlet essentially echoes aspects of conspiracies endorsed in extremist circles. Claiming that in conjunction with the media, there is an effort by mainstream political figures not to combat racism but to encourage it, the pamphlet states that there is a “climate of racism, anti-refugee hatred and islamophobia fuelled by mainstream politicians and by sections of the media”.⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, suggesting that the government is perhaps behind certain portrayals of Muslims in the media, Azad Ali writes in his section that “the

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, April 2015.

⁴⁴⁸ *Prevent: why we should dissent*, January 2017.

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Channel Duty Guidance: Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism’, HM Government, April 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ *Prevent: why we should dissent*, January 2017.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁵² *ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*

Home Office seems to coordinate its messaging with the media to make sweeping statements about British Muslim communities”.⁴⁵⁷

Alex Kenny, a leader in the National Union of Teachers, writes in the pamphlet that there should now be an independent review of Prevent because the programme has become discredited and toxic.⁴⁵⁸ Yet arguably it is precisely the kind of narrative pushed in this document that has sought to make Prevent toxic, particularly among Britain’s Muslim communities. Far from seeking to accurately inform readers or the wider public, the representation of the national counter-radicalisation programme seen here appears set to encourage alarm, alienation and even a sense of conspiracy about the British government and its relation to the media. Taken as a whole, the case made in this pamphlet is not one of taking issue with possibly flawed elements of a good faith effort by government to protect the public from extremism. Rather, counter-radicalisation safeguarding in Britain’s public services is smeared as an attempt by the government to crush civil liberties and to single out Muslims for persecution on the basis of expressions of their faith. At its most fanciful it implies that the government colludes with the media to stoke hatred of Muslims and that the Prevent programme is essentially functioning in tandem with racist and fascist elements.

2.1.5 Marxism 2017

In July 2017, the Socialist Workers Party held a four-day event in London, called Marxism 2017. One of the sessions at this conference was titled “Challenging Prevent and Islamophobia”, and it featured Azad Ali and Siema Iqbal of Mend, as well as Moazzam Begg of the extremist group Cage and Ameen Hadi of UNISON. The panel was chaired by the SWP’s Naila Ashraf.⁴⁵⁹ During his part of the panel discussion, Azad Ali repeated the familiar accusation that Prevent involves “thought policing”, and he claimed, “Now what we live, is a society where Muslims are constantly watching what they say. There is this restriction that is placed on them, and Prevent has played a very big role in this. It has institutionalised Islamophobia.”⁴⁶⁰ Endorsing the notion that Islamophobia is an intentionally orchestrated phenomenon, Ali explained, “If you look at how Muslims are treated that do not follow a particular line, if you look at organisations how they are treated if they do not follow a particular line. The term we are starting to use now is ‘Professional Islamophobia’.”⁴⁶¹

Discussing the evolution of Prevent, Azad Ali criticised the move by the authorities from focussing only on violence to dealing also with extremism more broadly. Ali lamented, “Unfortunately, what we have now has gone back in time, and we’re now trying to Prevent extremism, and we’re trying to de-radicalise people.”⁴⁶² While Mend and Mend speakers very rarely give any indication of what programme they would envisage in place of Prevent to stop people being drawn into terrorism, on this occasion Azad Ali was quite frank about saying that he didn’t believe this was a problem. On this subject he explained to the audience:

We have to not rush into finding a solution for a flawed policy. So one of the questions that I get asked all the times is, “Ok so Prevent is bad, what would you say is the alternative?” and the problem with that question is its forcing me to accept the premise that there was a problem in the first place. I’m too long in the tooth to fall for that trap. But unfortunately there are people in our community who will fall for that trap, because they have not experienced it from day one, they don’t see what’s going on. So people will try to find a problem, for something that wasn’t a problem in the first place.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Challenging Prevent and Islamophobia - Moazzam Begg, Siema Iqbal, Azad Ali & Ameen Hadi’, YouTube, 31 July 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0P8Eof-47U>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁶² *ibid.*

⁴⁶³ *ibid.*

Speaking still more candidly, Ali outlined an alternative approach for dealing with terrorism. In effect, it appeared to be a call to grant political concessions to those who engage in acts of terrorism. Although no specifics were detailed, earlier in his talk Ali had expressed his often repeated belief that grievances over foreign policy drive terrorism. Referencing the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, and the need to “negotiate a political issue”, he stated, “Terrorism is by and large a political issue. So those people that are carrying it out have some political issues. You need to deal with it on a political level.”⁴⁶⁴

During her part of the panel discussion, Siema Iqbal said that she agreed with Moazzam Begg and Azad Ali’s comments on foreign policy as a driver of terrorism. She said, “Until we start having the honest discussions, like Azad Ali said, and like Moazzam has said, and we talk about foreign policy, things are not going to get any better.”⁴⁶⁵ She also attacked Prevent with, among others, the claims that it demonises people with mental health problems and risks patient confidentiality.⁴⁶⁶

Moazzam Begg characterised the counter-radicalisation programme in particularly stark terms when he asked, “If we target and hammer the Muslim community again, under the microscope, under the magnifying glass of Prevent, has it made us safer?”⁴⁶⁷ Later, his claims became still more provocative when he said of counter-terror legislation:

This is all part of a broader picture that has been targeting the community, the Muslim community, for many years, but in a bigger story it’s been targeting the black community, the Irish community, the trade unionists, anybody who dissents. So bear in mind, that it is the nature of the beast that is in power right now, that it wants to target people based on their dissent.⁴⁶⁸

2.1.6 *The Campaign on Social Media*

Mend and Mend officials have continued their campaign against Prevent over social media channels: on Facebook and also over Twitter. The potential audience here is sizeable, with Mend’s Activity Report 2016 noting that the organisation had over 25,000 followers on Facebook and Twitter at the time.⁴⁶⁹ The tone taken over social media is often more candid and outspoken than in Mend’s official literature. The same is true of how Mend’s officials discuss Prevent over social media, with Siema Iqbal going so far as to compare the counter-radicalisation strategy to totalitarianism, in a tweet sent in February 2017.⁴⁷⁰ The social media campaign has included promoting extremist claims about the counter-radicalisation programme, as well as promoting content with an extremist narrative on websites such as *Coolness of Hind*, *Middle East Eye* and *Cage*. Through social media, Mend has promoted familiar themes, such as the claim that terrorism is being caused by foreign policy, that the Prevent duty is a form of thought control as well as an attack on those practising the Islamic faith.

In April 2015, the Mend Twitter account tweeted a story from the *Metro* newspaper about Prevent in schools and asked, “Is Prevent’s statutory requirement on schools an exercise in thought control? #Islamophobia”.⁴⁷¹ While in August 2016, Mend tweeted, “Why is Prevent policing expressions of faith among British Muslims when religious observance is least likely trait among extremists?”⁴⁷² That same

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁴⁷⁰ Siema Iqbal, Twitter, 22 February 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/siemaiqbal/status/834523682424893440>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁷¹ Mend Community, Twitter, 7 April 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/585542762860253184>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁷² Mend Community, Twitter, 16 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/765591516924538881>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

month, Mend tweeted, “2016: The Beginning of The End of Prevent”, and linked to an article by Dilly Hussain.⁴⁷³ The opinion piece claims that through Prevent, governments have been trying to divide Muslims into “good Muslim/bad Muslim” categories based on how religiously devout they are.⁴⁷⁴ Hussain writes that by focusing on ideology as a driver of radicalisation, Prevent “continues to wreak havoc in Muslim communities”, and that it should instead be recognised that foreign policy grievances and deprivation are the actual underlying causes.⁴⁷⁵ The article goes on to state that “Prevent is not in the business of preventing terrorism”, and claims instead that “Prevent is and always has been about policing ideology – normative Islamic concepts and beliefs rooted in the hearts and minds of Muslims, which the establishment is hell-bent in diminishing”.⁴⁷⁶ Hussain concludes with the threatening warning that, “Unless the British government removes the neoconservative hawks within its ranks, and starts listening to grassroots Muslim organisations, Muslim youth will continue to be ‘radicalised’.”⁴⁷⁷

In March 2017, in the wake of the Westminster Bridge attack, Mend tweeted a link to a story from the website *Middle East Eye*, writing, “Exploiting fear, politicians enact policies like Prevent which is ‘state-sponsored Islamophobia’ #EndPrevent”.⁴⁷⁸ The article the tweet links to, by Roshan Muhammed Salih, claims that the “counter-terrorism and Islamophobia industries” were the winners from the Westminster Bridge attack in which five people were killed.⁴⁷⁹ The author claims that the government’s counter-terrorism efforts feed off of an “Islamophobia industry” in some form of symbiotic relationship.⁴⁸⁰ In this piece promoted by Mend, Salih also complains that “aspects of normative Islam – such as sharia law, an Islamic state or the idea that homosexuality is a sin” – are being singled out as part of a strategy by Britain’s counter-terrorism activities.⁴⁸¹ Instead, it is claimed that radicalisation is being driven by “rampant Islamophobia, racism and disenfranchisement”, and also by “Britain’s murderous foreign policy”.⁴⁸² Salih explains, “Terrorism breeds terrorism – if any country metes out death and destruction abroad, it won’t escape from some of that death and destruction at home.”⁴⁸³

In June 2016, Azad Ali posted on Facebook using the #EndPrevent hashtag⁴⁸⁴. In the post, he wrote that, having witnessed Prevent over the past 11 years, he had seen how it had “tried to destroy the Muslim community”.⁴⁸⁵ With regard to defenders of the Prevent duty who point to its work on combatting the far right, Ali wrote, “I hope I don’t see any Muslims agree with Prevent. It has tried to destroy us we cannot allow it to destroy the white community due to the actions of a few.”⁴⁸⁶ In his post, he also framed Prevent as part of a much wider Islamophobic agenda pushed from the top of government, as well as via the media: “As for who do we hold to account for the rise of Islamophobia well that starts with David Cameron and goes all the way down to the journalists that write the Islamophobic stories for their papers and includes those that further perpetuate the Islamophobic narrative either via Prevent programmes or other.”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁷³ Mend Community, Twitter, 25 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/768905196055375872>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘2016: The Beginning of The End of Prevent’, *Huffington Post*, 24 January 2017, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dilly-hussain/prevent-beginning-of-end_b_9065820.html, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ Mend Community, Twitter, 27 March 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/846396398228701185>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁷⁹ ‘Feeding off terror: More security, fear and bombing will not end this’, *Middle East Eye*, 24 March 2017, available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/westminster-attack-counterterrorism-islamophobia-779021590>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁸² *ibid.*

⁴⁸³ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ Azad Ali, Facebook, 19 June 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10154300051743383>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*

In another post, this time from October 2016, Azad Ali shared a link to a story suggesting that a video showing the murder of the journalist James Foley by Islamic State may have been staged. Along with *The Telegraph* article – which did not actually dispute that Foley had been murdered by IS – Ali wrote, “I’ve said this from day one! It’s all coming out now and yet we have dimwits from the Home Office wanting us to pursue (#prevent) their complicity in this charade called war on terror. If they actually cared for Muslims they’d stop bombing them.”⁴⁸⁸ Beneath the post, in the comments section, Ali wrote of the need to speak out against “the impact of foreign policy and the false flag operations that are exposed”⁴⁸⁹; an apparent further suggestion of conspiracy, although it is not entirely clear whether the use of the term “false flag” in this instance refers to terrorism.⁴⁹⁰ Also in the comments, Ali claimed that Prevent is being used to silence those who challenge alleged government propaganda: “Our government is a complicit poodle in the War on Terror and the 2nd victim of all such wars are the innocent BUT the 1st is truth (honesty). War survives on propaganda and #Prevent is nothing but a tool to silence those who see the propaganda and refuse to stay silent.”⁴⁹¹

In September 2016, Mend promoted a report by the pro-terrorist group Cage over Twitter called *The “science” of pre-crime: The secret “radicalisation” study underpinning Prevent*.⁴⁹² This report, among other things, presents misleading claims about the degree to which those employed in the public sector are required to make assessments of individuals and their vulnerability to radicalisation.⁴⁹³ Mend made a series of highly inflammatory tweets in November 2016 which drew on the message of Cage’s recent report. These included one that read, “There is no doubt that Prevent has targeted British Muslims and has had a devastating impact on them. #EndPREVENT #PreCrime #ERG22”, while another stated, “Muslims are not guinea pigs to be abused by Govt pursuing ideology over evidence based research #EndPREVENT #PreCrime #ERG22”. Another tweet that day linked to a piece on the Mend website on referrals to Channel: “how young Muslims pay the price for ‘secret, flawed research’ #EndPREVENT #PreCrime #ERG22”.⁴⁹⁴ In another November 2016 tweet, Mend asked, “Is the right to free speech contingent on subject exercising it? One rule for Muslims, one for everyone else? #EndPrevent”.⁴⁹⁵

Also in November 2016, when the *Independent* ran a story about children making phone calls to Childline on account of their fears of terrorism, Azad Ali linked the story to Islamophobia and tweeted, “Projecting an exaggerated threat and creating fear and panic whilst demonising one community aka #Prevent #IAM2016”.⁴⁹⁶ In August of 2016, Mend had sent a series of tweets attacking the NSPCC after reports that the charity had produced guidance on how to discuss terrorism-related issues with children. In one, Mend tweeted, “@NSPCC use posters to push surveillance state further into people’s lives #EndPrevent”.⁴⁹⁷ In another, Mend tweeted, “Where will Muslim pupils go to report racist abuse as NSPCC has started peddling Prevent?”⁴⁹⁸ On the NSPCC, Mend also tweeted, “What @NSPCC will do to its reputation if it becomes complicit in alienation of young British Muslims? #EndPrevent”.⁴⁹⁹ In

⁴⁸⁸ Azad Ali, Facebook, 6 October 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10154615022338383>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁹² Mend Community, Twitter, 29 September 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/781456052315426816>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁹³ Sutton, R., ‘Myths and Misunderstandings: Understanding Opposition to the Prevent Strategy’, The Henry Jackson Society, September 2016.

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ Mend Community, Twitter, 22 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/801105577573105668>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁹⁶ Azad Ali, Twitter, 13 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/797755161418547200>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁹⁷ Mend Community, Twitter, 31 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/770944777290407937>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁹⁸ Mend Community, Twitter, 1 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/760202224165203968>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁴⁹⁹ Mend Community, Twitter, 31 August 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/770945528288935940>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

December 2016, Azad Ali tweeted with the #EndPrevent hashtag referring to the Prevent duty as “psychological child abuse” while linking to a piece on the Islamist blog, Coolness of Hind.⁵⁰⁰

Mend has also used posts about Prevent on social media to attack Muslim groups working on counter-extremism, such as Quilliam. In October 2015, Mend posted a series of tweets, one of which claimed that government policy was being driven by the Quilliam Foundation, and another which stated that since the government was refraining from giving money or a platform to extremists, it should not be working with Quilliam.⁵⁰¹ Mend posted another tweet in November 2015 which included a quote accusing Quilliam of “supporting a witch hunt”.⁵⁰² Also in November 2015, Mend retweeted a tweet by Yusuf Patel referring to the Quilliam Foundation, which read, “Prevent is being driven by the likes of QF. It’s like the burglar who burgled you being made a security expert over your home. #IAM2015”.⁵⁰³

More recently, in August 2017, Sufyan Ismail attacked a new initiative by Imams to promote a more progressive interpretation of British Islam. Ismail alleged a connection with Prevent and made accusations of government interference with the Muslim community. The initiative by senior Islamic clerics stated its aims as being to create the UK’s first national council of Muslim theologians, with the intention of issuing progressive religious rulings and challenging “regressive cultural practices”.⁵⁰⁴ One of the leading figures in the initiative, Qari Asim, has been on record speaking out against terrorism and opposing forced marriage,⁵⁰⁵ yet his involvement came under attack from Ismail. In one tweet, Sufyan Ismail stated, “Qari Asim knee-deep in PREVENT, not ‘credible’ man in community’s eyes. This smells like Govt. meddling in Muslim Comm. again!”⁵⁰⁶ In another tweet, Ismail criticised Asim and the initiative, accusing that it was contributing to division in the community. Tweeting at Qari Asim, Ismail stated, “@QariAsim we already have an umbrella body in @MuslimCouncil – Support and strengthen it rather than furthering division @mendcommunity”.⁵⁰⁷

2.2 Islamophobia

At times, Mend represents itself as an organisation primarily concerned with combatting anti-Muslim prejudice; at others, the focus is represented as being more on increasing Muslim political engagement. In recent years the emphasis appears to have been more often on the former. Certainly Mend has undertaken a huge amount of work to increase public awareness about this issue. It has now created something called the Islamophobia Response Unit which, among other things, allows victims to report instances of Islamophobia; although in the past, Mend officials had opposed recording these crimes through third-party NGOs, and had been critical of Tell Mama’s work in this area. In any case, Mend has put a great deal of energy into raising the profile of Islamophobia within the wider public debate. However, while civil society efforts to combat prejudice and bigotry are usually to be welcomed, over the years Mend’s (and previously iEngage’s) work on Islamophobia has not been unproblematic. Far from it.

⁵⁰⁰ Azad Ali, Twitter, 1 December 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/804285922414100480>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰¹ Mend Community, Twitter, 19 October 2015 <https://twitter.com/MENDcommunity/status/656127677884141568>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰² Mend Community, Twitter, 26 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/MENDcommunity/status/669982854642798592>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰³ Yusuf Patel, Twitter, 23 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/SREIslamic/status/668883459939704832>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰⁴ ‘Imams join forces in pursuit of a more progressive British Islam’, *The Times*, 18 August 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/imams-join-forces-in-pursuit-of-a-more-progressive-british-islam-plus-who-speaks-for-british-muslims-ddzsn8khx>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ Sufyan Ismail, Twitter, 18 August 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/SufyanGIsmail/status/898509913890148352>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰⁷ Sufyan Ismail, Twitter, 18 August 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/SufyanGIsmail/status/898519517223157760>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

All too often, the messaging adopted on Islamophobia by Mend and its officials has been one that seems liable to encourage a sense of division, promoting not only grievance narratives but also the belief that the Islamic faith is under assault and that there is even a powerful conspiracy, connected to the British establishment and media, that is driving Islamophobia. At worst, the message becomes inflammatory, singling out Jewish community groups and other Muslim counter-extremism organisations as being part of the problem. A fixation with Israel and Zionists is recurring, with these parties on occasion equated with terrorism, while concerns about actual terrorism and counter-terror efforts are cast as manifestations of Islamophobia. At other times, Mend/iEngage events concerned with Islamophobia have become a platform for extremist speakers or the expression of extremist sentiments, such as the rebuking of British mosques for not holding prayers for the Mujahedeen. More often, an impression is simply conveyed that presents anti-Muslim hatred as widespread and rampant throughout the British public, and institutionalised in the British state. The concern is that this rhetoric seems likely to risk making Muslim audiences feel more alienated from, or hostile towards, their country rather than less.

2.2.1 Talking Up Islamophobia; Talking Down Other Prejudices

The message of Islamophobia as a widespread societal problem has been a recurring theme in the discourse used by Mend’s officials. For instance, in his talk at the Zakariyya Central Mosque in Bolton in November 2014, Mend’s then CEO Sufyan Ismail encouraged listeners to believe that Muslims are widely disliked by the public in the UK, stating as fact that British society “hates us”.⁵⁰⁸ It was a similar message in 2017 when Mend’s working group coordinator for Cardiff, Sahar Al-Faifi, told BBC radio, “There is a multi-million pound islamophobia industry. Hate and bigotry has become accepted more than ever. People have become socially conditioned to accept an anti-Muslim narrative.”⁵⁰⁹ She offered the same assessment when speaking at a Stand Up To Racism event in Cardiff in 2016, once again talking of the “multimillion Islamophobia Industry”, of the “Rupert Murdoch Industry” and of “politicians of fear across the political spectrum”, claiming again that “Islamophobia has become accepted and a lot of people have become socially conditioned to accept it as the norm”.⁵¹⁰

Similarly, speaking in London in 2015, Azad Ali gave a Mend presentation on Islamophobia which reinforced the message of Muslims as alienated and not accepted in British society. He described the Mend exhibition on Islamophobia as:

Just really highlighting how we as Muslims are portrayed as the other. You know the meta-narrative about Muslims is we’re the other, you know, extremism, everything, all of that kind of stuff is a subheading. The overarching narrative is that Muslims they’re the other, they just don’t belong here, you know, this isn’t our country. And that’s the rhetoric.⁵¹¹

The sense that hatred of Muslims is widespread, normalised and even accepted has also been reiterated in Mend’s discussion of the law. Sufyan Ismail has claimed that the law protects other groups but permits violence towards Muslims,⁵¹² and that “it’s not a crime to use violent or threatening words or behaviour” towards them.⁵¹³ Similarly, Ismail has also said that in the UK, “It’s open season when it comes to Muslims.”⁵¹⁴ In 2014 he is reported as having said, “It’s perfectly OK under UK law to hate

⁵⁰⁸ ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/11515630/Muslim-group-with-links-to-extremists-boasts-of-influencing-election.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Tom Wilson, HJS Research Fellow, speaks to BBC Wales after UKIP say they would ban the Niqab’, YouTube, 24 April 2017.

⁵¹⁰ ‘Anti Racism Cardiff: SUTR / MEND’, YouTube, 19 November 2016.

⁵¹¹ ‘Challenging Islamophobia’, YouTube, 22 May 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzmmcXnHcdc>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵¹² ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015.

⁵¹³ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

Islam and Muslims, it’s not a problem ... if you’re Muslim, [the law says] you can take liberties big time, that’s why women are getting their hijabs ripped off.”⁵¹⁵

Mend’s emphasis on portraying hatred of Muslims as widespread, systematic and institutionalised is at times accompanied by a downplaying of the bigotry that other minority groups can also suffer. For instance, in April 2016, Mend tweeted an article from the website *Electronic Intifada*, titled “How the Israel lobby manufactured UK Labour Party’s anti-Semitism crisis”.⁵¹⁶ This was in the aftermath of Labour’s Ken Livingstone having claimed that Adolf Hitler had been a supporter of Zionism. In promoting this piece, Mend was apparently not only downplaying anti-Semitism, but also supporting the belief that an anti-Semitism scandal had been fabricated by Zionist groups as a further repetition of an arguably anti-Semitic charge.

More often, the downplaying of discrimination against other groups has been used to directly further the claim that Islamophobia is far more serious than other bigotries in contemporary British society. During a Mend presentation at a mosque in Bolton in 2014, Sufyan Ismail made remarks which seemed to downplay anti-Semitism and attacks on other faiths, at least in comparison to discrimination against Muslims. Referencing a fire at an Islamic centre in Muswell Hill, Ismail asked, “When’s the last time you saw a Church burnt to the ground? Or a synagogue burnt to the ground? Or a ... Gurdwara? I bet you you can’t think of one. But mosques are now being burnt to the ground completely.”⁵¹⁷ Rather, Ismail simply noted “You have a bit of graffiti on the back of a Synagogue or a Gurdwara or whatever ...”⁵¹⁸ In reality, both in the UK and in other European countries, there had been a number of arson attacks on synagogues as well as on other places of worship in the years preceding Ismail’s speech. With reference to the arson attack at the mosque in Muswell Hill, Ismail also gave the impression that the crime had been met with indifference by political figures: “Did you hear one politician condemn it? Did you hear even one politician condemn it?”⁵¹⁹ In reality, many senior political figures had spoken out against the attack, including London Mayor Boris Johnson, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles,⁵²⁰ MP Theresa Villiers,⁵²¹ Labour’s Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper⁵²² and Labour’s Shadow Communities Secretary Hilary Benn⁵²³, and a police counter-terror investigation was also undertaken.

In light of these comments and others made about the Jewish community during the presentation, a remark which might further add to intercommunity resentment and tensions came when Ismail told listeners at the Bolton mosque, “Oh by the way, in case you didn’t know, as taxpayers in the UK you pay for security outside synagogues. Were you aware of this? You actually pay for security guards outside synagogues, the government pays for synagogues to be protected. Certainly doesn’t pay for mosques to be protected.”⁵²⁴

Similarly, referencing the 2013 murder of 82-year-old Mohammed Saleem by a Ukrainian white supremacist, Ismail acknowledged that there had been anti-Semitism against Jews and that black people and Irish people went through “difficulties”, however, he continued, “But I never remember a church

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ Mend Community, Twitter, 29 April 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/726009977639456768>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵¹⁷ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁵²⁰ Eric Pickles letter, 19 July 2013, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224746/130719_-_SoS_letter_to_Muslim_organisations_final.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵²¹ ‘Anti-terror police probe Muswell Hill mosque blaze amid fears “firebomb” is Woolwich revenge’, *Evening Standard*, 5 June 2013, available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/anti-terror-police-probe-muswell-hill-mosque-blaze-amid-fears-firebomb-is-woolwich-revenge-8645356.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵²² ‘Al-Rahma Islamic Centre destroyed in “hate crime” fire’, *BBC News*, 5 June 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-22785074>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵²³ ‘Islamic Centre Fire: Muslims “Need Protection”’, *Sky News*, 6 June 2013, available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/islamic-centre-fire-muslims-need-protection-10443786>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵²⁴ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

being burnt to the ground, I never remember a Jewish person being stabbed.”⁵²⁵ Yet once again, the UK had witnessed both the firebombing of churches and a number of anti-Semitic stabbing attacks. Nevertheless, he claimed, “That’s why it’s a lot worse for us than it has been for anybody else.”⁵²⁶

During a Mend presentation in 2015, Azad Ali also conveyed a sense that downplayed the hate crimes suffered by other groups. Discussing Mend’s call to have Islamophobic incidents recorded by the police as a separate category, Ali spoke about those in the police force who had objected to such a procedure being put in place for Muslims on the grounds that the same recording would have to be undertaken for hate crimes against other minorities also. To this argument Ali responded, “If Hindus, and Sikhs, and everyone else were being picked on, of course you would have to do that.”⁵²⁷ The reality of prejudice experienced by other groups seems to be downplayed, so contributing to a sense that Muslims suffer unique victimisation.

2.2.2 State Sponsored Islamophobia, and Other Conspiracies

This narrative of unique Muslim victimisation is made all the more problematic by the way in which Mend has also at times endorsed the idea that Islamophobia is institutionalised and driven by a powerful establishment, what Azad Ali referred to during a July 2017 panel discussion as “professional Islamophobia”.⁵²⁸ For example, in one Facebook post from June 2016, Ali presented Islamophobia as a phenomenon driven from the top of the government, with everything from the country’s counter-radicalisation programme to the media working in concert to advance hatred of Muslims: “As for who do we hold to account for the rise of Islamophobia well that starts with David Cameron and goes all the way down to the journalists that write the Islamophobic stories for their papers and includes those that further perpetuate the Islamophobic narrative either via Prevent programmes or other.”⁵²⁹

Although the organisation was officially still called iEngage at the time, during a presentation on Islamophobia at Lewisham Islamic Centre in November 2013, Azad Ali not only claimed that Islamophobia was deliberately driven by powerful groups, but he also gave a partially theological explanation for anti-Muslim prejudice in wider society. In his presentation, he told the congregation, “Now, is it happening by accident? Do you think this is happening by accident? The religious perspective has come. We all know that there is going to be enmity towards this religion. That’s fine.”⁵³⁰ He then went on to offer more of a political, and indeed conspiratorial, assessment for Islamophobia. Suggesting that Muslims had been intentionally selected for discrimination following the Cold War, Ali said, “Before Islam was the enemy, what was the enemy of the West? Communism, Russia! When the Berlin Wall fell, I remember an Imam telling me, ‘You watch, we’re going to be the next enemies of this world.’”⁵³¹ He elaborated this point further:

It is very very deliberate. There are organisations out there, there are websites out there, there are think tanks out there that make it their business to say what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad, what is extreme, what is acceptable. And this is what’s going on. And these neoconservative extremists have the ear of the government, they have the ear of the media, they actually have a very powerful backing.⁵³²

During the same presentation, Ali listed the government – both the coalition government of the time and the previous Labour government – as a cause of Islamophobia, through what he referred to as

⁵²⁵ *ibid.*

⁵²⁶ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁵²⁷ ‘Challenging Islamophobia’, YouTube, 22 May 2015.

⁵²⁸ ‘Challenging Prevent and Islamophobia - Moazzam Begg, Siema Iqbal, Azad Ali & Ameen Hadi’, YouTube, 31 July 2017.

⁵²⁹ Azad Ali, Facebook, 19 June 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/azad.ali.100/posts/10154300051743383>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵³⁰ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre - The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁵³¹ *ibid.*

⁵³² *ibid.*

“conflation”. Referencing Prevent, Ali claimed that through “this agenda” the government has “tried to create the good Muslim, the bad Muslim, the acceptable Muslim, the unacceptable Muslim”.⁵³³ He elaborated:

They have this agenda, they have a list of – there’s a recent discussion of you know this Somali brother who escaped wearing a burqa, apparently. So now they want to create a list of Masjids that they’re not allowing people on TPIMs to go. So you know, these extreme mosques. This is what’s taking place. So this conflation from our own government, our government, nobody else’s, our own government on its own citizens is taking place. We talk about oppression in Syria, let’s talk about closer to home.⁵³⁴

In 2014, during a presentation on Islamophobia, Ismail told an audience at a mosque in Bolton that people in Westminster laugh at the Muslim community because it doesn’t realise how powerful it is.⁵³⁵ However, the presentation became particularly inflammatory when Ismail claimed that the UK government would soon include UKIP, and that that party was the devil in disguise. He told his audience that they should reconsider if they “really think that UKIP are not the shayatin in disguise”, and followed this by claiming, “Now remember next year it’s very likely that the Conservative party will be in coalition with UKIP. So if you think Nigel Farage will not be deputy Prime Minister next year then you’ve got another think coming.”⁵³⁶

The idea that demonisation is being intentionally advanced by particular powerful interest groups becomes all the more problematic when it starts to take on anti-Semitic dimensions. The UK Jewish community’s leading anti-Semitism watchdog, the Community Security Trust, has raised serious concerns about Mend. In evidence submitted to the Home Affairs Select Committee, the trust stated, “Mend endorses the conspiracy theory that ‘Zionists’ are partly responsible for encouraging anti-Muslim hatred.”⁵³⁷ Indeed, in November 2015, Mend explicitly tweeted that “Zionist movements” are one of the five pillars of Islamophobia.⁵³⁸ On another occasion, Mend wrote of the UK Jewish newspaper that it is “not surprising that the Jewish Chronicle should flex its muscles to keep Muslims out of politics”.⁵³⁹

In September 2015, Mend and the organisation SpinWatch arranged a joint speaking tour under the title “The Five Pillars of Islamophobia”, which held public events in Leicester, Leeds, Manchester and London.⁵⁴⁰ According to Mend’s website, the tour’s lectures, which were co-presented by Mend’s CEO Sufyan Ismail and SpinWatch’s David Miller,⁵⁴¹ reached a total audience of 632 attendees.⁵⁴² Adopting the narrative of conspiracy, the lecture series claimed to be an “evidence based exposé of the manufacturers of Islamophobia and the interests behind them”.⁵⁴³ Much of the content of these presentations was based on research under the same title, carried out by David Miller and others, which was first presented at a conference earlier that summer, in June 2015.⁵⁴⁴ As also outlined in various other

⁵³³ *ibid.*

⁵³⁴ *ibid.*

⁵³⁵ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁵³⁶ *ibid.*

⁵³⁷ ‘Written evidence submitted by the Community Security Trust’, Data Parliament, available at: http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-%20committee/countering-extremism/written/22384.html#_ftn9, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵³⁸ Mend Community, Twitter, 23 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/mendcommunity/status/668761315377328128>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵³⁹ ‘MEND’s response to Andrew Gilligan’, Mend, available at: <http://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/MENDs-response-to-Andrew-Gilligan.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁴⁰ ‘The 5 Pillars of Islamophobia’, Mend, 4 January 2016, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/the-5-pillars-of-islamophobia/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁴¹ ‘The 5 Pillars of Islamophobia’ poster, Muslim Council of Britain, available at: <http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/5-Pillars-of-Islamophobia-Mend.jpg>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁴² ‘The 5 Pillars of Islamophobia’, Mend, 4 January 2016.

⁵⁴³ Khan, S., *The Battle for British Islam*, p. 67.

⁵⁴⁴ ‘David Miller – Lectures, Papers And Talks’, David Miller, available at: <http://www.dmiller.info/conferences>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

writings,⁵⁴⁵ David Miller’s theory of the Five Pillars of Islamophobia lists the five drivers as follows: first, the government and its counter-terrorism activities; second, the far right, and particularly the so-called counter-Jihad network; third, the neoconservative right and its associated think-tanks; fourth, Zionist and pro-Israel groups; fifth, the pro-war left/liberal and secularist groups.⁵⁴⁶ A slide shown during the tour listed UK Jewish groups such as the Community Security Trust as being part of the “Zionist movement” accused of driving Islamophobia.⁵⁴⁷

David Miller’s view of Islamophobia is one which has a number of unfortunate connotations, not least the way in which it echoes conspiracies about international Zionism influencing the institutions of state. And yet, Miller and his co-authors have written:

We also need to focus our attention on elements of the (also transnational) neo-conservative and Zionist movements which provide information, “research” and advocacy which can drag the state and politics to the right and sharpen Islamophobic policies, as we have seen in the UK with the revision of the “Prevent” programme in 2010 (drawing on the material of the neo-conservative Centre for Social Cohesion) and in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.⁵⁴⁸

Promoting the suggestion that an international Zionist movement has been shaping the UK’s counter-terrorism policies is a highly concerning thing to do. Furthermore, given the way in which Mend has itself repeatedly framed the government’s Prevent programme as an attack on British Muslims, bringing David Miller to present such theories before Muslim audiences appears likely to risk exacerbating tensions between communities. But there are other elements of Miller’s beliefs that might also be considered particularly divisive. It has been reported that in November 2015, during a presentation at a conference at the School of African and Oriental Studies, David Miller and the co-authors of the five pillars theory elaborated on some of the left/liberal groups that they believed are contributing to driving Islamophobia. Included were such groups as British Muslims for Secular Democracy, as well as the anti-racism campaigners Southall Black Sisters, who were apparently condemned for Islamophobia on account of their counter-radicalisation efforts.⁵⁴⁹

2.2.3 *Islamophobia as an assault on Islam*

One of the most potentially irresponsible and inflammatory aspects of Mend’s messaging on Islamophobia are the claims that the phenomenon is not simply a prejudice against Muslims, but rather that it is a distinct attack on Islam. There have been Mend events on Islamophobia with titles such as “Islam Under Attack – What Can You Do About It?”⁵⁵⁰ This is particularly a theme that has been present in Mend’s campaign against Prevent, in which the counter-radicalisation strategy is framed as an effort to criminalise certain religious practices. But it is also a message that Mend promotes when discussing Islamophobia more generally. Even an incident such as the Law Society deciding to withdraw a guidance note on Sharia-compliant inheritance procedures was received by Mend with the suggestion that this might have happened because of “excitable Islamophobic groups”.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁵ ‘The five pillars of Islamophobia’, *Open Democracy*, 8 June 2015, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/david-miller-tom-mills-hilary-aked-narzanin-massoumi/five-pillars-of-islamophobia>, last visited: 25 October 2017.

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ Archived Screenshot: Twitter September 2015.

⁵⁴⁸ ‘The five pillars of Islamophobia’, *Open Democracy*, 8 June 2015, available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/david-miller-tom-mills-hilary-aked-narzanin-massoumi/five-pillars-of-islamophobia>, last visited: 25 October 2017.

⁵⁴⁹ Cowden, S., ‘The Poverty of Apologism: The British Left, Feminism and the Islamic Right’ *Feminist Dissent*, (1), 67-80, 21 July 2016, available at: <http://journals.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/feministdissent/article/view/13>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁵⁰ ‘MEND: Islam Under Attack – What Can You Do About It?’, Facebook, 19 October 2014.

⁵⁵¹ ‘Law Society retracts Islamic wills guidance note’, Mend, 27 November 2014, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/law-society-retracts-islamic-wills-guidance-note/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

At a talk in the autumn of 2014, Sufyan Ismail addressed the question of whether Islamophobia was simply a matter of discrimination and prejudice against Muslim people or whether it was actually the Islamic faith that was being attacked. He explained, “If you think the attack is just by the right wing on a group of Muslims you’d be wrong. Actually there’s an attack out there on Islamic principles and values as a whole.”⁵⁵² Giving the example of calls for the burqa to be outlawed in the UK, he warned, “So its getting closer, it’s getting closer and closer.”⁵⁵³ On another occasion in 2014, Ismail claimed, “In truth, if you look at the problem UK society has got, based on the stats that Azad presented earlier, actually we have got a phobia of all things Islamic and everything to do with Muslims.”⁵⁵⁴ Also speaking on behalf of Mend and its work on Islamophobia in 2014, Shiplu Miah, the organisation’s London Regional Manager, told a television interviewer that the term “extremism” was being used by the government and police to target traditional Muslim beliefs, and in such a way that actually drives Islamophobia:

When the government, or dare I say even the police sometimes, when they use the term extremism in such a broad manner that includes traditional mainstream beliefs and practices of Muslims – which have been held as beliefs and practices throughout the decades in this country but hasn’t led to acts of terrorism – but when we do that we are actually stigmatising a large percentage of the Muslim community, and I believe that actually forms the basis for the Islamophobia that we do find in the society that we live in today.⁵⁵⁵

Framing Islamophobia in terms of an attack on Islamic religious practice, in a 2013 talk, Azad Ali referenced a study that supported the claim that the media will often praise what Ali referred to as “so-called moderate Muslims” in a way that praised them for not being “fully Muslim”.⁵⁵⁶ Ali summed this point up by saying, “So the only positive way you’re going to get a positive story about Muslims, is if you’re really not a Muslim. And that’s the agenda ... so to be a moderate Muslim you have to actually forsake your religion. That’s what’s going on here.”⁵⁵⁷ This is a point Azad Ali has reiterated during other Mend presentations on Islamophobia, including at a City Circle talk in 2015 when he again spoke of the same study and the praise “so-called moderate Muslims” received for not being “fully Muslim”.⁵⁵⁸ Ali elaborated on the stories about moderate Muslims in the press:

Even the positive story that is there, it’s only positive because the Muslim that they’re talking about isn’t really Muslim. Meaning they’re not really what we would understand as the fundamentals of the religion, they’re not really affiliated to them, or openly displaying them. So that’s a very scary thought, and that’s where we’re starting from.⁵⁵⁹

This was a point Ali has also spoke about in Sheffield in February 2017. Talking about the media portrayal of Muslims and the favouring of moderate Muslims, Ali warned that “there is this manufacturing of what Islam should be, what a Muslim should be”, and he claimed that the Muslim community “is being pushed towards that”.⁵⁶⁰ Ali continued, “If you don’t meet what the media say are Muslims, then you get labelled” as extremists and terrorists.⁵⁶¹

In Ali’s presentation in Lewisham in 2013, Islamophobia was explained as being essentially an attack on the Islamic religion and normative Islamic practice. He told his audience, “What we would term as everyday Islamic activities is what’s under threat here”, and he continued, “All of us have the same normative Islam. Salah is normal to all of Muslims. Sharia is normal to all of Muslims. These are the

⁵⁵² ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁵⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘The Report Episode 123 | Part 3/3 (25/11/14) – Islamophobia Awareness Month’, YouTube, 26 November 2014.

⁵⁵⁶ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre – The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁵⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ ‘Challenging Islamophobia’, YouTube, 22 May 2015.

⁵⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ ‘Sheffield Stand Up To Racism Rally’, YouTube, 28 February 2017.

⁵⁶¹ *ibid.*

values that are under threat.”⁵⁶² Later, Azad Ali explained that because of this, Muslims are becoming afraid to engage in certain open expressions of their faith. He bemoaned, “We’re just defensive all the time. Why? Because we’ve lost confidence in our deen. Not to practise it, but share it. Because we do actually think, ‘Ok, you know what, it is a bit, maybe it’s a bit extreme.’”⁵⁶³ However, he immediately went on to suggest as an example of this loss of confidence, the claim that many mosques are reluctant to pray for “the Mujahedeen”⁵⁶⁴ – often a reference to Islamic militant groups, or more broadly those engaged in Jihad.

2.2.4 From Islamophobia to anti-Semitism and Attacks on Other Muslims

As already noted, the Mend narrative on Islamophobia has echoed anti-Semitic conspiracies when it has hosted events claiming that powerful Zionist groups have had a role in orchestrating Islamophobia. In addition to this, Mend events on Islamophobia have been used as a platform from which both to promote anti-Semitism and to attack liberal and anti-extremist Muslim groups. As already noted, there has in the past been particular criticism of a series of comments made by Sufyan Ismail in 2014, when he spoke about “battering” the “300-year-old Israel lobby”, a remark which Jewish groups pointed out appeared to be a thinly veiled reference to the UK Jewish community. During the same presentation, Ismail repeated anti-Semitic notions about the power of Jewish lobbies when referencing the subject of Halal slaughter in Europe. Warning about the banning of Halal ritual slaughter, he told his audience, “You have in Denmark a ban on Halal meat. So people said don’t worry, the Jewish lobby is so strong, Halal meat will never be – sorry Kosher meat will never be banned across Europe; it was banned in Denmark.”⁵⁶⁵

In the course of that talk, Mend’s former CEO borrowed from the tone of familiar anti-Semitic conspiracies, telling listeners at the Zakariyya Mosque in Bolton that the current government would never be fair on the Palestinian issue, because “this Tory government is so insanely pro-Israeli financed”.⁵⁶⁶ During a presentation in which Ismail drew an equivalence between British Jews in the Israeli army and terror groups operating in Syria, he also appeared to insinuate a comparison between Zionists and Jihadists. Condemning an offensive tabloid headline that read “How to spot the Jihadi next door”, which had been accompanied by a caricature of a Muslim figure, Ismail asked his audience, “Do you think they would dare put a picture of a Jew and say how do you spot the Zionist next door?”⁵⁶⁷

During presentations on Islamophobia in 2014, Sufyan Ismail, the then CEO of Mend, bestowed praise upon extremist and pro-extremist groups such as Cage, iERA and Friends of Al-Aqsa.⁵⁶⁸ Yet it was Muslim organisations that have opposed extremism that Ismail chose to attack. Speaking at a mosque in Bolton, he told the congregation that Mend does not receive public money, adding, “We’re not Quilliam Foundation, where we get government money and pro-Israeli lobby funding.”⁵⁶⁹ Similarly, at another talk given by Ismail at a mosque in Cheadle, the anti-Islamophobia group Tell Mama was attacked on the grounds of having links to Zionism and apparently a more tolerant view of homosexuality:

We don’t want the government to fob us off with some phoney thing called Tell Mama – which has got a made pro-Zionist pretty much heading it, or in a very senior capacity, and is making all sorts of comments we might not agree with when it comes to homosexuality – to be recording Islamophobia.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶² ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre – The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁵⁶³ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

The remark about a “pro-Zionist” in a very senior capacity is assumed to be a reference to Tell Mama’s president Richard Benson, a prominent Jewish community figure who was formerly head of the anti-Semitism watchdog the Community Security Trust.⁵⁷¹ Yet here, collaboration between Jews and Muslims in combatting bigotry seems not to be seen as contributing to Tell Mama’s credentials, but rather as detracting from them. This hostility to Tell Mama has been expressed by other key figures in Mend. In January 2016, when it was announced that the government would require police forces to record anti-Muslim hate crimes as a distinct category, Mend posted on the organisation’s Facebook page that this was “the end of the road for Tell Mama”.⁵⁷² The post linked to a piece in *Middle East Eye* by Dilly Hussain which, among other accusations, alleged that the anti-Islamophobia watchdog is linked to Islamophobes.⁵⁷³

Azad Ali also used his 2013 Lewisham talk on anti-Muslim hatred to attack moderate Muslim groups and those in Muslim communities who assist with counter-extremism work. Prior to Ali’s own presentation, the mosque’s Imam Shakeel Begg – himself someone identified as promoting Islamic extremism, including Jihad – had spoken about the importance of Muslim unity. Referencing Begg’s comments on Muslim unity, Ali picked up this as a subject with which to condemn those Muslims who assist efforts to challenge extremism, saying, “We will not forsake each other, we will not fall into this colonial game – that’s what it is – colonial game of divide and rule.”⁵⁷⁴ Ali followed this remark by recounting an anecdote mocking the Muslim counter-extremism think-tank Quilliam.⁵⁷⁵ Earlier in the same talk, he had also condemned those Muslims whom he accused of being responsible for the banning of the cleric Zakir Naik.⁵⁷⁶ It should be noted that as well as anti-Semitic comments and his alleged remarks suggesting that Western women make themselves a target for rape, Naik has said of Osama Bin Laden, “If you ask my view, if given the truth, if he is fighting the enemies of Islam, I am for him,” and also, “If he is terrorising the terrorists, if he is terrorising America the terrorist, the biggest terrorist, every Muslim should be a terrorist.”⁵⁷⁷ Yet Ali’s condemnation wasn’t for Naik, but rather for those Muslims he accused of not upholding Muslim unity:

Shiekh Zakir Naik, he got banned from this country, do you know that, do you know who asked for him to get banned? Who was it? Was it these Neoconservative think-tanks and things like that? It was a Muslim. How’s that sound? It was Muslims. As Muslims they wrote to the Home Office asking for him to be banned. It wasn’t non-Muslims. So when you talk about unity, you have to understand what’s taking place here.⁵⁷⁸

Claiming that normative Islam and Islamic values were now under threat, Ali added, “So when we help others ban each other, what do we really do? What is it that we really do? We take away the space that we can stand on. And we allow ourselves to be pushed back ... Very soon there’ll be nothing left to stand on.”⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷¹ Leadership of Tell Mama, Tell Mama, available at: <https://tellmamauk.org/leadership-patrons/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁷² Mend, Facebook, 6 January 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/posts/1670824239848406>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁷³ ‘In fighting Islamophobia, British Muslims need fairness not favours’, *Middle East Eye*, 5 January 2016, available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/recording-islamophobia-britain-763817023>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁷⁴ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre – The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ ‘Home secretary Theresa May bans radical preacher Zakir Naik from entering UK’, *The Telegraph*, 18 June 2010, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/7836557/Home-secretary-Theresa-May-bans-radical-preacher-Zakir-Naik-from-entering-UK.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre – The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

3. Public and Political Engagement

One of the most troubling aspects of Mend’s evolution is the way in which civil society groups, public figures and public bodies have on various occasions engaged and collaborated with the organisation. The last of these three groups is the most problematic of all. Public bodies are under a statutory duty to take measures to prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism and to ensure that they do not provide a platform or legitimacy to those who promote extremism. Mend is quite evidently opposed to the duty and has been consistently hostile to the fundamentals of counter-extremism efforts. More than this, Mend has both defended and hosted hate preachers, and has had officials who have promoted extremist ideas, including a director who has been judged to be a “hardline Islamic extremist” in court.⁵⁸⁰ As such, it would seem that Mend is not a group that those bound by the Prevent duty should be working with.

It is concerning then that both police forces and local authorities, as well as some schools and teachers, have chosen to engage with Mend. It is no less worrying that political figures, including Members of Parliament, have decided to publicly endorse and legitimise this organisation. Given that Mend has chosen to keep as employees and volunteers those who are known to have voiced support for terrorist organisations and to have promoted anti-Semitism and intolerance of other Muslim groups, it is a point of public concern that Members of Parliament have chosen to associate with Mend in this way. The same is true of those in the police, and of Police and Crime Commissioners.

3.1 Public Prevent Duty Funding

Despite Mend’s extensive activities in campaigning against Prevent, and despite Mend describing itself as being “wholly independently financed”,⁵⁸¹ the evidence shows that as iEngage it received public funding, and specifically funding made available as part of the Prevent strategy. In its Activity Report 2014, Mend notes that its most extensive piece of work that year was a review commissioned by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets as part of the local No Place for Hate campaign.⁵⁸² The campaign is promoted on the borough’s website as being part of the council’s Prevent strategy⁵⁸³ and also appears in the Tower Hamlets Prevent Delivery framework and action plan 2014/15⁵⁸⁴. Tower Hamlets Borough Council payments for June 2014 shows that iEngage (Mend was still being called iEngage into 2014) received a payment of £25,262.40 on 23 June 2014 from the borough’s Democratic Representation and Management division.⁵⁸⁵ Tower Hamlets Borough Council subsequently confirmed having made the above payment to IENGAGE Muslims Ltd in June 2014.⁵⁸⁶ The council said that the funding had been provided by the Corporate Strategy and Equality Service for IENGAGE Muslims to provide an evaluation of the No Place for Hate scheme since 2008.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁰ *Ali v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2010] EWHC 100 (QB), 27 January 2010.

⁵⁸¹ ‘Mend Islamophobia Awareness Exhibition Guide’, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/IAM-Exhibition-Brochure-MEND.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁸² ‘Activity Report 2014’, Mend, available at: http://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/MEND_Activity_Report_2014_Low_Res.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁸³ The Prevent Strategy, Tower Hamlets, available at: https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/community_and_living/community_safety_crime_preve/local_prevent_strategy/local_prevent_strategy.aspx, last visited: 12 April 2017.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Tower Hamlets Prevent Delivery framework and action plan, 2014/15’, Tower Hamlets, available at: <https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/224682/response/554546/attach/3/DRAFT%20Prevent%20Delivery%20action%20plan%202014%2015.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁸⁵ Financial Transactions Management, Tower Hamlets, 2015, available at: <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Finance/Financial-transactions-management/Expenditure/2013-15/June-500-Spend-2014.xlsx>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁸⁶ London Borough of Tower Hamlets FOI: 2438466.

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.*

It may be considered a matter of particular public concern that a group with such extremist associations should have come to receive public funding, and particularly funding in relation to the national counter-extremism strategy. No less serious is the fact that through being asked to review this element of the Tower Hamlets Prevent strategy, Mend was presumably being given the opportunity to influence the local delivery of Prevent. Furthermore, the government’s 2011 Revised Prevent Strategy document makes clear that public bodies delivering the strategy are not to work with extremists as part of counter-radicalisation efforts and that public money is not to go to extremist organisations.⁵⁸⁸

3.2 iEngage and the APPG on Islamophobia

In 2010, when the organisation was still known as iEngage, an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Islamophobia was established for the first time. iEngage was granted the position of holding the Secretariat for the new APPG; however, this soon became a matter of some controversy. In November 2010, Andrew Gilligan wrote a piece in *The Telegraph* seeking to expose iEngage for its links with extremism and anti-Semitism.⁵⁸⁹ At that time, the MP Paul Goodman added his voice to the criticism: writing for the website *Conservative Home*, he stated, “While meeting Engage is one thing, permitting or encouraging it to run an All Party Parliamentary Group quite another. This, by the way, is what the secretariat to an All-Party Group can effectively do.”⁵⁹⁰ Goodman also said of iEngage, “It’s essentially a monitoring website or an attack website (depending on one’s point of view) which targets non-Islamist Muslims in particular.”⁵⁹¹

In January 2011, the chairman and a vice chairman resigned from the APPG on Islamophobia in protest at iEngage’s continued role as the Secretariat. The Conservative MP Kris Hopkins was among those who resigned over the failure to have iEngage removed, and at the time he and others complained to colleagues in an email that “an orchestrated lobbying campaign on behalf of iEngage” had only further reinforced their opinion that the organisation should not continue to act for the APPG.⁵⁹² Only in July of 2011 did iEngage finally lose its position when MPs voted 60 to 2 against the organisation continuing as the Secretariat.⁵⁹³ The APPG was temporarily disbanded but was then re-established without iEngage in November of 2011.⁵⁹⁴

3.3 Elections and Mend’s Parliamentary Activities

In the run-up to the UK general election in May 2015, Mend was made an official partner by the Electoral Commission as part of efforts to increase voter registration among Muslims, as well as other minority groups.⁵⁹⁵ In both 2015 and 2017, Mend published what it calls its “Muslim Manifesto”, which sets out what it believes should be the issues of concern for Muslim voters. The effort appears to have been to encourage the candidates and political parties to commit to publicly supporting the policies

⁵⁸⁸ ‘Prevent Strategy’, HM Government, June 2011, available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁸⁹ ‘Islamists establish a bridgehead in Parliament’, Andrew Gilligan, 25 November 2010, available at: <https://andrewgilliganblog.wordpress.com/2010/11/25/islamists-establish-a-bridgehead-in-parliament/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁹⁰ Allen, C., ‘A Momentous Occasion: A report on the All Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia and its Secretariat’, *Conservative Home*, 2011, available at: <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/files/appg-islamophobia-allen-2011-2.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁹² ‘MPs walk out in battle over Islamist group’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2011, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/andrew-gilligan/8290965/MPs-walk-out-in-battle-over-Islamist-group.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁹³ ‘Islamophobia group relaunched’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 24 November 2011, available at: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/islamophobia-group-relaunched-1.29531>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015.

outlined by Mend. Mend’s 2017 Muslim Manifesto included a policy pledge to “commit to repealing the current statutory Prevent duty”, instead calling for it to be replaced with a “more effective, evidence based and non-discriminatory counter-terrorism strategy by engaging with Muslim communities”.⁵⁹⁶

It would appear that another of the pledges implicitly calls for the criminalisation of insulting Islam. Written in the context of Islamophobic hate crime, this section of the manifesto makes the case for the removal of the distinction between race and religion in the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, so that the act would also cover using “insulting words” about religion, and not only about racial groups.⁵⁹⁷ Other pledges in the manifesto include those such as to “support the growth of the shari’ah compliant financial services industry”, while the 2015 manifesto featured a policy pledge to “commit to furthering Turkey’s progress on the path to eventual EU membership”.⁵⁹⁸

In addition to specific key policy pledges, Mend sets out a much more detailed political agenda. This includes an attack on the government’s programme of promoting British values, stating that “the rhetoric on ‘British values’ provides a fertile environment for the festering of far right ideas”.⁵⁹⁹ Indeed, the manifesto condemns the existing counter-extremism policy, partly on the grounds that there has been a “near exclusion of far right extremism from policy concern in the area of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation”.⁶⁰⁰ However, the large number of Prevent referrals concerning far right extremism demonstrates that this is far from being the case.

Nevertheless, the manifesto also claims that the strategy has alienated Muslims on account of an alleged “excessive attention paid to religion and theology”.⁶⁰¹ Mend’s manifesto accuses that the policy “privileges certain expressions of Islamic belief over others”, of legislating on matters of religious belief, and of using “public funds to socially engineer ‘acceptable’ expressions of Islamic belief and practice”.⁶⁰² The document asserts that this social engineering now takes the form of “labelling Muslims as ‘Islamists’ to cast them beyond the pale and extinguish their involvement in partnership approaches to tackling the vulnerability of individuals to violent extremism”.⁶⁰³ The apparent implication being that the government should instead include those who would widely be considered extremists in counter-terrorism efforts, and that not to do so amounts to legislating on Islamic belief.

Mend’s Muslim Manifesto fits into a wider scheme that Mend has run since 2014 called Get Out and Vote, whereby it encourages Muslim voters to run its policy pledges past local constituency candidates.⁶⁰⁴ Mend’s then CEO Sufyan Ismail explained the purpose of this campaign by saying that he had been approached by a Muslim community figure wanting to know who to tell the Muslim community to vote for.⁶⁰⁵ Speaking in late 2014, in the lead-up to the general election, Ismail spoke to several mosque audiences about how they should go about this, and recommended that they bring their candidates to a platform and record them answering which of the policies they would commit to supporting.⁶⁰⁶ Ismail assured his audiences that if put in front of a camera, the candidate would agree to the pledges. He added, “And believe me, they will say anything to get elected, they will say absolutely anything to get elected.”⁶⁰⁷ He told another audience, “That candidate knows the minute they turn round and say, ‘I’m going to support Israel,’ they’re not going to get your vote.”⁶⁰⁸

⁵⁹⁶ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2017’, Mend, 2017, available at: https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres.pdf, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2015’, Mend, 2015, available at: https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-GE2015_LowRes.pdf, last visited: 23 October 2017.

⁵⁹⁹ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2017’, Mend, 2017.

⁶⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰² *ibid.*

⁶⁰³ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ Get Out and Vote, available at: <http://getoutandvote.info/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁰⁵ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁶⁰⁶ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

⁶⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

The strategy can be seen working in practice in a 2015 Vice documentary featuring a Mend hustling. During the event in East London, a member of the audience asked the panel if they would agree to call Israel “a terrorist state”.⁶⁰⁹ When Ismail pushed Labour candidate Stella Creasy on whether she would specifically use that term and she confirmed that she would not, the audience erupted angrily.⁶¹⁰ There was supportive applause, however, when Green Party candidate Michael Gold answered a question on Prevent by saying, “The easiest way to get rid of the threat from terrorism is that the British government doesn’t go around the world terrorising other people.”⁶¹¹

According to Mend literature, these hustings reached 800 people in the North West alone.⁶¹² Events with candidates were held in Oldham East, Rochdale, Bolton North East, Blackburn, Preston, Gorton, Blackley, Whittington and Stretford.⁶¹³ Mend’s presentations from this time, however, appear to have had a strong sense of voting along sectarian lines according to religion and community. This particularly applies to the idea of a clearly defined “Muslim vote” or voting bloc, as opposed to there simply being individual British Muslims voting in a diverse number of ways. Talking about the demographic concentration of Muslims in certain parts of the UK, Sufyan Ismail claimed that “the Muslim vote is the most powerful in the UK, more powerful than the gay vote, the Jewish vote, any vote you care to imagine”.⁶¹⁴ It was Ismail’s contention that, because of this concentration, “the Muslim vote is worth ten ordinary votes”.⁶¹⁵ He also claimed that “we can give any party an outright majority” in Parliament, and claiming that since the Muslim vote could offer “ten, twenty, thirty seats, like we can ... you’re what they call the kingmaker, they have to listen to you”.⁶¹⁶ Azad Ali has similarly spoken of the ability of the Muslim vote to swing 45 target seats for the Conservative party, and 41 for Labour.⁶¹⁷

In Islamist circles, the notion of politics along sectarian lines also extends to a view of MPs and the belief that they should represent their own sectarian community interests. At the time of the 2017 general election, Azad Ali took part in a discussion about the election with extremist cleric Haitham al-Haddad as part of an Islam21c programme.⁶¹⁸ Haddad complained that some of the Muslim MPs in Parliament were “anti-Muslim”, suggesting instead that “we should have twenty Muslims who represent us, who take our voice to the Parliament”, and these, he explained, should be “good Muslims, by good Muslims I mean strong Muslims who can represent us in the Parliament”.⁶¹⁹ Haddad emphasised that “they should come strongly and say that, well, I’m representing my community, whom do you want me to represent? To pass what maybe other communities want? What’s the point?”⁶²⁰ If Mend’s Azad Ali disagreed with that view he did not voice this in the discussion. Similarly, Mend’s former South London working group chair, Sheikh Suliman Gani,⁶²¹ has spoken to Muslim audiences about the importance of voting as a means of imposing Islamic religious values on wider society.⁶²² Among other things, Gani has voiced concerned about the fear that Parliament might increase “the protection that has been given to homosexuality”.⁶²³

Sufyan Ismail has discussed what kind of impact having a bloc community vote could have on government policy. Criticising David Cameron’s government’s decision to arrest those who had gone to

⁶⁰⁹ ‘The Fight for the Muslim Vote: The British Election’, YouTube, 6 May 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRsg5fmifdY>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹¹ *ibid.*

⁶¹² ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁶¹³ *idid.*

⁶¹⁴ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁶¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ ‘Challenging Islamophobia’, YouTube, 22 May 2015.

⁶¹⁸ ‘General Election 2017 | Islam21c Big Discussion | Sh Dr Haitham al-Haddad | Azad Ali | Dr. Salman’, YouTube, 14 May 2017.

⁶¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁶²⁰ *ibid.*

⁶²¹ Archived screenshot from Mend webpage.

⁶²² ‘Suliman Gani’s hate-filled remarks on Ahmadis – “Voting in islam debate”’, YouTube, 21 April 2016.

⁶²³ *ibid.*

fight with Jihadist groups in Syria (but not British Jews who had undertaken service in the Israeli Defence Forces), Ismail contended, “Now do you think that if we landed those 20 seats or 30 seats, he [David Cameron] would have the audacity to say that to the Muslim community? Not a chance!”⁶²⁴ Azad Ali has also spoken on a number of occasions about the failure of Muslims to engage politically to oppose legislation on marriage equality for same-sex couples.⁶²⁵ ⁶²⁶ During a presentation at the Lewisham Islamic Centre, he recounted, “I know many Muslims who secretly were cursing and getting really angry at the seven or eight Muslim MPs we have who voted for the same-sex marriage,” but he suggested that they had failed to contact those Muslim members of Parliament to urge them to vote against the legislation.⁶²⁷

3.4 Mend’s Engagement with Members of Parliament

Although there have been some very public and highly publicised examples of Mend maintaining links with extremists and extremism, as well as the events surrounding the organisation’s role with the APPG on Islamophobia, a number of MPs have continued to associate with Mend, and have even hosted its events in Parliament. An indication of how the organisation has worked to build up its standing with Parliamentarians can be seen by the launch event for Islamophobia Awareness Month 2017. Promotional material for this event, taking place on 1 November 2017, gave Labour MP Stephen Kinnock as the host and listed a panel of MP speakers that included the Conservatives’ Anna Soubry, Labour’s Wes Streeting, the Liberal Democrats’ Ed Davey, the Green Party’s Caroline Lucas and the Scottish Nationalist Party’s Joanna Cherry.⁶²⁸ Subsequently, Anna Soubry, Sir Ed Davey, Joanna Cherry and Crispin Blunt all pulled out of the event with Mend.⁶²⁹

This has evidently been a process since the issues iEngage experienced in 2011 when its role as the Secretariat of the APPG on Islamophobia came to an end. In November 2014, not long after iEngage had rebranded as Mend, the organisation held a round-table discussion in Parliament in collaboration with the far left group Unite Against Fascism.⁶³⁰ As well as by Mend’s Sufyan Ismail, the discussion group was addressed by Labour’s Diane Abbott, Talha Ahmed of the Muslim Council of Britain, and Mohammed Kozbar,⁶³¹ who has called for Israel to be destroyed and who is Vice President of the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Muslim Association of Britain.⁶³²

Mend was back in Parliament in March 2015 when it launched the Mend Muslim Manifesto in Portcullis House. The event was reportedly attended by at least ten MPs from the Labour and

⁶²⁴ ‘General Election 2017 | Islam21c Big Discussion | Sh Dr Haitham al-Haddad | Azad Ali | Dr. Salman’, YouTube, 14 May 2017.

⁶²⁵ ‘London Mayor Election – The Muslim Vote pt 1 | The BIG Discussion’, YouTube, 4 May 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akWCVq2i8AA>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶²⁶ ‘Islam In Focus – An Islam Channel Production – Featuring Ustadh Shams Ad-Duha and Azad Ali’, YouTube, 10 December 2013, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abHXsJmxjbc>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶²⁷ ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre – The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁶²⁸ Islamophobia Awareness Month 2017 Launch Event invitation.

⁶²⁹ ‘MPs ditch meeting with Muslim group Mend over Islamist claims’, *The Times*, 29 October 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/mps-ditch-meeting-with-muslim-group-mend-over-islamist-claims-rgxqn0s05>, last visited: 29 October 2017.

⁶³⁰ Mend, Facebook, 20 November 2014, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1516861005244731, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³¹ *ibid.*

⁶³² ‘Jeremy Corbyn and the mosque leader who blames the UK for Isil’, *The Telegraph*, 12 March 2016, available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/Jeremy_Corbyn/12192292/Jeremy-Corbyn-and-the-mosque-leader-who-blames-the-UK-for-Isil.html, last visited: 21 October 2017.

Conservative Parties, as well as by Baroness Sayeeda Warsi.⁶³³ Other MPs in attendance included Labour’s Yasmin Qureshi, Gerald Kaufman and Andy Slaughter.⁶³⁴

Mend held another event in Parliament later that year, in November 2015,⁶³⁵ this time attended by MPs Imran Hussain, Sarah Champion, Paula Sheriff, Kate Green and Wes Streeting of Labour, as well as Anne Mclaughlin of the SNP.⁶³⁶ Mend’s launch of Islamophobia Awareness Month in November 2016 was held in the House of Lords, and as well as being addressed by Sufyan Ismail and Baroness Warsi,⁶³⁷ Labour MP Naz Shah was also at the event, and was criticised for her attendance in light of the anti-Semitism scandal she had been involved in earlier that year.⁶³⁸

The annual party conferences have been another setting where Mend has been able to hold fringe events with MPs and political figures. The organisation held a fringe event at the Conservative Party conference in October 2017, where Mend’s CEO Shazad Amin spoke, along with Nazir Afzal and Peter Osborne, while Sufyan Ismail also appeared on the platform.⁶³⁹ Peter Osborne later complained that Mend had initially been told that they would be able to hold their event inside the conference but that they had then been made to hold their event outside of the conference’s security zone.⁶⁴⁰ Osborne also claimed that the Conservative MP Crispin Blunt was due to speak at Mend’s fringe event, but that he had pulled out.⁶⁴¹

Previously, Mend hosted an event at the Conservative Party conference in 2014, which was also attended by Peter Osborne and Sir Lynton Crosby and chaired by Sufyan Ismail.⁶⁴² Later that year, Ismail told an audience at a Bolton mosque about the event, recounting, “This year the Conservative Party sent their most senior person to our conference, which even the Israeli lobby couldn’t get.”⁶⁴³ On other occasions Ismail has been less complimentary about the Conservative Party, while still maintaining the insinuation of anti-Semitic conspiracy. In August 2014, when Conservative Peer Baroness Warsi resigned from the government, Sufyan Ismail replied to a tweet on the subject from the extremist preacher Abu Esa Niamatullah, saying “I suspect she’s been frustrated for ages amongst right-wingers and Zionist funders in the Tory party. Finally left!”⁶⁴⁴

In late September 2017, Mend held a fringe event at the Labour Party conference in Brighton, where the Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott was among the speakers.⁶⁴⁵ Other Labour MPs speaking at

⁶³³ ‘Muslim group with links to extremists boasts of influencing election’, *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2015.

⁶³⁴ Azad Ali, Twitter, 4 March 2015, available at:

https://twitter.com/azadaliCCM/status/573111328874885120/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Forder-order.com%2F2015%2F03%2F05%2Fjihadi-baddie-hosts-event-in-parliament%2F, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³⁵ Sufyan Ismail, Twitter, 18 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/SufyanGIsmail/status/667053590880649216>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³⁶ Sufyan Ismail, Twitter, 18 November 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/SufyanGIsmail/status/667051226748555264>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³⁷ ‘MEND launches Islamophobia Awareness Month’, *5 Pillars*, 3 November 2016, available at:

<http://5pillarsuk.com/2016/11/03/mend-launches-islamophobia-awareness-month/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³⁸ “‘An enormous step backwards’: Labour MP suspended over allegations of anti-Semitism slammed for attending event promoting an extremist group”, *The Sun*, 4 December 2016, available at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2326683/labour-mp-suspended-over-allegations-of-anti-semitism-slammed-for-attending-event-promoting-an-extremist-group/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶³⁹ Mend, Facebook, 2 October 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/posts/1947539228843571>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁴⁰ ‘Another Conservative Party conference, another snub to British Muslims’, *Middle East Eye*, 5 October 2017, available at: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/conservative-party-gradually-becoming-muslim-free-zone-631495644>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁴² Mend Newsletter: Islamophobia is Real, Help us make it History, p. 7.

⁶⁴³ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁶⁴⁴ Sufyan Ismail, Twitter, 5 August 2014, available at: <https://twitter.com/niamatullah/status/496659194402328576>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁴⁵ ‘Mend fighting to empower Muslim women alongside Shadow Home Secretary’, Mend, 27 September 2017, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/mend-fighting-empower-muslim-women-alongside-shadow-home-secretary/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

the event included Naz Shah, Kate Green and Rushanara Ali.⁶⁴⁶ Dr Saleya Ahsan also spoke at the event, while Siema Iqbal and Isobel Kingscott participated in the panel.⁶⁴⁷ Mend’s fringe event at the Labour conference in September 2014 was addressed by both Keith Vaz MP and the journalist Owen Jones.⁶⁴⁸ Mend also had an event at the Scottish Nationalist Conference in 2016, attended by MPs Tasmina Sheikh and Angela Crawley.⁶⁴⁹

Arguably, one of Mend’s most impactful events at a party conference was at the Labour conference in 2016.⁶⁵⁰ Attended by Labour MPs Stephen Kinnock and Andy Burnham, much of Mend’s policy agenda against the Prevent duty was endorsed by Burnham. Adopting many of many of the kinds of arguments that Mend itself has used, Andy Burnham warned that the approach taken by Prevent risked legitimising or inspiring Islamophobic hate crime and compared the statutory duty to the French burkini ban on the grounds that it “singles out one community for different treatment”.⁶⁵¹ Showing a lack of knowledge or understanding of the way in which Prevent and the counter-extremism work to combat extremism on the far right, Burnham said:

There’s a lot of people in this country not necessarily at risk from “Islamic extremism” but it’s far-right extremism. That’s what we’re talking about here, but where is the statutory duty on that? ... There are so many issues with it that it needs a root and branch review.⁶⁵²

During the Labour conference fringe event, Andy Burnham also claimed that because Prevent has ruined trust between the police and the Muslim community, when it comes to reporting hate crimes, “People won’t feel able to come forward and say exactly what’s happening to them and their family if they also feel they’re being monitored in some way.”⁶⁵³ As such, Burnham suggested that trusted third-party reporting mechanisms might be established that would bypass the police.⁶⁵⁴

In addition to the numerous hustings that Mend has held with Parliamentary candidates at the time of general elections, at a local level, Mend has held a number of events that were joined and supported by a number of MPs. Mend’s 2015 Islam in Britain conference was addressed by Labour’s Shadow Women’s Minister Kate Green, as well as by MEPs Afzal Khan and Julie Ward.⁶⁵⁵ Labour MP Kate Hollern joined a Mend event in May 2016 in Blackburn along with the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner Clive Grunshaw.⁶⁵⁶ In November 2016, Labour’s Wes Streeting spoke at an Ilford Mend event,⁶⁵⁷ and Streeting also met with Redbridge Mend in July 2017.⁶⁵⁸ The chair at the 2016 event was Vaseem Ahmed, who is group coordinator of Ilford Mend and has promoted a number of anti-Semitic posts on social media.⁶⁵⁹ In one example, Vaseem has had as his Twitter background picture a cartoon of Israel gradually taking over the United Kingdom.⁶⁶⁰ He has also posted an anti-Semitic cartoon

⁶⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ Mend, Facebook, 23 September 2014, available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/a.1490336894563809.1073741861.1433739670223532/14903368831230482/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁴⁹ Mend Newsletter: Islamophobia is Real, Help us make it History, p. 7.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ ‘British Muslims “should be allowed to bypass police” when reporting hate crime, Andy Burnham says’, *Independent*, 26 September 2016, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/prevent-anti-extremism-strategy-legitimising-islamophobic-hate-attacks-andy-burnham-warns-a7330951.html>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁵² *ibid.*

⁶⁵³ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁶⁵⁶ Mend, Facebook, 20 May 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/514247288782266/>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁵⁷ Vaseem Ahmed, Twitter, 10 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/v4seem1968/status/796836058776436736>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁵⁸ Wes Streeting, Twitter, 28 July 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/wesstreeting/status/890849536306020352>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁵⁹ Vaseem Ahmed, Twitter, 10 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/v4seem1968/status/796836058776436736>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁶⁰ Vaseem Ahmed, Twitter, available at: <https://twitter.com/v4seem1968>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

relocating Israel to North America.⁶⁶¹ This was the same cartoon over which Labour MP Naz Shah was forced to resign from her position on the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Mend has also reported having been represented at the Hearing in Leeds for a commission headed by Conservative MP Dominic Grieve.⁶⁶² The Hearing took place in Leeds Civic Hall for the Commission on Muslim Participation in Public Life.⁶⁶³ The research was undertaken by Citizens UK and its findings were published in July 2017.⁶⁶⁴ This was the same study that Mend’s Sahar Al-Faifi was listed as being connected to through her position on the Citizens UK Muslim Leadership Group.⁶⁶⁵

3.5 Mend on University Campuses

The Prevent duty has been a particularly contested issue at British universities. There it has faced opposition from various student groups, including the National Union of Students, as well as from some academic staff. The campaign against Prevent has become particularly active on universities since its introduction as a statutory duty on public bodies in February 2015, with the growth of campaigns such as Students Not Suspects. Mend has maintained a presence on campuses throughout this period. The emphasis appears often to have been one of repeating the narrative of institutionalised Islamophobia tied up with counter-extremism efforts. For instance, in November 2015, following the Islamic State terror attacks at the Bataclan and Stade de France in Paris, Mend jointly held an event with Stand Up To Racism at the University of East London, titled “After Paris Horror... Don’t let the Racists Divide Us. No to Islamophobia...”⁶⁶⁶ In the wake of the terror attacks in France, the focus of the event appears to have been the “Stop the Counter-Extremism Bill” campaign and Islamophobia. Mend’s Sufyan Ismail was one of the speakers on the panel, along with Moazzam Begg of the extremist group Cage, Malia Bouattia of the NUS, and Weyman Bennett of Stand Up To Racism.⁶⁶⁷ The official description for the event included the following section on Prevent:

Government policy is fuelling division. Over the last year a wave of “counter extremism” legislation has cast the Muslim community as host of “extremism”. These laws, including the government “Prevent” strategy, is targeted at those deemed “non-violent extremists” not guilty or accused of any criminal activity but who hold views of which the government disapproves.⁶⁶⁸

More recently, in October 2017, Mend held an event for students at Cambridge University.⁶⁶⁹ Earlier in 2017, in February, Mend’s Amin Ali took part in a panel at Middlesex University alongside Ibrahim Mohammed, formerly of FOSIS, now of Cage, titled “Manufacturing Hate”, which promised to be about the impact of the Prevent agenda on Muslims.⁶⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Mend has also arranged an event in September 2017 with the Glasgow University Muslim Student Association, which has included promotional material claiming that “Mend has replaced the Quilliam foundation as the official government think tank for anti-extremism”.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶¹ Vaseem Ahmed, Twitter, 13 October 2015, available at: <https://twitter.com/v4seem1968/status/654049446561497093>, last visited: 21 October 2017.

⁶⁶² ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁶⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ ‘The Missing Muslims’, Citizens UK

⁶⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁶ ‘After Paris Horror... Don't let the Racists Divide Us. No to Islamophobia...’, Eventbrite, 23 November 2015, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/after-paris-horror-dont-let-the-racists-divide-us-no-to-islamophobia-defend-civil-liberties-tickets-19508175478#>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ Mend, Facebook, 16 October 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/a.1490336894563809.1073741861.1433739670223532/1953512301579597/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁰ Screenshot: Middlesex University Islamic Society Facebook page, February 2017.

⁶⁷¹ ‘MEND: Mending Islamic Societies’, 30 September 2017, available at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mend-mending-islamic-societies-tickets-37382789931?aff=es2>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

Mend held a large number of events on campuses in November 2016 as part its Islamophobia Awareness Month campaign. This included Bristol University, where the Islamic Society hosted a Mend event on Islamophobia with Sahar Al-Faifi as the guest speaker.⁶⁷² Other regional campuses that hosted Mend events that month included Leeds,⁶⁷³ Swansea⁶⁷⁴ and Leicester.⁶⁷⁵ And both Mend’s Siema and the organisation’s North regional manager Yusuf Tai were advertised as speakers at an Islamophobia Awareness Month launch event at Manchester University that month; the poster for the event included the Mend logo.⁶⁷⁶ Yusuf Tai had also spoken previously at a Mend event on that campus in April 2015,⁶⁷⁷ the same month as the Islamic Society at the University of Bradford also promoted a Mend event with Sufyan Ismail to its student members.⁶⁷⁸ It has also been reported that Mend’s literature was recorded as being distributed at Huddersfield and De Montfort Universities, and that Mend classes were held at Manchester Metropolitan University.⁶⁷⁹

The School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London has repeatedly been host to Mend. In 2014, Mend held an event there in collaboration with Cage where, as well as Mend’s Shiplu Miah, Malia Bouattia also spoke in her capacity as NUS Black Students Officer.⁶⁸⁰ In November 2016, Mend held one of its politics and media training classes at SOAS.⁶⁸¹ It appears that Mend also held an event at SOAS the previous year, in November 2015, where Sahar Al-Faifi was one of the speakers, however amidst media coverage about comments made during the event, Mend denied having had any role in organising the panel at SOAS.⁶⁸² Despite this, images from the event show Mend’s logo on display at the panel event, and the event poster claimed the event was arranged in association with FOSIS and Mend.⁶⁸³

What is not disputed is that, in November 2015, Mend collaborated with the Muslim student umbrella body FOSIS to arrange a series of campus events and exhibitions at UK universities as part of Islamophobia Awareness Month. Campuses involved in the tour that year included the Leeds University Islamic Society on 11 November⁶⁸⁴, and also Aston University ISOC on the same date.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁷² Bristol University Islamic Society, Facebook, 22 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/338126846556724/>, last visited: 22 October 2017

⁶⁷³ Leeds University Union Islamic Society, Facebook, 23 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/907829106017353/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁴ EduRxb, Twitter, 24 November 2016, available at: <https://twitter.com/EduRxb/status/801873499660910597>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁵ University of Leicester Islamic Society, Facebook, 30 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/825041260932385/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁶ The University of Manchester Islamic Society, Facebook, 4 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/manchesterisoc/photos/a.146986628658044.18687.145952518761455/1211918515498178/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁷ The University of Manchester Islamic Society, Facebook, 16 April 2015, available at: https://www.facebook.com/events/733160390116653/?active_tab=about, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁸ Bradford Isoc, Facebook, 10 April 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/BradISoc/photos/a.1476562465945540.1073741825.1476562369278883/1575327939402325/?type=1>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁷⁹ ‘MEND events promoted to students’, Student Rights, 16 April 2015, available at: http://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2273/mend_events_promoted_to_students, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁰ Mend, Facebook, 26 November 2014, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1519054671692031

⁶⁸¹ Mend, Facebook, 27 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/706209586199669/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸² ‘“It’s fine to hit a wife who doesn’t please you”: What Islamic cleric is telling students as he tours British universities unchallenged... and he’s not alone’, *Daily Mail*, 9 January 2016.

⁶⁸³ SOAS Islamic Society, Facebook, 22 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/soasisoc/photos/gm.926920970729970/547653505383369/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁴ Leeds University Union Islamic Society, Facebook, 8 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/leedsisoc/photos/a.842017042498881.1073741828.841964005837518/1068392523194664/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁵ Aston Isoc, Facebook, 11 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/203710593293488/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

Other Mend events were held that month at Bradford and Birmingham⁶⁸⁶ campuses, as well as at Sheffield Hallam University on 30 November.⁶⁸⁷

Another campus Mend visited in November 2015 was Salford University,⁶⁸⁸ where the Students Union has taken a particularly strong stand against cooperating with Prevent.⁶⁸⁹ This is the same university attended by the Manchester Arena bomber Salman Abedi, who had enrolled for the academic year in October 2015.⁶⁹⁰ Contrary to initial reports, Abedi was never referred to Prevent,⁶⁹¹ and it is possible that the prevailing atmosphere of non-cooperation with Prevent at Salford made it less likely that he ever would have been. The Students’ Union there had passed a motion to boycott Prevent and instead committed to educating students against the counter-radicalisation strategy.⁶⁹² The motion passed by Salford Students’ Union that academic year in February 2016 claimed that Prevent engages in “systematically targeting black people and Muslims” as part of a mass spying operation for the purpose of “policing dissent”.⁶⁹³

When Mend came to Salford in November 2015, rather than being hosted by the campus Islamic Society, as is often the case, Mend was instead hosted by the University of Salford Students’ Union itself, and the event page administered and promoted on Facebook by the Students’ Union Vice President⁶⁹⁴ Zamzam Ibrahim.⁶⁹⁵ When subsequently running for the position of Students Union President in 2017, Ibrahim made opposition to Prevent a key part of her election campaign.⁶⁹⁶ She has described Prevent as “disastrous” and “racist”.⁶⁹⁷ Ibrahim, who subsequently did become the Students’ Union President, has stated over social media that she believes that everyone should be required to read the Quran because this would bring about “an Islamic takeover”.⁶⁹⁸ In 2012, she tweeted “#IfIwasPresident I’d oppress **white** people just to give them a taste of what they put us through! #LMFAO”.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁸⁶ ‘FOSIS work with MEND on Islamophobia campaign’, Student Rights, 16 November 2015, available at: https://www.studentrights.org.uk/article/2322/fosis_work_with_mend_on_islamophobia_campaign, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁷ Mend, Facebook, 30 November 2015 – 2 December 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/524041084418079/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁸ ‘Tackling Islamophobia [sic] on Campus!’, University of Salford Students’ Union, 18 November 2015, available at: <http://www.salfordstudents.com/events/tackling-islamaphobia-on-campus>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁸⁹ ‘Does Andy Burnham regret his opposition to the ‘Prevent’ strategy?’, *The Spectator*, 27 May 2017, available at: <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2017/05/andy-burnham-regret-opposition-prevent-strategy/#>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹⁰ ‘Manchester suicide bomber used student loan and benefits to fund terror plot’, *The Telegraph*, 27 May 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/26/exclusive-manchester-suicide-bomber-used-student-loan-benefits/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹¹ ‘Extreme Prejudice’, *The Times*, 3 June 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extreme-prejudice-5zvrjxhw3>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹² ‘Police can’t stop terror alone – we must do more’, *The Times*, 31 May 2017, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-can-t-stop-terror-alone-we-must-do-more-96zr5ptxm>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹³ University of Salford Students’ Union Student Senate Meeting Agenda, 23 February 2016, available at: https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/22582/9b862ccc32f3710cc593d39dc79e252c/Senate_Agenda_FEB16.pdf, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹⁴ ‘USSU Sabbatical Officers announced’, University of Salford Manchester, 13 March 2015, available at: <http://staff.salford.ac.uk/newsitem/4479>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹⁵ Archived screenshots from Facebook event page.

⁶⁹⁶ ‘Does Andy Burnham regret his opposition to the ‘Prevent’ strategy?’, *The Spectator*, 27 March 2017.

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Student union president sparks controversy by saying she would like to “oppress white people”, everyone should read the Koran and that men and women must not be friends’, *Daily Mail*, 6 July 2017, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4656926/Student-union-president-calls-Islamic-takeover.html>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid.*

3.6 Manchester’s Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group

Mend sits on Manchester’s Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group where it is one of just two Muslim groups represented, along with the Muslim Council of Mosques⁷⁰⁰. There Mend sits alongside several other highly influential bodies, with the planning group also including Manchester City Council, Greater Manchester Police and the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner.⁷⁰¹ The group is chaired by Manchester City Council’s Fiona Worrall,⁷⁰² and in November 2015 she was a speaker at a Mend event on Islamophobia in the Manchester Town Hall.⁷⁰³ Fiona Worrall was joined at the same Mend event by representatives of several other bodies who sit with Mend on the Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group, including Jim Battle the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner of Greater Manchester and Yousef Dar of the Greater Manchester Community Safety Forum.⁷⁰⁴ John Morgan, the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, and Mustafa Mohammed, President of the National Association of Muslim Police, were also speakers.⁷⁰⁵

The Hate Crime Action Plan 2016/17 for Greater Manchester details numerous ways in which Mend will partner with the Manchester authorities on the delivery of the Hate Crime strategy. The Action Plan lists Mend as being tasked with providing an event on Islamophobia in February 2017 as part of Hate Crime Awareness Week, and also notes a collaborative event in the city’s cathedral.⁷⁰⁶ In addition, Manchester Cathedral lists Mend as one of the organisations participating in the Hate Crime Awareness Week event.⁷⁰⁷ Mend also notes that as part of the launch of the ‘Hate Crime’ strategy for 2016-2019, it was invited to hold a consultation meeting with Manchester’s Muslim community.⁷⁰⁸

In Manchester’s Hate Crime Action Plan 2016/17, Mend is listed as one of the organisations involved with mapping the “drivers of hate crime and islamophobia in Manchester”,⁷⁰⁹ as well as being listed as one of the groups tasked with identifying “where victims feel comfortable reporting”.⁷¹⁰ The Action Plan references Mend, along with the Muslim Council of Mosques and the Community Safety Forum, in relation to accessing funding for the delivery of an “Islamophobia Awareness Month”.⁷¹¹ The document specifically outlines Hate Crime grant funding and mentions the PCC (Police and Crime Commissioner) as having contributed funding as part of this aspect of the strategy.⁷¹² While Mend runs an annual Islamophobia awareness month, the Action Plan does not make clear whether it is this which is to receive the public funding.⁷¹³ However, the plan does in several places list as an action the promotion and supporting of Mend’s Islamophobia Awareness Month campaign IAM2017, in November 2017.⁷¹⁴

Mend is included among the members of the Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group that is to deliver “joint engagement sessions across Neighbourhood Teams” but it is also specifically mentioned above the other members as having a particular role in developing a social media training/workshops for schools⁷¹⁵. The document does not elaborate on whether this will mean Mend going into schools,

⁷⁰⁰ Ending Islamophobia In Manchester – Hate Crime Action Plan 2016/17.

⁷⁰¹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰² *ibid.*

⁷⁰³ ‘Let’s End Islamophobia in Manchester’, *The Nubian Times*, 26 November 2015, available at: <http://thenubiantimes.com/iam2015-lets-end-islamophobia-in-manchester/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁵ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁷⁰⁶ Ending Islamophobia In Manchester – Hate Crime Action Plan 2016/17.

⁷⁰⁷ ‘Hate Crime Awareness Week Event: “Art Brings Communities Together”’, Manchester Cathedral, 8 February 2016, available at: <http://www.manchestercathedral.org/news/412/hate-crime-awareness-week-event-art-brings-communities-together>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁰⁸ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁷⁰⁹ Ending Islamophobia In Manchester – Hate Crime Action Plan 2016/17.

⁷¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹¹ *ibid.*

⁷¹² *ibid.*

⁷¹³ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁵ *ibid.*

however, this programme directed at schools would still represent a significant new area of expansion for Mend activities.

3.7 Police and Crown Prosecution Service

Despite Mend’s views on counter-extremism and counter-terrorism legislation, which are the responsibility of the police to uphold and enforce, there have been multiple points of interaction between Mend and UK law enforcement agencies. This has included both local police constabularies, elected Police and Crime Commissioners, as well as the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mend has had several points of interaction with the Crown Prosecution Service. The organisation notes being part of the monthly meetings of the Manchester Hate Crime Forum which works in coordination with both the Crown Prosecution Service and Greater Manchester Police.⁷¹⁶ Mend also states that in 2014 it participated in the Crown Prosecution Service’s National Scrutiny Panel on Religiously Aggravated Hate Crime⁷¹⁷ and the Community Accountability Forum subgroup on Hate Crime.⁷¹⁸ This a group which works to assist prosecutors and the criminal justice system in its response to hate crime offences.

In the organisation’s Activity Report 2014, Mend lists having worked with a number of Police and Crime Commissioners, including those of Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Lancashire.⁷¹⁹ In its activity report for that year, Mend also talks of its work with police forces, and particularly efforts to have the police record Islamophobia as a separate category of crime.⁷²⁰ Mend has claimed that through its efforts, six police forces adopted separate recording of Islamophobia and West Midlands Police is listed as an example of where Mend’s efforts brought about a change in how crimes are recorded.⁷²¹ The report also speaks of the need to train police officers to “correctly identify religiously motivated hate crime”.⁷²²

Speaking in 2015, Azad Ali reported that the then Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner Tony Lloyd had been very supportive of Mend. While Lloyd would stay in his position, in 2015 he became interim Mayor of Greater Manchester, a position he would remain in until 2017, when Andy Burnham was elected to that position. Having taken part in Mend’s Labour Party conference fringe event in September 2016, it appears that he too has been supportive of Mend and some of the positions it takes on issues such as counter-extremism.⁷²³ Indeed, Mend’s connections with policing in Manchester appear to be particularly strong, as seen with Mend’s participation in Manchester’s Ending Islamophobia Action Planning Group. For a period, the police Chief Inspector for Greater Manchester, Ian Hopkins, was also featured in the promotional picture for Mend’s Twitter account, and Mend has praised Hopkins on its website and Facebook page on a number of occasions, including a story from October 2015 when Hopkins warned about risks of law enforcers being seen as “thought police” under the newly introduced counter-extremism strategy.⁷²⁴ Both Ian Hopkins and Tony Lloyd spoke at an event in Manchester with Mend’s Azad Ali in August 2016.⁷²⁵ The event was hosted by UKIM, a Jamaat-e-Islami

⁷¹⁶ ‘Activity Report 2014’, Mend.

⁷¹⁷ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2015’, Mend, 2015.

⁷¹⁸ ‘Activity Report 2014’, Mend.

⁷¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*

⁷²¹ *ibid.*

⁷²² *ibid.*

⁷²³ ‘British Muslims “should be allowed to bypass police” when reporting hate crime, Andy Burnham says’, *Independent*, 26 September 2016.

⁷²⁴ Mend, Facebook, 30 October 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/posts/1651919465072217>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷²⁵ ‘Building a better Britain Together’, UK Islamic Mission, available at: <http://www.ukim.org/webpages/detailnews.aspx?id=38990fd1-1b7b-4cf0-8bbc-d57734a52119>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

linked group⁷²⁶ which has been associated with extremist speakers in the past⁷²⁷ and which was also named as being linked with the Muslim Brotherhood in a recent paper from the Foreign Affairs Select Committee.⁷²⁸ In November 2016, Mend held an event in Manchester where a representative of the Greater Manchester police force was a speaker,⁷²⁹ with the event also claiming to be endorsed by Manchester City Council and the Crown Prosecution Service.⁷³⁰

Just as Mend has sought to exert its influence through hosting hustings for Parliamentary candidates during election time, so too has Mend arranged a number of hustings events for the elections of local Police and Crime Commissioners. The organisation held a hustings for the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner candidates in Birmingham in August 2014.⁷³¹ That event was chaired by Mend’s Azad Ali and was attended by Labour’s David Jamieson, who would go on to become the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner, as well as candidates from the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties, Les Jones and Ayoub Khan.⁷³²

Similarly, at the time of the May 2016 Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, Mend produced a Mend Manifesto, as the organisation does at the time of general elections.⁷³³ Little of the rhetoric used by Mend figures at public events or in other recent publications finds its way into this document. However, the manifesto does feature a section critical of the Channel process of the counter-radicalisation strategy, placed under the heading “Thought Police”.⁷³⁴ It is also noticeable that, despite other statements from leading figures in Mend that appear to oppose all counter-extremism efforts, on this occasion the Mend Manifesto does call for greater focus on extremism from the far right. As the manifesto says, “Far right extremism continues to present a serious security threat to the UK although it is often underestimated in a climate where an excessive focus on al-Qaida inspired terrorism obscures the nature and scale of the threat posed by neo-Nazi groups and far right social movements.”⁷³⁵

Along with the production of the manifesto for the Police and Crime Commissioner elections, Mend also held a series of hustings throughout local areas. It arranged a Police and Crime Commissioner hustings in Leicester on 14 April, although it is not specified which candidates participated in the event.⁷³⁶ On 29 April 2016, Mend jointly arranged a hustings for the Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner with the educational charity JET; however, again it is not clear which of the local candidates were present for the hustings.⁷³⁷ That same evening, Mend also hosted a Police and Crime Commissioner hustings in Kirklees, which was attended by the sitting commissioner, Labour’s Mark Burns-Williamson, as well as by Allan Doherty of the Conservatives, Peter Corkindale of UKIP, Therese Hirst of the English Democrats and Barry Stewart Golton of the Liberal Democrats.⁷³⁸ The

⁷²⁶ ‘Double Games Of The UK Muslim Brotherhood’, *Standpoint Magazine*, March 2016, available at: <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/features-march-2016-john-ware-muslim-brotherhood?page=0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C0%2C3>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷²⁷ ‘Revealed: preachers’ messages of hate’, *The Guardian*, 7 January 2007, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/jan/07/broadcasting-channel4>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷²⁸ ‘“Political Islam”, and the Muslim Brotherhood Review’, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 1 November 2016, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaif/118/118.pdf>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷²⁹ Mend, Facebook, 20 November 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1730456330611549/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷³⁰ *ibid.*

⁷³¹ Mend, Facebook, 14 August 2014, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/503402653096757/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷³² *ibid.*

⁷³³ ‘Police and Crime Commissioner Elections MEND Manifesto 2016’, Mend, 2016, available at: https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PCC_Manifesto_2016.pdf, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷³⁴ *ibid.*

⁷³⁵ *ibid.*

⁷³⁶ ‘LEICESTER: Police & Crime Commissioner Election Hustings’, Facebook, 14 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/975152882534581/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷³⁷ ‘DERBY: Police & Crime Commissioner Hustings 2016’ Facebook, 29 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/164270123967742/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷³⁸ Mend, Facebook, 8 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/gm.1027055367350224/1706391369625026/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

previous evening, the same candidates had been present for another hustings held by Mend, this time in Leeds.⁷³⁹

Mend has also particularly received police engagement as part of its annual Islamophobia Awareness Month campaign. One such event held on 24 November 2015 in Leeds was attended by West Yorkshire Police and featured Police Hate Crime Coordinator Sean McDonald as a speaker.⁷⁴⁰ Other speakers included Mend’s Shahab Adris, Sally Kincaid of the National Union of Teachers, and Rose Simkins, CEO of Stop Hate UK.⁷⁴¹ On 20 November 2015, Mend held an event in Blackburn Town Hall as part of the annual Islamophobia awareness month.⁷⁴² At that event, the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner Clive Grunshaw was one of the keynote speakers alongside Mend’s Sufyan Ismail.⁷⁴³ Clive Grunshaw also spoke for Mend at an event the group organised in Blackburn on 20 May 2016, where he was joined by Labour MP Kate Hollern.⁷⁴⁴ In October 2016, as part of Hate Crime Awareness Week, Paul Money of West Yorkshire Police was a speaker at a Mend event in Leeds, alongside the Leeds City Councillor Harvinder Saimbhi.⁷⁴⁵

However, in November 2016, Bedfordshire Police became involved in controversy after announcing on social media that it was joining Mend’s Islamophobia awareness campaign #IAM2016.⁷⁴⁶ The force was publicly criticised and came under pressure when some suggested that the logo for the campaign of a hand with a raised index finger appeared to replicate a gesture used by Jihadists, including Osama Bin Laden and Islamic State fighters.⁷⁴⁷ Bedfordshire Police responded by deleting its posts bearing the logo and released a statement that said:

It has come to our attention the pointing finger logo used to illustrate social media posts around Islamophobia Awareness Month is similar to that used by Isis. The logo was produced by a national charity and was used in good faith. As a consequence and to avoid offence, Bedfordshire Police has deleted these posts and will not tolerate Islamophobia or any other form of hatred or discrimination.⁷⁴⁸

Most recently, in October 2017, Mend’s Cardiff group held a training day with the British Transport Police.⁷⁴⁹ Mend’s Cardiff Working Group is the same group that is headed by Sahar Al-Faifi,⁷⁵⁰ who has a considerable record of extreme and intolerant statements, including expressing support for terrorist groups such as Hamas, and encouraging conspiracy theories about terrorist attacks in the UK.

⁷³⁹ ‘LEEDS: Poly & Crime Commissioner Election Hustings’, Facebook, 28 April 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/853290718132240/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴⁰ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁷⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁷⁴² ‘BLACKBURN: Islamophobia Conference – #IAM2015’, Facebook, 20 November 2015, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1694605160774435/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴⁴ ‘BLACKBURN: Question Time with Kate Hollern MP and Lancashire PCC, Clive Grunshaw’, Facebook, 20 May 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/514247288782266/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴⁵ ‘Tackling Islamophobia Together – #hcaw2016’, Facebook, 11 October 2016, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/events/373909239615042/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴⁶ ‘Police force deletes its Twitter posts promoting Islamophobia Awareness Month after using a logo similar to a hand gesture popular with ISIS jihadis’, *Daily Mail*, 16 November 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3941926/Police-force-deletes-Twitter-posts-promoting-Islamophobia-Awareness-Month-using-logo-similar-hand-gesture-popular-ISIS-jihadis.html>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁴⁸ ‘Bedfordshire Police deletes “IS-style” finger tweets’, *BBC News*, 16 November 2016, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-37999087>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁴⁹ Mend, Twitter, 10 October 2017, available at: <https://twitter.com/i/web/status/917796877608747009>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁵⁰ Mend, Cardiff, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/working-groups/cardiff/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

3.7.1 National Muslim Police Association

Over recent years, Mend has maintained an active level of cooperation with the National Association of Muslim Police (NAMP). iEngage (as Mend was called at the time) had a display and stand at the National Association of Muslim Police Eid dinner in 2013, which was also attended by Azad Ali.⁷⁵¹ As part of Islamophobia Awareness Month #IAM2014, Mend and NAMP held a joint conference event at City of London Police on 24 November 2014.⁷⁵² Asif Sadiq of City of London Police and President of the National Association of Muslim Police spoke at the event.⁷⁵³ However, the event was also addressed by Sheikh Shams Ad Duha,⁷⁵⁴ who has previously said that there is “no yes or no answer” to whether infidels should be killed, as well as having made a number of homophobic comments.⁷⁵⁵ The following year, on 26 November 2015, the new President of the National Association of Muslim Police, Inspector Mustafa Mohammed, spoke at a Mend event in Manchester.⁷⁵⁶ Yousef Dar of the Community Safety Forum, a founder of the National Association of Muslim Police, was another speaker at the same event.⁷⁵⁷ NAMP’s logo appeared on the promotional material for this event.⁷⁵⁸

3.8 Schools

In addition to its activities challenging Prevent with the National Union of Teachers, Mend has been seeking to expand into the area of schools and education. The Prevent statutory duty for schools requires that schools ensure they take measures to help prevent children from being drawn into extremism, particularly with regard to external speakers. The full extent of Mend’s engagement with schools remains unclear. The Mend website does include pictures showing Azad Ali giving a presentation in a school, as well as photographs of the Mend exhibition in schools.⁷⁵⁹ According to Azad Ali, Mend first piloted lesson plans and school packs with the NASUWT teachers union for schools in Humberside, Leeds and Bradford in 2014.⁷⁶⁰ A Mend newsletter distributed in 2017 references the organisation conducting “a recent Yorkshire event” where “over 230 students and around 18 teachers were in attendance”.⁷⁶¹ The document also reports conducting teacher training sessions in Yorkshire.

The Mend website now includes a “Teachers’ Zone” which features resources for teachers and images from a presentation given at a school by Azad Ali.⁷⁶² As well as videos about Islamophobia, Mend includes in these resources a brochure offering content for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) classes.⁷⁶³ The Mend website also provides an accompanying PowerPoint presentation for schools, covering much of the same content. While the material is broadly concerned with Islamophobia, large parts of the material seem to be devoted to promoting the benefits of the Islamic religion.⁷⁶⁴ The presentation does not deal with the Prevent duty specifically; however, there is a slide on the government’s definition of extremism and a series of questions about the government’s definition of

⁷⁵¹ Mend, Facebook, 25 July 2014, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1458293207768178, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁵² Mend, Facebook, 25 November 2014, available at: https://www.facebook.com/pg/mendcommunity/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1518502608413904, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁵³ *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁵ Dyer, E., ‘Banking Restrictions on Extremism-Linked Muslim Groups’, The Henry Jackson Society, 17 November 2014.

⁷⁵⁶ Lets End Islamophobia in Manchester event poster, 26 November 2015.

⁷⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁵⁹ Teacher’s Zone, Mend, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/resources-and-publications/teachers-zone/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁶⁰ ‘Challenging Islamophobia’, YouTube, 22 May 2015.

⁷⁶¹ Mend Newsletter: *Islamophobia is Real, Help us make it History*, p. 5.

⁷⁶² Teacher’s Zone, Mend.

⁷⁶³ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁴ *ibid.*

fundamental British values.⁷⁶⁵ This seems to correspond with Mend’s position in its 2017 Muslim Manifesto, where it states that “the rhetoric on ‘British values’ provides a fertile environment for the festering of far right ideas”.⁷⁶⁶ The slide show references the educational charity the Leeds Educational Development Centre as having contributed to the production of the presentation.⁷⁶⁷

More recently, Mend has advertised a day-long joint conference in Leeds with the Leeds Development Education Centre.⁷⁶⁸ The conference for teachers, titled “Respecting Diversity – supporting schools to address prejudice”, features as speakers Mend’s former CEO Sufyan Ismail, Mohammed Rafique of Leeds City Council, and Bradford MP Naz Shah.⁷⁶⁹ Given that both Sufyan Ismail and Naz Shah have in the past been accused of anti-Semitism, questions might be raised about their appropriateness for talking to teachers about combating prejudice. However, it is unclear whether the event went ahead as advertised.

Mend has also advertised an event about the Birmingham schools Trojan Horse Scandal for 3 November 2017, titled “Trojan Horse: the facts”, to be held in Birmingham’s Bordesley Centre.⁷⁷⁰ Speakers for the event are listed as the political activist Salma Yaqoob, the journalist Peter Osborne, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers Kevin Courtney, University of Huddersfield lecturer Shamim Miah, University of Nottingham Professor John Holmwood, and the former chair of the board of governors of the Parkview School affected by the Trojan Horse scandal Tahir Alam.⁷⁷¹ The promotional material for the event provides the following description:

Has a hoax letter, a media scrum, a forceful education secretary and political motivations in education regulation lead to the stigmatisation of a community, discrimination against outstanding teachers/school leaders and exam failure for a generation of children?⁷⁷²

While the event description references a document that may not have been authentic, it fails to make clear that, as both Ofsted⁷⁷³ and Peter Clarke’s investigation subsequently confirmed, there had indeed been an organised effort by Islamists to gain influence over a number of schools in Birmingham.⁷⁷⁴ Several articles on the Mend website,⁷⁷⁵ including Mend’s 2017 Muslim Manifesto, use a 2015 report by the Education Select Committee to indicate that no evidence of extremism or radicalisation had been found.⁷⁷⁶ As is made clear in that same document, however, this was actually a reference to violent radicalisation – which had been found in only one case – but the report did in fact accept that there had been a promotion of a culture that would leave children culturally isolated and vulnerable to extremism.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁶ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2017’, Mend, 2017.

⁷⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ ‘Respecting Diversity – supporting schools to address prejudice’, Eventful, available at: <http://leeds.eventful.com/events/respecting-diversity-supporting-schools-address-p-/E0-001-104054491-5>, last visited 26 October 2017.

⁷⁶⁹ ‘Respecting Diversity – supporting schools to address prejudice’, Mend, 29 September 2017, previously available at: <https://mend.org.uk/event/54811/> (Archived Screenshot from Twitter 21 September 2017).

⁷⁷⁰ Mend, Facebook, 19 September 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/mendcommunity/photos/gm.1581764671885557/1942183546045806/?type=3&theater>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷⁷² *ibid.*

⁷⁷³ ‘Trojan Horse: Ofsted says schools were targeted’, *BBC News*, 9 June 2014, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-27763113>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁷⁴ ‘Trojan horse inquiry: “A coordinated agenda to impose hardline Sunni Islam”’, *The Guardian*, 17 July 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jul/17/birmingham-schools-inquiry-hardline-sunni-islam-trojan-horse>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁷⁵ ‘Department for Education continues to use “Trojan Horse” scandal’, Mend, 5 October 2017, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/department-education-continues-use-trojan-horse-scandal/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁷⁶ Mend Muslim Manifesto 2017, available at: https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MEND-Muslim-Manifesto-2017_FINAL_lowres.pdf, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁷⁷ ‘Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair – Education Committee’, Parliament UK, 71 March 2015, available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/473/47304.htm#a3>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

Similarly, when Sufyan Ismail discussed the Trojan Horse Scandal during a Mend presentation in 2014, the organization’s CEO referenced a headline: “Jihadist plot to take over our schools”, he continued, “Do you remember the Trojan Horse fiasco, that document was proven to be a fake two weeks after the story went live.”⁷⁷⁸ He added, “A lot of people out there make these things up, so the media comes up with these crazy stories about the Muslim community.”⁷⁷⁹ Once again the focus is on the origin of the initial document that first drew attention to Islamist activities in Birmingham schools, while the impression is left that there was no truth to the wider reports about the Trojan Horse Scandal.

3.9 Press and Media Monitoring

While Mend and Mend officials have taken a strong and essentially libertarian stance on free speech in their opposition to counter-extremism legislation – with Azad Ali even criticising legislation prohibiting the glorification of terrorism⁷⁸⁰ – a different position has been taken on regulation and policy intervention over the press. There may be conflicting interests here with regard to questions of press freedom and freedom of expression. These have been raised previously by the National Secular Society with regard to a former Mend employee, who, in a Facebook post celebrating Mend’s work, claimed that this would be the first step towards criminalising any malicious writing about Islam.⁷⁸¹ Clearly, incitement to hatred against ethnic and religious groups is wrong; however, it is not clear that this is the only kind of media coverage that those in Mend take issue with. Speaking during an iEngage presentation in 2013, Azad Ali gave the 2012 Channel 4 documentary *Islam the Untold Story* as an example that Muslims should complain to Ofcom about.⁷⁸² This was arguably not a programme that encouraged a negative portrayal of Muslims, but rather one which simply engaged in a debate about the early history of Islam.

A further point of concern relates to the role that the police should have with regard to the media in cases where the law has not been broken. Such an instance arose following the murder of 71-year-old Jalal Uddin by two Islamist extremists who considered him to be an apostate.⁷⁸³ At the time, Mend praised Greater Manchester’s Chief Constable Ian Hopkins when he wrote a public letter to *The Times* to complain that the newspaper’s headline about the murder of Jalal Uddin had referred to Rochdale as “sex grooming town”, this, Hopkins claimed, was offensive to Muslim residents and risked community tensions.⁷⁸⁴ As such, Hopkins requested *The Times* to issue an immediate apology and a response.⁷⁸⁵ *The Times* amended its misjudged headline, but some will be concerned that this was a matter on which the police chose to intervene with the press, given that no law had been broken by the newspaper.

In October 2011, iEngage made both written and oral submissions to Lord Leveson’s inquiry into press standards in the UK.⁷⁸⁶ Indeed, Mend’s promotional literature claims that it was the only Muslim organisation to have given oral evidence to the inquiry.⁷⁸⁷ Sufyan Ismail has said that all eight of the recommendations they made were included by Lord Leveson, including “massive fines for newspapers

⁷⁷⁸ ‘The Islamist message of MEND CEO Sufyan Ismail’, YouTube, 14 April 2015.

⁷⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁸⁰ ‘Azad Ali Muslim Safety Council Islamophobia Global Threats Confronting Anti Muslim Hatred in Britain and Europe 21 05 11’, YouTube, 28 May 2011.

⁷⁸¹ ‘SNP to host Muslim group whose staff member calls for prosecution of anyone who criticises Islam’, National Secular Society, 15 October 2015, available at: <http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/10/snp-to-host-muslim-group-whose-staff-member-calls-for-prosecution-of-anyone-who-criticises-islam>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁸² ‘Lewisham Islamic Centre - The Challenges of Islamophobia in the UK by Azad Ali’, YouTube, 7 February 2014.

⁷⁸³ ‘Rochdale Muslim leader “was bludgeoned in Isis-inspired murder”’, *The Guardian*, 23 August 2016, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/23/rochdale-muslim-leader-jalal-uddin-bludgeoned-isis-style-jury-hears>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁸⁴ ‘Success Alert - Times changes headline’, Mend, 20 February 2016, available at: <https://mend.org.uk/news/success-alert-times-changes-headline/>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁸⁶ ‘Islamophobia within Britain - Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

⁷⁸⁷ Mend Pamphlet: *Our Credentials: 18 reasons why you should work with Mend.*

that report irresponsibly on Muslims”.⁷⁸⁸ Subsequently, Mend has called for the full implementation of the Royal Charter that came out of the Leveson Inquiry, specifically with regard to the establishment of a regulatory body for the press.⁷⁸⁹ In its 2017 Muslim Manifesto, Mend states that “given the high volume of negative media coverage on Islam and Muslims”, the impact of this now “deserves proper attention and policy intervention”.⁷⁹⁰ Accordingly, the manifesto also highlighted research from the BBC to suggest that programming on faith groups and Muslims is problematic.⁷⁹¹ As such, one of the policy pledges outlined in the manifesto calls on politicians to commit to backing initiatives for promoting positive representations of Muslims, as well as other minorities, in the media.⁷⁹²

Mend also notes in its own literature that it has been recognised by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) as “a representative body of the Muslim community”.⁷⁹³

3.10 International Activities

Beyond the UK, Mend has also had some involvement with international organisations. Its own promotional literature tells of the organisation’s activities internationally, including reports that the World Economic Forum has recognised Mend as an example of “best practice and partnership” in “human rights protection and promotion”.⁷⁹⁴ Mend has also been an official partner in a European initiative on Islamophobia. As Mend’s Activity Report 2014 mentions, Mend was one of several UK groups brought into the European Commission-funded Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network.⁷⁹⁵ Also known as IMAN, the project is active in France, Italy, Holland, Sweden, Belgium, Hungary and Germany.⁷⁹⁶ The project was granted 70,187.25 Euros from the Commission of the European Union over the two-year period of 2013-14.⁷⁹⁷ The organisation’s activity report for 2016 further notes that Mend participated in the European Union’s first Colloquium on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, which was held in September 2015.⁷⁹⁸

Mend has also stated that the World Economic Forum has noted its work as an example of “best practice” on “human rights protection and promotion”.⁷⁹⁹ In 2014, Mend made a submission of its Anti-Muslim Hate Crime 2013 report to the Office for the Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) as part of the “Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region: Incidences and Responses” report.⁸⁰⁰ In the organisation’s 2015 Muslim Manifesto, Mend notes that this became a submission made annually to the ODIHR.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁸⁸ ‘Islamophobia within Britain – Sufyan Ismail of MEND’, YouTube, 13 April 2015.

⁷⁸⁹ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2017’, Mend, 2017.

⁷⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁷⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁷⁹² *ibid.*

⁷⁹³ Mend Pamphlet: *Our Credentials: 18 reasons why you should work with Mend.*

⁷⁹⁴ Mend Pamphlet: *Our Credentials: 18 reasons why you should work with Mend.*

⁷⁹⁵ ‘Activity Report 2014’, Mend.

⁷⁹⁶ ‘IMAN’s Core Team’, IMAN: Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network, available at: <http://iman-project.org/network/ngos-partners/#>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁹⁷ ‘Answer given by Ms Jourová on behalf of the Commission’, European Parliament, 29 July 2015, available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-2015-007227&language=EN>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁷⁹⁸ ‘Activity Report 2016’, Mend.

⁷⁹⁹ ‘MEND’s Response to Andrew Gilligan’, Mend, available at: <http://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/MENDs-response-to-Andrew-Gilligan.pdf>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁸⁰⁰ ‘Anti-Muslim hate crime 2013’, Mend, 2013, available at: <http://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Hate-Crime-Report-2013.pdf>, last visited: 22 October 2017.

⁸⁰¹ ‘Mend Muslim Manifesto 2015’, Mend, 2015.

Conclusion

Mend can seem a complicated and at times difficult to define organisation. At first glance, much of its activity appears to be legitimate, if not socially beneficial. A surface-level reading might reach a similar conclusion about many of the documents and posts published on its website. Yet there is far more to Mend than this. A more detailed examination of the organisation’s rhetoric and the statements made by its officials show that the repeated instances of criticism from journalists and public figures have been warranted.

Taking the government’s own definition of extremism, and the more detailed assessment of non-violent extremism offered by the then Prime Minister David Cameron in his July 2015 speech, there are multiple, repeated and consistent examples of Mend/iEngage crossing the line into extremism. In the subtler cases, this has tended to involve literature produced by Mend or presentations delivered at Mend events, endorsing aspects of an extremist narrative and worldview. In particular, Mend’s messaging on both counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation, as well as on Islamophobia, seems to have intentionally set out to persuade Muslims that there is a conspiracy being waged against them and their faith, one that is being implemented by the British government in collaboration with sinister and powerful interest groups. Anti-Semitic insinuations have emerged often in this narrative.

Equally, Mend and its employees and volunteers have on numerous occasions attacked liberal Muslim groups and Muslims engaged in counter-extremism, and on occasion, Mend volunteers have expressed intolerance towards other Muslim denominations. Additionally, Mend – and iEngage previously – has defended and supported both extremist groups and hate preachers who have been banned from coming to the UK. In the case of the pro-terrorist group Cage, there have been repeated instances of Mend and its senior figures voicing support for Cage and appearing on platforms with members of Cage, including at Cage-run events. Mend has also chosen to regularly host illiberal, intolerant and extremist Islamist speakers at the public events it arranges. This would appear now to be systematic, and presumably an expression of Mend’s own ideological worldview.

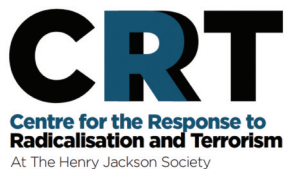
Mend officials and volunteers have also expressed a variety of troubling views on terrorism. These have ranged from downplaying the terrorist nature of various Islamist terrorist attacks, or promoting conspiracy theories in relation to them, to suggesting that those returning from fighting in Syria should not be prosecuted, and to advocating that British mosques hold prayers for the Mujahedeen (Islamic militias), and in one instance legitimising the killing of British troops in Iraq.⁸⁰² If Mend disavows these views, it has not demonstrated this by ending its employment of, or association with, these individuals.

The national Counter-Extremism Strategy sets out the importance of challenging the extremist narrative, and it requires public bodies to avoid providing uncontested spaces for extremism. Responsible public figures and civil society groups should also consider what they can do to avoid legitimising those who side with extremism and intolerance. Given the evidence set out in this report, it would be justified to regard Mend as having the same status as other non-violent extremist groups.

⁸⁰² *Ali v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2010] EWHC 100 (QB), 27 January 2010.

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About The Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT)

The Centre for the Response to Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) is unique in addressing violent and non-violent extremism. By coupling high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, we aim to combat the threat of Islamism in our society.



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MEND: "ISLAMISTS
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