

“WE ARE COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT”

The Home Office, Breakthrough Media and the PREVENT Counter Narrative Industry

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If you think about what the Internet does for terrorists, it gives them a myriad of ways to communicate covertly. It gives them a platform to fundraise, to radicalise, to spread propaganda. It gives them the means to plan, to command and control, to spread lethal ideas, to exhort violence. We have had some successes in this area, in terms of turning that against them. I think those are best kept secret.

Sir Iain Lobban, former Director of GCHQ, 7 November 2013

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the Home Office and a secretive government department called RICU, the Research, Information and Communications Unit, has been cultivating a network of 'grass roots' Muslim voices to promote 'counter-narratives' to combat the appeal of 'extremist narratives' among Britain's young people. All of this is taking place with no public debate or oversight.

Working with top PR agencies and new media companies to target young people who fit the profile of 'vulnerable young Muslim', RICU's interventions represent the first concerted foray into cyberspace by the British state with the aim of covertly engineering the thoughts of its citizens. In practice this means the chosen 'grass roots' organisations and 'counter-narratives' receive financial and technical support from the government for the production of their multimedia campaigns (videos, websites, podcasts, blogs etc.). These state-sponsored 'counter narratives' have in turn been promoted to specific groups of internet users, chosen on the basis of their demographics, the websites they visit, the social media accounts they 'follow', and the search terms they use.

COUNTER-EXTREMISM STRATEGY

This report has been produced to shine a light on these activities and promote debate about the extent and legitimacy of public policies predicated on secret partnerships between government bodies, public relations agencies, social media conglomerates and state-sponsored ‘grass roots’ activism. The report calls for a wider debate on the impact and legitimacy of British ‘counter-radicalisation’ policies, which purport to campaign for the ‘hearts and minds’ of British Muslims but are instead based on extraordinary surveillance and control under the PREVENT agenda, heralding a new counter-extremism strategy.

Since 1 July 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 has imposed a legal duty upon local UK authorities, prisons, National Health Service trusts and the education sector, from pre-school to university, to prevent and detect ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’. These public and private enterprises are ill-equipped to implement state counter-terrorism policy, and the new law has had the effect of simultaneously opening the door to the ranks of CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) consultants and ‘reformed extremists’ to deliver strategy and training, while having a chilling and at times scarcely believable impact on the freedom of expression, conscience and religion of young British Muslims and their communities (toddlers, school kids wearing ‘Free Palestine’ badges and university students on terrorism studies courses have been referred to counter-terrorism police, for example).

The new Counter-Extremism strategy will target non-violent ‘extremists’ and those who oppose ‘British values’. ‘Extremist’ organisations may be shut down and individual ‘extremists’ will be blacklisted and banned from working with children. The detail on who decides who those ‘extremists’ are, and what ‘British values’ it is deemed extreme to oppose is still awaited, but with the Prime Minister recently branding those who oppose the bombing of Syria as ‘terrorist sympathizers’, and placing the blame for ‘radicalization’ on socially conservative Muslims with a poor grasp of English, the direction of travel is all too clear. It is in this context that state-sponsored narratives about being a ‘good British Muslim’ and shunning ‘extremism’ should be assessed.

THE PARTNERS

The research we have conducted suggests that the following organisations have been working with media companies such as Breakthrough Media to produce counter-narratives that are strongly endorsed by the government’s Prevent strategy. Although all those involved have gone to great lengths to keep these relationships secret, we have collected ample evidence to suggest that the following groups are among a significantly larger number involved in producing government-approved messages:

- Anti-Tribalism Movement
- Armed Forces Muslims Association
- Families Against Stress and Trauma

- Upstanding Neighbourhoods
- Faith Associates
- Quilliam Foundation

The link between the Prevent programme and these and other groups is Breakthrough Media, a PR company whose activities are apparently protected by the Official Secrets Act. Parliament has not been informed of these activities; government communications policy is being kept from public scrutiny by draconian secrecy legislation and the veil of ‘national security’.

INDEPENDENCE?

It is important to stress from the outset that there is nothing objectionable in principle about grass roots activism that tries to steer people away from violence and ‘extremism’ - or any other ‘-ism’ for that matter. Indeed, freedom to engage in whatever kind of non-violent activism one chooses gets to the heart of what it means to live in a democracy that holds freedom of expression dear. Moreover, organisations engaged in community work can and frequently do receive funding from local or central government, and are perfectly within their rights to do so. But it is a slippery slope when governments start trying to engineer the contours and impact of that activism by secretly sponsoring some ‘community voices’ and misrepresenting and censoring others – in particular those non-violent activists and organisations who challenge the legitimacy and credibility of the wider War on Terror.

The government already spends well over a quarter of a billion pounds per year across all of its marketing and public relations activities. Having railed against ‘sock-puppet’ NGOs and introduced a ban on charities in receipt of public money lobbying against government policy, it is time for an honest conversation about the impact, legitimacy and effectiveness of British government propaganda targeted at the ‘Muslim community’. This is essential if these policies are to be subject to anything like the kind of democratic control and accountability that ‘British values’ are supposed to hold dear.

Ultimately, this report is about transparency and accountability, and the need for the two to be present when the government claims to be “working alongside communities”, and when ‘grass roots’ and ‘public interest’ organisations claim to be independent and impartial. Without transparency and accountability, communities will not trust government, and people will not trust anyone. People need to be confident in the difference between government propaganda and genuine activism. In turn they need to know that non-governmental organisations and grass roots organisations are independent of government, or otherwise open about their relationship with government. When ‘civil society’ organisations become tools of government, as is evidenced in this report, it spells the end for civil society.

RICU

This section examines the key actor involved in the development of the UK government counter-narratives programme: the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) and the evolution of its counter-narrative activities.

RICU is part of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), an executive directorate of the UK Home Office created in 2007. The Guardian suggests that the OSCT “is widely regarded in Whitehall as being an intelligence agency”. (1) The OSCT does indeed work closely with the police and security services and reports directly to the Home Secretary and Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism. It is responsible for exercising the UK’s response to terrorist incidents, and devising counter-terrorism legislation, both for the UK and clients overseas. (2)

RICU was established in June 2007 and works under the PREVENT directorate. It has a remit to “advise departments across government on communicating counter-terrorism and counter-extremism messages” and “works to ensure that those messages are consistent.” (3) This includes “countering the appeal of violent extremism while promoting stronger grass-roots inter-community relations.” (4) Although RICU is a Home Office department, it is “jointly owned” by the Home Office, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). (5) The UK’s Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 indicates that counter-narrative approaches could be mainstreamed into future international development strategies. (6)

RICU'S COUNTER-EXTREMISM MESSAGING

The thinking behind RICU was summed-up by a report in the Guardian in 2007:

“Counter-terrorism officials are rethinking their approach to tackling the radicalisation of Muslim youth, abandoning what they admit has been offensive and inappropriate language. They say the term “war on terror” will no longer be heard from ministers. Instead, they will use less emotive language, emphasising the criminal nature of the plots and conspiracies. The government in future, they add, will talk of a “struggle” against extremist ideology, rather than a “battle”.

“We hadn’t got the message right,” said one senior official. He added: “We must talk in a language which is not offensive.” Another said that the terrorist threat must not be described as a “Muslim problem”.

The change in approach by counter-terrorism officials is part of plans by the government’s Research, Information, and Communications Unit to counter al-Qaida propaganda and win hearts and minds. The unit, headed by Jonathan Allen, is part of the Home Office, but will work closely with the Foreign Office and Department of Communities and Local Government.

...

Whitehall officials are being asked to draw up “counter-narratives” to the anti-western messages on websites designed to influence vulnerable and impressionable audiences here. They will set out to explain what one official called the government’s “foreign policy in its totality”, counter the accusations made by al-Qaida sympathisers and extremist groups and pinpoint the weaknesses in their arguments. The unit will also support “alternative voices” in the Muslim community.” (7)

According to the EU-funded Counterextremism.org, (8) a project of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, (9) RICU has since become “One of the most developed cross-departmental strategic communications units in Europe”. (10) Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Professor David Miller and Dr Rizwaan Sabir (11) show RICU’s initial concern:

MESSAGES TO PROMOTE	MESSAGES TO COUNTER
Terrorism is a real and serious threat to us all.	Terrorism is not a real and serious threat to us all. The terrorist threat is exaggerated by the UK government.
Terrorists are criminals and murderers.	Terrorist attacks against the UK are legitimate.
Terrorists attack the values that we all share.	Terrorist attacks are justified by ‘Muslim Values’.
We all need to work together to tackle the terrorist challenge.	The terrorist challenge is primarily a problem for Muslims or Muslim communities to address.

An early review of the impact of this strategy conducted by global marketing specialists TNS, identified only one ‘off-message’ communication in the first 15 months of RICU operations. Notwithstanding the self-serving nature of these kind of impact assessments, it is easy to see how the ceaseless mantra of “terrorists attack the values that we all share; we all need to work together to tackle the terrorist challenge” has been used to prepare the ground for the whole-of-state approach to ‘extremism’ that the government has now put in place.

PARLIAMENTARY REFERENCES TO RICU'S WORK

There are some basic references to the trajectory of RICU’s work in reports of the UK Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC). In 2008, the then Labour government told the ISC that:

“...a major counter-narrative campaign has been initiated...a network of community organisations established...local partners in priority areas have been briefed and provided with communications advice...relationships have been built with key media channels...research into audience segmentation...has been completed...[and] guidance on communicating with Somali and Pakistani [communities] in the UK has been circulated.” (12)

RICU’s ‘UK Counter-Narrative Campaign’ - “a project to establish a loose network of credible community groups able to directly challenge terrorist propaganda” - was launched amid a period of widespread concern about the PREVENT programme. Anti-racist campaigners accused the programme of dividing and spying on Muslim communities; (13) right wing newspapers accused it of funding “Islamist hatemongers”; (14) and a Commons Select Committee concluded that:

“[The PREVENT] programme is a complex and sensitive agenda that has met with widely varying perceptions as to what it stands for and aims to deliver ... its approach is contentious and is unlikely ever to be fully accepted by those it is most important to engage” (15) [emphasis added]

This was the context in which the Home Secretary informed the Intelligence and Security Committee in 2011 that RICU was “currently road-testing some quite innovative approaches to counter-ideological messages,” (16) adding in her response to their report that the government was “committed to developing more professional counter-narrative products” that reach people who are vulnerable to ‘radicalization’.

Jonathan Allen, the first head of RICU, is now Director for National Security at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, following a stint as ambassador to Bulgaria. (17) The current head of RICU is Richard Chalk, a former investment manager for British Aerospace and Conservative party spin doctor who stood as a parliamentary election candidate in 1997, describing himself as fuelled by “religious conviction” and a “passionate rejection of the dogma and dangerous idealism of a Socialist agenda”. (18)

RICU PROPAGANDA AND RESEARCH

According to Counterextremism.org, RICU conducts research and analysis of target audiences, (19) both on and offline. This includes “commissioning analysis looking at the online behaviors [sic] of young Muslims, media consumption patterns, the role of blogs in radicalization, in addition to broader efforts to understand how language used by government is received and understood by target audiences”. RICU’s “Campaigns Team” is charged with the implementation of “strategic communications activities – including digital campaigns – targeted at vulnerable communities”. (20) “Strategic communication”, or ‘STRATCOM’, appears to be a euphemism for propaganda, and a product of the constant renaming of the term designed precisely to avoid the negative connotations of the practice. (21)

Between 2007-2010, RICU research projects included: “How young British Muslims felt about their identity and sense of belonging”, “How young British Muslims use the internet”, “How government messages are perceived by Muslim communities”, “Islamic blogs”, “The language of terrorism” and “Why some voices are more credible than others to Muslim communities”. (22) Government tenders included guidance on, “the influence of the internet with (AQ) extremist offenders and online communities with an interest in supporting extremism/terrorism” commissioned by the Ministry of Defence to the private company ‘i to i research’ at a cost of £60,000. (23)

Following Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s 2009 assault on Gaza, the Home Office was tasked to assess the effect of the Gaza massacre on British Muslims to determine the impact on domestic security levels – in consultation with “Muslim civil society groups”. (24) Responses provided in Parliament clarified that these groups included: Sufi Muslim Council, Al Khoei Foundation, the National Muslim Women’s Advisory Group, the Ithna Asheri Khoja Shia World Federation, Association of Muslim Social Scientists, the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, Active Change Foundation, and the Quilliam Foundation. (25) The following year it launched a project on “Victims’ Testimonies”, placing “emphasis on the experiences of the victims of terrorism in populations that are deemed to be at risk of susceptibility to terrorist propaganda”. (26)

RICU’S BUDGET

In 2009/10, RICU had 35 full-time staff and an annual budget of £5.7 million, of which £1.5million was expected to be spent on research, and £3.5 million on campaigns to “empower community voices” such as Muslim community groups. (27) Its staff and budget was cut in 2010/11 to 22 staff and £4.25 million, of which £2.7m was spent on communication campaigns. (28) Since 2010/11, however, RICU has not appeared in any other Intelligence and Security Committee reports, so its current resources are unknown. RICU is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for Communities and Local Government, (29) and is also reported to have received Ministry of Defence funding. (30) According to the Independent newspaper, the FCO was granted £173,000 in urgent funding for “social media activity to deter UK residents from travelling to fight in Syria” in 2014. (31)

THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

The withholding of information regarding RICU’s activities from parliament and the public is consistent with a broader trend of secrecy around counter-extremism funding. (32)

The counter-narrative campaigns discussed in this report may have been funded by RICU, through local government PREVENT schemes, or from dedicated funding streams such as the “Preventing Violent Extremism” fund, the “Safer & Stronger Community Fund” or the “Community Safety Fund”.

The lack of transparency around RICU’s activities means Parliament and the public are prevented from knowing how government policies are being implemented and how taxpayers’ money is being spent.

In October 2015, the government announced a further £5 million in new funding for, “local initiatives, campaigns and charities to counter extremist ideologies”. (33) It is imperative that rules are put in place to ensure full transparency over the execution of these and related budgets.

“IT DOES
SOUND
HORRIBLY
COLD WAR”

RICU OFFICIAL, SUNDAY TIMES, 2008

BREAKTHROUGH MEDIA

This section explains how it is that ‘community groups’ with relatively tiny budgets have been able to produce slick websites, videos and campaigns.

As already explained, RICU delivers its counter-narratives through its ‘network of grass roots Muslim Voices’ and engages PR companies to help them produce multi-media. During the course of our research, one media company appeared time and time again in respect to our investigations into numerous ‘community’ organisations: Breakthrough Media.

Based on the material we have gathered, Breakthrough Media Network Limited appears to be the government’s go-to creative media agency for its “counter-narratives”. Furthermore, Breakthrough’s relationship with the Home Office and its community partners appear to be protected under the Official Secrets Act in order to hide such relationships.

“Breakthrough exists to make life better: for people, for communities, for countries. We’re not just a creative communications agency. We’re an idea born out of the belief that powerful storytelling and compelling communications can, and do, change the world for the better”.

Breakthrough Media specializes in, “emotionally driven films, campaigns and other communications products”, and its clients include government and intergovernmental agencies (UK, US, European Union, African Union, United Nations) and various NGOs. It has offices in London, Nairobi and Mogadishu and employs 100 people across Europe and East Africa.

Breakthrough was founded by Managing Director Robert Elliot, and originally called “Camden Creative”, which was incorporated in 2008. Camden Creative operated as a drama and documentaries production company that delivered a ten-part reality drama series for Channel 5 and a one-off documentary about the Mayor of Mogadishu for Al Jazeera English. The name of the company was changed to “Breakthrough Media” on 27 November 2012. Breakthrough’s CEO is Scott Brown, appointed on 17 August 2012. Brown was formerly an account director at M&C Saatchi and Deputy Chief of Staff at Bell Pottinger (the UK’s biggest PR company) in Nairobi.



AN OFFICIAL SECRET?

Breakthrough Media is frequently involved in production of counter-narratives on behalf of the British government and the “grass roots” organisations with which it works. This is evidenced not only by the case studies in the following section, but by indications that at least some Breakthrough Media staff are required to sign the Official Secrets Act (OSA). (34) An employee for Breakthrough Media, Sulaiman Khan, wrote a blog post for his site ‘Hey Kinectricity’ on 8th August 2015, where he described the activities of Breakthrough Media and admitted the requirement to sign an OSA by quoting from a talent company,

“The company website gives a good account of their work although much of the detail is generalised simply because what they do and who it is for, in the main, is governed in the UK by the Official Secrets Act – which each employee must sign on joining – and divisive in nature, as it involves raising awareness and, in many cases, opposing vested political / religious interests for the greater good – both in the UK and abroad.” (35)

When researchers sought to access the Hey Kinectricity blog one month later on 28 September 2015, the reference to the Official Secrets Act had been removed entirely by Khan. The current post still quotes from the talent agent Tim Mitchell, with the exception that the quote referencing the work of Breakthrough Media is completely different. (36)

Why would Breakthrough Media’s work be protected by the Official Secrets Act? What activities are they involved in, that would require the involvement of such legislation designed to protect national security and state secrets?

The evidence we have gathered suggests that it is because the government is attempting to engineer the contours of debate around the legitimacy of Muslim life in the UK by promoting certain organisations and views, and that the veil of secrecy is there to allow these organisations to present themselves as independent and based within the grassroots of their communities.

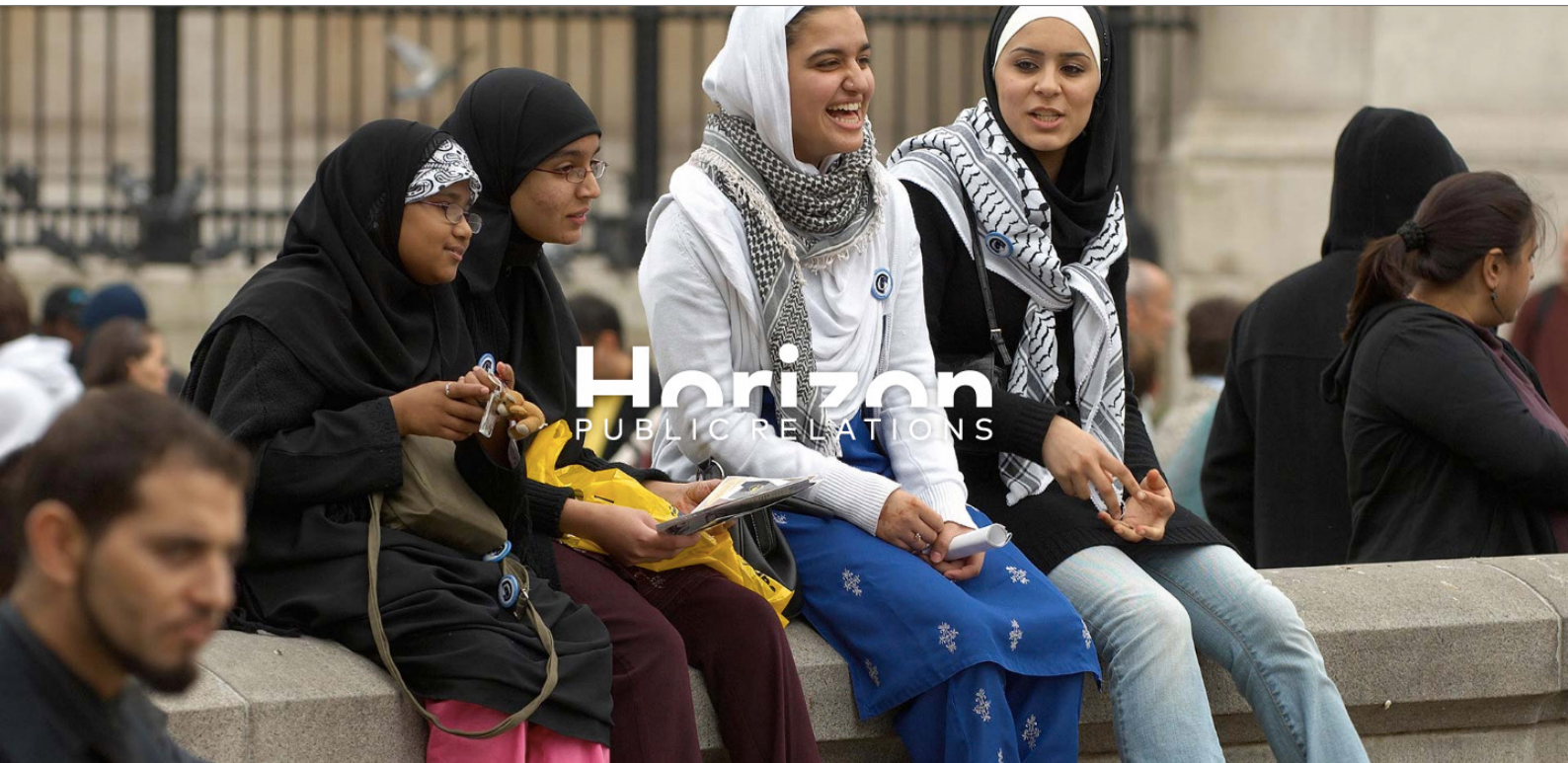
HOSTING COINCIDENCE?

Breakthrough Media is also involved in training NGOs on how to use social media. It is understood that representatives of some of the world’s largest social media conglomerates participated in Breakthrough’s workshops. According to a statement to Parliament by Eric Pickles, the Government’s Communities Secretary, “Four social media workshops were held in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds. We worked in conjunction with Home Office Research Information and Communication Unit and Breakthrough Media. The aim was to improve the social media capacity of community organisations in each area in promoting positive narratives and case studies”. (37)

Further, although it is difficult to evidence due to the protection of the identities of those who have registered the websites, it appears that Breakthrough Media has been responsible for the production of websites for a number of different counter-narrative campaigns. By analysing the hosting references for the following websites, we found that nearly all of the websites we were interested in were hosted on the same primary and secondary Name Server as Breakthrough Media:

ORGANISATION	SERVER
Breakthrough:	Primary NS: ns8235.hostgator.com Secondary NS: ns8236.hostgator.com
Families Matter:	Primary NS: ns8235.hostgator.com Secondary NS: ns8236.hostgator.com
Help for Syria:	Primary NS: ns8235.hostgator.com Secondary NS: ns8236.hostgator.com
Open Your Eyes:	Primary NS: ns8235.hostgator.com Secondary NS: ns8236.hostgator.com
Imams Online:	Primary NS: ns6189.hostgator.com Secondary NS: ns6190.hostgator.com

Given there are 75 million servers in the world, the probability that the websites above sharing the same servers as Breakthrough Media is unlikely to be coincidence .



GOING GLOBAL?

“Horizon is a public relations agency that specialises in applying best-in-class strategic communications to promote, celebrate and strengthen the positive voices and stories of ethnic minority communities here in Britain and abroad”.

Our investigation also uncovered close links between Breakthrough Media and M&C Saatchi Group, which appear to have launched a joint venture to capitalise on international demand for counter-narratives.

Horizon PR was incorporated in March 2015 and is part of the M&C Saatchi Group, the international PR and advertising group formed by Maurice and Charles Saatchi after they left from their original firm, Saatchi and Saatchi. Horizon has five directors: Robert Elliot and Scott Brown of Breakthrough Media, and Andrew Blackstone, Molly Aldridge and Marcus Peffers from the M&C Saatchi group. Blackstone and Aldridge are senior executives at M&C Saatchi, while Peffers was a senior account director who founded the companies World Services Division in 2011 to bring the, “experience and creative capabilities”, of the agency to, “help tackle complex behavioural and social issues in fragile states and developing markets”. M&C Saatchi’s World Services works with a range of national and international Governments, IGOs, INGO’s and foundations and is among the group’s most successful divisions. Peffers has also worked at a senior advisory level with successive UK Governments, including HMT, the FCO, The Home Office, HMRC and Number 10, and oversaw M&C Saatchi’s campaign to keep Scotland in the Union on behalf of the three main UK political parties.

Horizon provides PR solutions to, “ethnic, social and faith based issues”, to clients including, “non-government and civil-society groups who want to improve and increase the impact and scale of their activity and better reach audiences at a local, regional, national and international level”. This is achieved through, “creative news generation, traditional and social media campaigns and targeted events”. In launching Horizon, the Breakthrough and the Saatchis appear to be betting on a big future in communicating government messages on sensitive issues such as ‘terrorism’ and ‘extremism’.

“You can do it without it looking like government propaganda, because if it looks too much like government propaganda then I don’t think people are going to listen, nor should they”

Richard Mottram, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office (Intelligence, Security and Resilience) (38)

THE COUNTER-NARRATIVES

The previous sections of this report have suggested that RICU has cultivated a network of ‘grassroots’ community organisations through which to deliver PREVENT counter-narratives and to engage specialist PR companies to produce their campaigns. It is also suggested that these activities have been withheld from Parliament, while the Official Secrets Act has helped shield them from public scrutiny and disclosure.

Our investigation suggests that RICU’s network has also been used to promote the virtues of the PREVENT programme itself.

PREVENT has been controversial and divisive since its inception. (39) Over the last few years, wide sections of the public have begun to critically assess the impact of PREVENT, arguing that rather than being a panacea to extremism, it is causing further division and disenfranchisement among the very communities it professes to support.

To counter this growing, critical discourse, the entry into force of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act in July 2015 was accompanied by a ‘grass roots campaign’ in support of the legislation called ‘The Fightback Starts Here’.

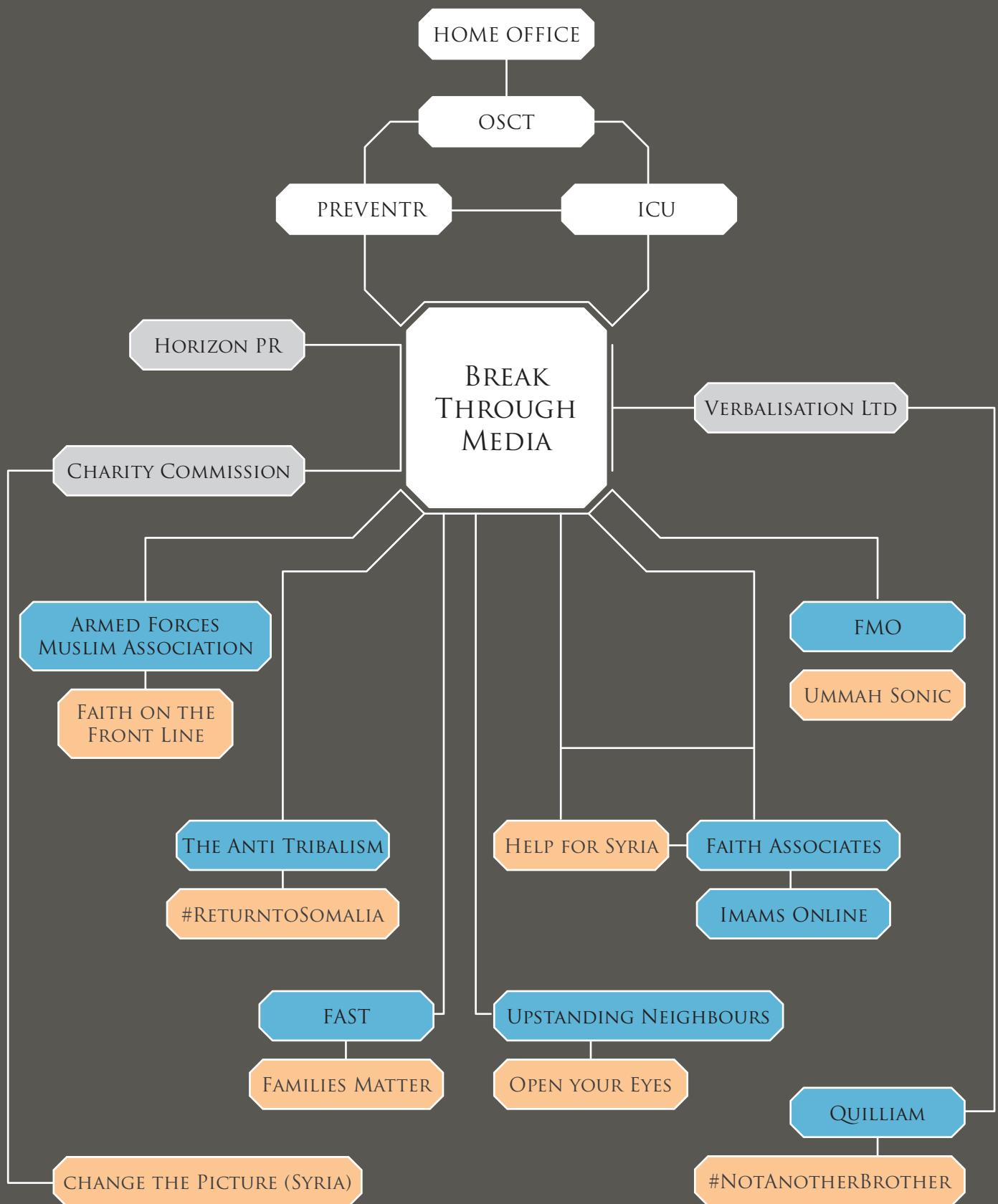
The legislation imposed a statutory PREVENT duty on local authorities, government bodies, the NHS, education sector and almost every single part of public sector life to report on those they considered to be drawn towards ‘terrorism’.

Its entry force was welcomed by an open letter and the launch of the www.fightbackstartshere.com website. The BBC described the campaign as a “Muslim-led ‘fightback’ against extremism”. (40) The open letter reads:

“We represent charities, civil society organisations and safeguarding groups from across the UK. We speak for the many religions, faiths, ethnicities, denominations, colours and creeds that make up modern Britain. And we each in our own way find ourselves on the front line of the battle against all extremists, who sow hate and prey on young people to encourage them to harm themselves, their families and the fabric of the communities in which they live.” (41)

In the context of this report, it is important to note, that the signatories included many organisations in receipt of government PREVENT funding, as well as most of the organisations that have produced the government supported counter-narratives which appear in the pages that follow, including the Federation of Muslim Organisations, Active Change Foundation, Inspire, JAN Trust, Families Against Stress and Trauma and the Deen Institute (Adam Deen is now at the Quilliam Foundation).

It is these kinds of initiatives that must now be subject to robust scrutiny.



KEY:



SOMALIA: TIME TO GO HOME

Somalia is one of the poorest countries in the world. Since 1989, almost a third its population of 7.5 million people has been displaced by famine and conflict. A million people have fled the country, and further 1.3 million are internally displaced. (42) In 2011, the UK Government suggested that the political situation in Somalia, “directly threatens British interests,” (43) and labelled the country a, “top priority”, promising £250 million in British security and development funding for over four years. (45)

In 2012 and 2013, the British government hosted international donor conferences on Somalia in an attempt to garner, “international support for the Government of Somalia as they rebuild their country after two decades of conflict”. (46) In advance of the 2013 London Conference, RICU circulated, “talking points”, on Somalia for representatives of the UK government and its agencies. These directed ministers to talk-up the political situation in the country and play-down the impact of the conflict with Al-Shabaab, suggesting, “the proscribed terrorist organisation Al Shabaab has been expelled from many of Somalia’s major towns and cities. Confidence is increasing and the diaspora is returning. The changes in Somalia over the last year offer a unique opportunity to build stability and security in the country”. (47)

To promote this last message, that it was time for the Somali diaspora to go home, RICU selected the ‘Anti-Tribalism Movement’ (ATM), a UK NGO founded in 2010 to, “educate tribal communities about tribalism as well as creating cohesive and unity within those communities by empowering young people.” (48)

In October 2013, shortly after the release of, “Return to Somalia”, by Breakthrough Media and the ATM, the Home Office declared the country safe for the return (deportation) of Somali refugees, who had long been demonised in the UK media as the least integrated and most dangerous refugee community in Britain. (49)

This was a controversial and widely disputed decision. As recently as 2011, the European Court of Human Rights had ruled that the UK would violate Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights if Somali asylum seekers were sent back to Mogadishu. (50) And in August 2013, just two months before the UK declaration that Somalia was “safe”, Medicine Sans Frontieres announced it was pulling out of the country after 22 years following, “extreme attacks on its staff in an environment where armed groups and civilian leaders increasingly support, tolerate, or condone the killing, assaulting, and abducting of humanitarian aid workers”. (51)

Despite this, and following the classification of parts of Somalia as safe for the return of refugees, the Home Office began forcibly deporting Somalis as part of, “Somalia test pilot scheme”. (52) Human Rights Watch stated that, “Deporting people to conflict zones in Somalia shows a total disregard for their rights and their safety.” (53)

RETURN TO SOMALIA



Messenger:	The Anti-Tribalism Movement
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media (54) Anti-Tribalism Movement has produced 30 minutes documentary with the help of Break Through Media, the documentary reached more than 200,000 people world wise as many TVs aired the programme including Kenya National TV, Islamic Channel, Universal TV just to mention a few. The documentary increased the membership of our organisation and has put the organisation at international arena.
Funded by:	Unknown
Target Audience:	Somali diaspora in UK
Products:	Two documentaries: “Return to Somalia: Adam & Abdi’s Story” (55) and “Return to Somalia: Aliya’s Story”; (56) website www.returntosomalia.com registered but unused.
Narrative:	The first part of Return to Somalia follows two young Somali men from North West London who return to Mogadishu with the aim of setting up an NGO to help eradicate inter-tribal discrimination in Somalia and across the world (ATM). Part two follows Aliya, a young American hip-hop music manager who leaves behind a life of fun and frivolity in Washington DC to embrace her new identity as a Somali woman in a mostly conservative society. The documentaries show Somalia as a place of “opportunities and optimism that are attracting thousands of other Somalis to return home”. (57)
Date of release:	2013
Impact:	According to ATM’s accounts, this documentary reached more than 100,000 people worldwide in its first year of release. (58)

Although the source of funding for this particular project is unclear, sources close to the Anti-Tribalism Movement have informed us that they were the recipients of large amounts of funding from the Home Office and OSCCT. While Breakthrough Media is happy to acknowledge its work on the Somalia documentaries, its role in all but one of the other government counter-narratives in this report has not been disclosed.



ARMED FORCES MUSLIM ASSOCIATION

FAITH ON THE FRONTLINE

In September 2015, a new documentary was screened about the activities of a British Muslim, Asim Hafiz, who serves as a chaplain to the British Armed Forces. According to the Armed Forces Muslim Association, the documentary is to explain how Islam is practiced and respected for 650 Muslims in the Forces,

“For Asim Hafiz, serving in the British Army brings something of a unique perspective. As the first Imam and Muslim Chaplain to the British Armed Forces, he is conducting his own mission to help groups from different faiths and backgrounds, to better understand Islam.

As well as his role as the spiritual guide for the 650 British Muslims, some serving in places like Afghanistan, Asim’s duties extend to gaining the trust of the very people the British troops have been sent to help.

Being a Muslim serving in the British Armed Forces, Asim has built relationships both inside and outside the perimeter fencing, that has brought the two communities together and brought a more positive feeling of hope for the future.” (59)

The organisation chosen specifically to deliver this project was Breakthrough Media, who do acknowledge their involvement in their website. This documentary and the ones on Somalia, are the only projects they acknowledge, out of all the counter narratives where they have a footprint. The production quality of the video is very much in keeping with other government propaganda products.

Messenger:	The Armed Forces Muslim Association (AFMA), set up in recognition of the contribution Muslim personnel make across all three services, both in the Regular and Reserve forces. (60)
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media (61) and CTVC Ltd
Funded by:	
Target Audience:	British secondary school children (11-18) and college students
Products:	Short video (62) and full length film (25 min) (63)
Narrative:	
Date of release:	September 2015
Awards:	Finalist, Bett awards 2016, Free Digital Content/Open Educational Resources – single issue resource (64)

DON'T GO TO SYRIA, ONLY GIVE TO REGISTERED CHARITIES

After the 2011 revolution began in Syria, there was an immediate humanitarian crisis as hundreds of thousands of refugees were both internally displaced and forced to seek refuge in Turkey and further afield. Many communities and small charities launched immediate relief efforts. However by 2013 the UK government changed its assessment of the threat posed by those travelling abroad, asserting that not only were they putting themselves in danger, but they may return and present further danger to UK society. (65) According to the Chair of the Charity Commission, William Shawcross:

““It is absolutely terrifying to see these young British men going out to be trained in Syria and coming back here...Most of them are not going out under the auspices of charities but, when that happens, it is absolutely our duty to come down on it...Even if extremist and terrorist abuse is rare, which it is, when it happens it does huge damage to public trust in charities.” (66)

As a result of the fears being expressed by the security establishment over unregulated aid convoys travelling to Syria, the Charity Commission directly intervened by investigating 37 charities involved in providing aid to the region. (67) The London-based Think Tank Claystone conducted a study of the Charity Commission's scrutiny of the Muslim charity sector, and wrote in their conclusion:

“...thus far there has been no empirical evidence to substantiate concerns that British Muslim charities are surreptitiously operating with the purpose of supporting terrorist or extremist activities...Recent years have seen a greater focus on counter terrorism measures and non-violent extremism at the Charity Commission. However, there is a lack of evidence made publicly available by the Commission to support the claims of its Chairman that extremism is a growing problem in the sector. We feel that it is important for the Commission to provide compelling evidence to justify the continued focus on Muslim charities.” (68)

What Shawcross and those fearful of the aid convoys do not convey, is the extent to which the convoys operate as a lifeline for towns where larger NGOs and charities refuse to enter or operate. It was only on 17 February 2016 that there has been any form of actual test to permit some form of humanitarian conditions that will allow the UN to supply urgent supplies to besieged towns. In the first five years of the conflict, it has been the aid convoys providing the life saving aid. (69)

Regardless of the situation of the Syrians, the Charity Commission and Home Office placed pressure on the Muslim charity sector to agree to only use recognised providers of aid to avoid suspicion. It is now clear that the government also engaged RICU and Breakthrough media to deliver counter-narratives supporting its policy decisions.



**SYRIA
NEEDS
YOUR
HELP**



**CHARITY
COMMISSION**

SYRIA NEEDS YOUR HELP

The launch of the “Syria Needs Your Help” project came one month after the Charity Commission released guidance on safe ways for individuals and organisations to donate to Syria. According to the Charity Commission,

“The Charity Commission strongly advises charities, their trustees, employees, volunteers and representatives against moving significant amounts of cash from one location to another on their person or in personal luggage. The method of transporting cash in person is known to be used by criminal terrorist groups; therefore carrying large sums of cash in person, unless supported by appropriate documentation, is likely to be viewed suspiciously by ports officers and may be subject to seizure under the Proceeds of Crime Act – and ultimately lost. Cash can be seized if the Police or a customs officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting that it is the proceeds of crime, or intended for use in unlawful future conduct.

...

The FCO advises against all travel to the Syrian Arab Republic. Before deciding to travel to Syria to provide human aid, charities need to assess the personal safety risks before travelling, and whether a convoy is the most effective way to deliver aid. It is likely that aid convoys may be stopped and questioned. The Commission is aware that people participating in aid convoys have been stopped by ports officers both in the UK and overseas. It is therefore essential that convoys are properly planned and consideration is given to individual safety and the safety of aid being transported, and all relevant country requirements are met.” (70)

In order to push this message further, the Charity Commission produced an animated video reinforcing its message that individuals interested in giving to Syria, should only use recognised charities through a campaign called Safer giving for Syria. (71) The messaging fits perfectly with the formation of another group “Help for Syria”, launched by three British charities (Hand in Hand for Syria, Syria Relief and Human Care Syria) in May 2013 as a resource for those wishing to donate to the Syrian effort in a safe manner. (72) Help for Syria describes itself as,

“Help for Syria is an online resource providing advice and guidance for anyone who wants to raise money and aid for Syria. We are not a charity, and cannot accept donations. Our purpose is to offer advice on how to organise fundraising events here in the UK to help the displaced Syrian people.” (73)

Except, the view of the three charities initially involved is very different. Unlike the claim of Help for Syria, it was they who approached the three charities as a campaign group, explaining how they would like to work with them in order to bring social media projects and advertising to help with fundraising. A former employee of one of the Charities gave the authors of this report confirmation that not only were Breakthrough Media behind the Help for Syria project, they were actively running it. Emails exchanged between staff members of the charities and their contacts at Help for Syria, went to Breakthrough Media email accounts, with responses received from those accounts and signatures. (74) The team lead for Breakthrough Media on the Help for Syria project was Rachel Watts, (75) who at the time of our source’s employment, coordinated matters.

“I came to work with Breakthrough Media when I worked at a charity that was approached by a campaign called ‘Help for Syria’ to get them onboard. The idea was that they would advertise our work and appeals on the helpforsyria.org.uk website, twitter and fb and help us out with media as well as other things. Who would say no to that?

I came to find that everything they produced with our logo on it (and the other charities that are also working in Syria) had to push out this idea that people shouldn’t go to Syria but they should help from the UK by volunteering with one of the charities featured on their website, us being one of them. At the time this didn’t really contradict our work as we had stopped aid convoys through our charity for various reasons, and really needed help from volunteers in the UK.

After a while it became extremely annoying, they would call us up daily to get certain footage and information of our work that they can promote, which all seems great, but it would be frustrating because again they would always pair it with the line ‘don’t go to Syria, help from here’, and I felt that this was taking the focus away from the vital work in Syria that only a few charities were doing.

There came a period where all the charities featured on the help4syria site began to feel the same and as a result we did not prioritise replying to their calls and emails, especially as the situation in Syria was deteriorating daily, so we had other pressing matters to deal with. So the team lead (Rachel) called for a meeting with the four charities that were featured on their site to discuss how we can move forward. At this meeting was a ‘consultant’ [Shaukat Warraich] and his two colleagues from a company called Faith Associates who as far as I remember was meant to help with ‘the messaging for the Muslim community’. He sat in on the meeting and didn’t really contribute, just took notes.

The charities all voiced their concerns about this line that we had to keep pushing out ‘don’t go to Syria’. Rachel reassured us by saying this part of the campaign is slowly coming to an end and that the next part will push out a different message, but that it really depends on their private funders as they need to “make them happy too.” (76)

Our source explained that the staff at Breakthrough Media would become very tense when the charities would not communicate with them. The tension between Breakthrough/ Help for Syria became heightened when they were confronted over the private funders they would mention – the Syria charities were given the response that they were not permitted to say. (77) The Charity Commission itself has also been involved with other projects with Breakthrough Media, again making the same point that all funding should be through specific charities as their Change the Picture video promotes the same messaging as the Safer giving for Syria and Help for Syria projects.

Based on these case studies alone, it is important to understand that there seems to be a nexus between different government agencies, private consultancies, and organisations that are either being hoodwinked into carrying out PREVENT messaging, or are active stakeholders in the counter narratives. What is clear, is that there is a systemic environment of opaqueness when the messaging is being directed by government, and in particular counter-terrorism agencies.

Ultimately, the greatest danger this opaque environment creates is to make civil society itself a toxic environment for real NGOs and charities who work on the basis of trust with their stakeholder communities. If this secretive programme of propaganda is permitted to continue, it will have disastrous consequences on the non-profit sector as a whole.

Messenger:	Help for Syria was launched by the Humanitarian Group for Syria in May 2013 after being set up by three British Syrian charities: Hand in Hand for Syria, Syria Relief and Human Care Syria (78)
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media and Hands Up (79)
Funded by:	Unknown
Target Audience:	British Muslims aged 15-39 in Prevent priority areas in the UK
Products:	Video (80) and website
Narrative:	Don’t go to Syria; only support registered charities
Date of release:	2013
Impact:	Film viewed over 98,000 times on YouTube

CHANGE THE PICTURE



CHANGE THE PICTURE

ONLY BY DONATING TO GENUINE, REGISTERED CHARITIES CAN YOU REALLY HELP THOSE IN NEED. SO NEXT TIME YOU GIVE, CHECK THE CHARITY REGISTER AT WWW.GOV.UK/CHARITY-COMMISSION

CHARITY COMMISSION

BECAUSE REALLY #CHANGEPIC

Messenger:	Muslim Charities Forum (81)
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media (82)
Funded by:	Charity Commission
Target Audience:	British Muslims giving to charity during Ramadan
Products:	Video (83) and #ChangeThePicture
Narrative:	Encourage Muslims to only give to legitimate charities by checking the charity's name and registration number against the online charity search tool. (84)
Date of release:	June 2015
Impact:	Film viewed 5,387 times on YouTube

FAMILIES AGAINST STRESS AND TRAUMA

FAMILIES MATTER

According to the Families Against Stress & Trauma (FAST) website, the organisation was established in 2007 in order to provide support to vulnerable families. Despite FAST having been established well before the conflict in Syria, the overwhelming emphasis of their website focuses on those potentially travelling to the region, including the organisation's home page which solely focuses on the conflict. (85)

Like many of the organisations mentioned already, FAST make a claim of independence explaining that they may engage external organisations where needed:

“FAST will engage external agencies whenever necessary to match a family’s needs. These can include, but are not limited to, scholars, advisors, the Probation Service, or local council departments, such as housing, employment and health agencies.” (86)

FAST’s ‘Families Matter’ project takes place of prominence on their website and is given a great deal of importance as part of its work. Although FAST make no mention of their partner in the production of their short film, a reference found on the website of Decent Design credits Breakthrough Media with the production of the film: (87)

→ decentdesign.co.uk/portfolio-item/fast-families-matter/

<< back



FAST is an organisation that supports families affected by a loved one travelling to Syria and Iraq. On July 21st 2014 they held a launch event (attended by Theresa May MP) for their Families Matter campaign.

We produced the content for the folders which were handed out, and the posters that you can see in the photos – the quotes on the posters come directly from the short film made by [Breakthrough Media](#).

Find out more from their website and [Facebook](#) page.

In the context of the other Syria campaigns run by Breakthrough Media with the Charity Commission and its partners, it is clear that there was a concerted approach between institutions to use Breakthrough's expertise to establish a consistent counter narrative through all the government's messaging on Syria.

Messenger:	Families Against Stress & Trauma, a publicly funded UK-based organisation providing support to vulnerable families and individuals. (88)
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media (video) (89)
Funded by:	Home Office (RICU)
Target Audience:	British Muslims aged 15-39 in Prevent priority areas in the UK
Products:	Campaign and online platforms supported by PR and online activity; short film featuring voices of three families who have been affected by family members who chose to travel to Syria. (90)
Narrative:	Highlight the distressing impact of travel to Syria and Iraq on families to dissuade people from travelling and undermine ISIL propaganda.
Date of release:	July 2014
Impact:	Main campaign viewed over 162,000 times on YouTube; Facebook page has over 15,000 likes (source: RICU)

UPSTANDING NEIGHBOURHOODS

"Upstanding Neighbourhoods reject extremism of all kinds- whether religiously motivated, ideologically driven or inspired by far right nationalism".

Upstanding Neighbourhoods describes itself as, "a network with no hierarchy, no organisational structure and no bureaucracy". (91) However, it does have a coordinator, Kashan Amar, and a National Safeguarding Mentor, Sulaimaan Samuel, who is a mentor for Channel, the UK Government's anti-radicalisation programme. (92) According to Amar, the organisation, "coordinates campaigns and local grassroots activism" (93) and has "a network of about 50,000 people who are helping to counter the hate-filled messages from ISIS and other extremist groups". (94) Mohammed Ashfaq, the Director of "KIKIT: Pathways to Recovery", which describes itself as a black minority ethnic specialist recovery focused service that provides substance misuse support, also appears in a promotional video for Upstanding Neighbourhoods. (95)

According to its website, Upstanding's aim is to build "safe and healthy communities with local knowledge and expertise"; an Upstanding Neighbourhood is defined as "a collective of individuals who care about community cohesion and local safeguarding". It is difficult to assess the extent to which Upstanding Neighbourhoods is a community based organisation, and the extent to which it has grassroots support. A further examination of those involved suggests that they are heavily supported by government and those within the security establishment.

KASHAN AMAR

Kashan Amar ran his own community interest company called Radical Thinking in partnership with Mick Gillick MBE, at the time the Force Diversity Coordinator for West Midlands Police. (96) Amar's links to government and the police services run deeper than might be expected as explained by Wyn Jones, the Contract Director of Serco:

"I am pleased to be able to endorse the work of Kashan Amar. We worked together in the West Midlands region of the National Offender Management Service. Kashan was, at that time, the Regional Head of Equality & Human Rights at the Ministry of Justice. The direction, guidance and support Kashan provided to us at that time was fundamental in helping set up the country's first credible seven strand approach to Diversity, within a custodial environment. His personal example and quiet, yet thoroughly effective, leadership was the fundamental key to overcoming cultural obstacles and in parts general inertia, resulting in a significant turn around in staff knowledge, tolerance and responsibility. I without reservation recommend Kashan as a quality business partner, and look forward to working with him again in the near future." (97)

Radical Thinking seeks to offer organisations (largely focusing on public sector bodies) with bespoke training on various areas of expertise. They boast of a wide range of credentials among their project leads:

- Advisors to National Security Council Extremism Task-force
- Advisors to Birmingham City Council Reducing Reoffending Scrutiny Board, 2012
- Strategic Advisors to the Director of Offender Management, West Midlands, 2009-2012
- Authors of NOMS National Community Engagement Strategy for Race Equality, 2007 (98)

Of concern, is how Amar's organisation has been involved in advising the government on extremism policy, and then is praised by the Home Secretary for the work that Upstanding Neighbourhoods do, as if there is no connection between them.

MOHAMMED ASHFAQ

Mohammed Ashfaq, as well as being one of the faces of Upstanding Neighbourhoods is also the director of the Community Interest Company KIKIT Pathways to Recovery. The organisation's founding purpose was to deliver interventions where individuals were suffering from drug and

alcohol addiction. The vast majority of KIKIT's work relates specifically to substance abuse, but they have also received funding from the Home Office for a project called Pathwayz, where they claim to have prevented 2 individuals from turning towards extremism. According to KIKIT's 31 March 2015 Annual accounts, they detail their funding from the Home Office,

"Home Office – (PREVENT) – KIKIT Pathwayzs project was commissioned to develop a Community safeguarding panel and develop a referral pathway in mosques for vulnerable people at risk of substance abuse, radicalisation or mental health." (99)

On the website for KIKIT, the Pathwayz project is described as funded by Birmingham City Council funding for Equalities and Social Cohesion. Because of the widespread discrediting of PREVENT-funded NGOs, there is a widespread suspicion that funding from local councils for equalities, safeguarding and social cohesion is simply a new way of packaging PREVENT funding.

PATHWAYZ

Home / Projects / Pathwayz



PATHWAYZ PROJECT

KIKIT Pathways to Recovery has been commissioned by Birmingham city council (Equalities and Social Cohesion) to provide substance misuse support satellite provision within mosques and community centres in Birmingham, engaging and supporting young vulnerable individuals. Within the mosques the Muslim Recovery Network 12 step Program is facilitated on a weekly basis.

As part of the project KIKIT is currently developing a community referral mechanism to support individuals who may be vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism.

PREVENT TRAINING

People can join Upstanding Neighbourhoods by registering for its Professional Development Training Programme. (100) The programme is aimed at "individuals and groups who are active citizens or wish to become active in their own communities and online", "statutory providers (Youth service, criminal justice, elected members, police, neighbourhood officers, community development workers etc) with an interest in increasing their ability to engage with beneficiary communities"; and the "voluntary and community and faith sector". (101) Based on the information above, it would appear that Kashan Amar's self-description as a community activist may be somewhat fudging his strong links to government. The timetable set out below is put together for communities with the intention of implementing the PREVENT strategy and theories that underpin PREVENT:

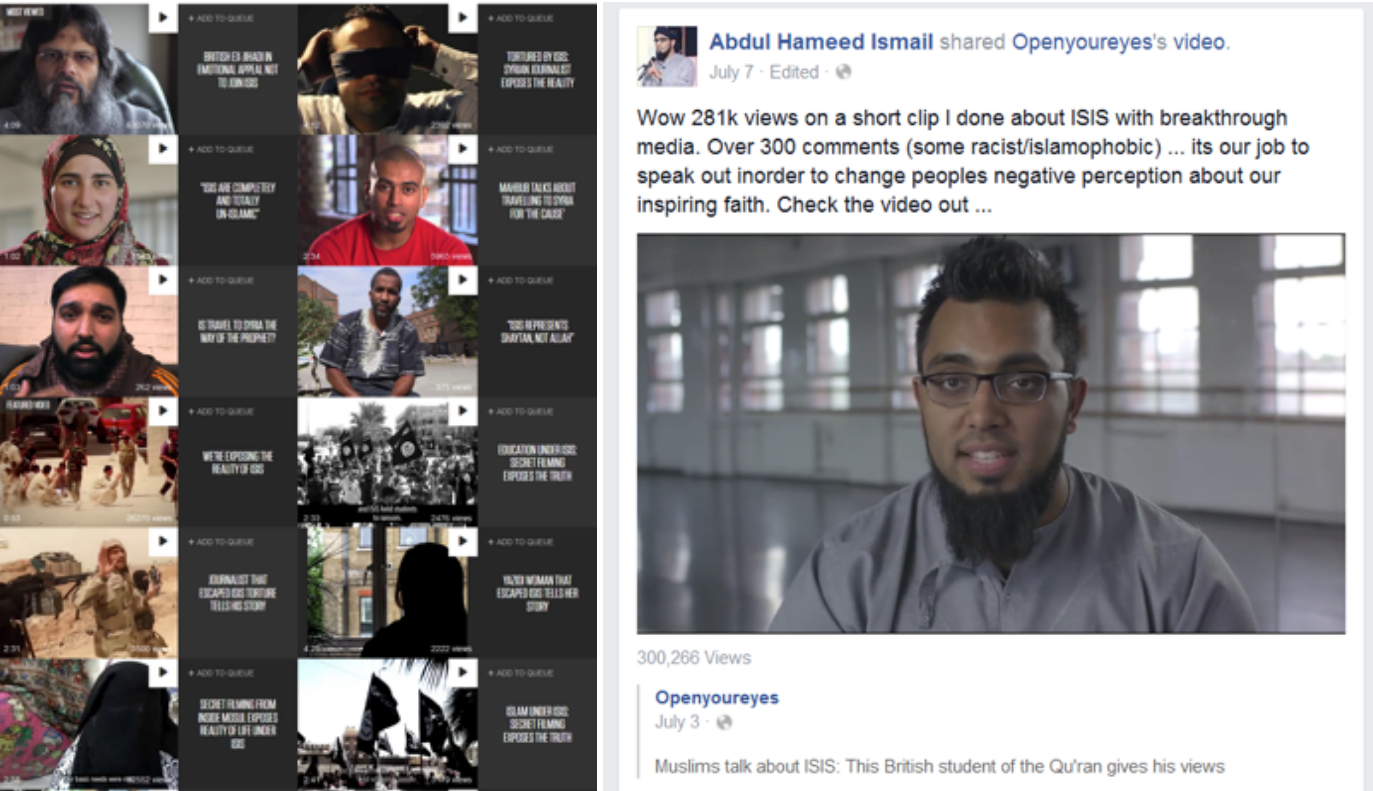
Upstanding Neighbourhoods – Professional development for the [.....] Sector

Training Schedule – [name of group]

Date	Topic	Subject	Facilitator
	Module 1 – Grievances and ideology An introductory module laying the foundations for the programme and establishing an evidence led baseline	• What are local people's grievances? • What role does Imperialism play in radicalising individuals? • What is "Gangster Jihadism"? • How does Foreign Policy influence local discourse?	Jahan Mahmood-Military Historian
	Module 2 – Safeguarding children & young people online A master class in Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media applications. Understand the impact of the media on impressionable minds	• Case studies of online radicalisation and recruitment • Understanding the impact of media distortion • Syria selfies and online propaganda	Mohammed Abbasi-Social media advisor to Parliament
	Module 3 – Legislation A 'safe space' discussion with local PREVENT police and legal practitioners. 'Know your rights' advice for young people	• What is PREVENT and Channel and how does it work? • The Terrorism Act(s) • Safeguarding young people from falling into the criminal justice system	West Midlands Police/Birmingham City Council
	Module 4 – From Soho Rd to Syria An opportunity to compare ideological & grievance led radicalisation. What can we learn from the Chechen conflict?	• What drives young people to travel to conflict zones? • How extreme Islam and far right nationalism affects communities • Is Syria a legitimate jihad? Who are the Khawarij sect?	Former
	Module 5 – Mentoring Vulnerable individuals An interactive module that includes role playing and developing a toolkit for engaging with vulnerable individuals	• What is the current narrative of young people? • How to identify vulnerable people • How to develop counter narratives	Sulaimaan Samuel–National Safeguarding Mentor
	Module 6 – Online counter messaging An interactive workshop aimed at improving access to technology for community activists	• Using social media for community activism • Identifying problematic discourse online • Using the desktop alert system	Kashan Amar – Community Activist
	Module 7 – Grooming and child sexual exploitation An awareness raising seminar for parents, community leaders, activists and faith leaders	• An insight into sexual violence, safeguarding and child protection issues • To increase the awareness of domestic violence and statutory responses • To consider community led safeguarding measures	Alyas Karmani – National CSE Safeguarding Practitioner
	Module 8 – Substance misuse & gang culture An informative workshop focusing on upskilling participants in understanding the signs and symptoms of problematic drug use and the links with other safeguarding risks	• Identifying the signs and symptoms of problematic drug use • Increasing awareness of referral and treatment routes • Case studies on the risks of substance misuse and radicalisation	Mohammed Ashfaq – Lead Practitioner, Substance Misuse
	Module 9 – Extremist ideologies unpicked An in-depth examination of the range and scope of existing religious ideology. To consider the 3 primary arguments for the justification of religiously motivated extremism	• What is the narrative of religiously motivated extremists? • The historical origins of religiously motivated extremism	Atif Iqbal/Alyas Karmani

Founded by Amar, a humanitarian aid charity co-founded by Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, (102) Upstanding Neighbourhoods' activities have been lauded by Home Secretary Theresa May. (103) This is hardly surprising given that Upstanding Neighbourhoods appears to have been employed directly to deliver government policy.

OPEN YOUR EYES: ISIS LIES



Messenger:	Upstanding Neighbourhoods
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media
Funded by:	Unknown
Target Audience:	British Muslims
Products:	Website (104) and series of 49 videos (105)
Narrative:	“ISIS is lying to you. Open Your Eyes to the real story. Upstanding Neighbourhoods is exposing the truth. Hear from people telling their personal stories of how ISIS has affected their lives. We are working with young people, activists, bloggers and filmmakers to raise our voices against ISIS. Join us on our mission: get involved, start filming, share your views. Together we will crush ISIS propaganda”
Date of release:	2015
Impact:	Unknown

Although there is no public link between them, Breakthrough Media and Upstanding Neighbourhoods worked together in order to produce videos for the Open Your Eyes counter-narrative project. (106) On 7 July 2015, in a Facebook post by Abdul Hameed Ismail, he specifically noted how he had done a clip speaking out against ISIS with Breakthrough Media.

**Shortlisted for
three DMA awards:**

**Best public sector campaign
Best integrated campaign
Best writing**

Verbalisation
SET THE AGENDA



QUILLIAM



Watch and share the film at notanotherbrother.org

#notanotherbrother

QUILLIAM FOUNDATION

#NOTANOTHERBROTHER

Unlike many of the other organisations that have been mentioned in this report, the Quilliam Foundation's footprint in relation to government funding or being involved in counter narratives is relatively light. To understand this better, it is important to understand the environment in which the organisation operates, effectively as a toxic organisation within the very communities it seeks to serve. In a recent controversy, speakers from the Quilliam Foundation were due to speak at a conference supported by the Muslim charity Penny Appeal and the TV channel British Muslim TV – both of whom are considered to be non-controversial organisations from the perspective of government and civil society. Once these two organisations became aware of the involvement of Quilliam speakers, they were quick to remove themselves from the event. Penny Appeal and British Muslim TV issued the following strongly worded statements respectively:

“For the avoidance of any doubt, Penny Appeal has no affiliation or support for the work of Quilliam Foundation. In fact, we believe that the work they do is damaging the very community (both Muslim and British) that they profess to be supporting, and to which we belong.

We were invited to speak at an event, hosted by New Horizons and the University of Coventry, to showcase positive ‘British Muslim contribution’ to British society through our UK Domestic programmes, where we work to support the homeless, foster children and victims of domestic violence. We have no role in organising the event and are not attending. We have also requested that organisers remove our logo.” (107)

“British Muslim TV works to provide a platform to explore what it means to be confidently Muslim and comfortably British. We were invited to present on this very theme at the ‘New Horizons’ event hosted at the University of Coventry.

We believe working in the cultural space is essential for the growth of our communities. We also believe the work of Quilliam Foundation to be detrimental to our communities and would encourage articulate voices to robustly challenge them.

We have no role in organising this event and have requested our logos to be removed.”

It is in this space that the Quilliam Foundation find it difficult to operate when attempting to promote counter narratives, as their message is treated with a great deal of scepticism. At the DMA Awards, the company Verbalisation was given an award for working with the Quilliam Foundation in the production of the counter narrative short film #notanotherbrother – using the same hashtag formula of Inspire and ACF. According to Verbalisation’s campaign overview:

“Quilliam were seen as ‘anti-Islam’ in some parts of the Muslim community, so the film was unbranded and launched via a single YouTube page and a deliberately lo-fi Wordpress page. The hashtag #notanotherbrother deliberately echoed how ISIL launch their films, creating a buzz within the ‘jihadist fanboy’ community to ensure it was watched.

The film was seeded within key networks in the Muslim community via Twitter (including tweets in Arabic) to start ground-level discussion before Quilliam’s involvement was revealed.” (108)

On 3 August 2015, Quilliam finally revealed their role in the project, claiming that the £12,000 cost of the project was supported through crowdfunding, although the authors of this report could not find any evidence of a public crowdfunding initiative for this project. Although the project was claimed to be delivered by Verbalisation, they had the campaigns manager for Breakthrough Media working on the project with them. Jennifer Hollis, also a campaigner for the Liberal Democrats, wrote a blog post on her website explaining how she had advised on the #notanotherbrother project. (109) In a deleted tweet, she also said, “Great to see the #notanotherbrother campaign I worked on win a silver DMA” . (110)

Breakthrough Media again appear in working with organisations that really have very little to say about Muslim public life, even with Verbalisation’s campaign recognising the toxicity of Quilliam.

Messenger:	Quilliam (111)
Produced by:	Verbalisation Ltd with consultancy from Breakthrough Media
Funded by:	Crowdfunded
Cost:	£12,000
Products:	Website and series of 49 videos
Target Audience:	Analysts identified that the target audience should not just be those considering going to Syria themselves, but also those who offered tacit support to ISIL’s aims – such as disseminating its propaganda – without realising the potentially fatal effect it could have, often on those closest to them. (112)
Products:	Film (short (113) and longer version (114)) and #NotAnotherBrother hashtag
Narrative:	The film took ISIL’s high production values, central ‘hero’ and sense of becoming part of a ‘band of brothers’ and created a devastating counter-narrative that showed the true costs of disseminating ISIL propaganda. The storyline was powerfully simple: no matter how much disseminating ISIL’s propaganda might make you feel you’re part of an Islamist ‘brotherhood’, that reward is nothing compared with the cost of losing an actual brother as a result. The script presented a letter from a man apologising to his younger brother for setting him on the path to extremism, while the viewer saw the real fate of a jihadist: no heroics, just a grim, lonely death, far away from your loved ones. (115)
Date of release:	July 2015
Impact:	DMA claims “The result was the most viewed counter-extremism campaign ever, with a global reach of over half a billion people”. However the film has only had 61,800 views on YouTube. (116)
Awards:	Digital Marketing Association silver award for public sector campaign (117)

FAITH ASSOCIATES

“Faith Associates recognizes the key roles Mosques, Madrassahs and Islamic Centres play in providing guidance. We also recognize the difficulties that face Imams and other key members when providing guidance and a good, sound, education experience.

Working with agencies that are concerned with business, education and government at local, regional, national and international levels has enabled us to identify the misconceptions that face faith-based communities and to work towards challenging these.” (118)

Faith Associates was established by Shaukat Warraich with Dr Sarah Warraich (formerly Sarah Abbas) on 26 October 2006. (119) The organisation describes the work they do on their website:

“We are committed to multidisciplinary collaborative research, development and implementation on local, national and international levels. Our aim is to influence and support the strategic planning of decision makers in all levels of government and non-governmental organisations. Faith Associates works to empower faith-based communities and leaders, young people and women within them.” (120)

The work the organisation is currently involved in spreads across a number of areas, in particular helping Muslim communities to understand the duties according to UK

government policy and legislation. In particular Faith Associates have been involved in a number of projects in order to build capacity for mosques and faith groups to safeguard against ‘extremism’.

Among their flagship projects, they have initiated the Imams Online website and resource that seeks to undermine the messaging of violent groups such as ISIS. As part of their desire to implement the government’s PREVENT strategy, they have initiated training for communities in order for their mosques and madrassahs to be compliant towards policy and statutory requirements. A new website about to be initiated www.madrassah.co.uk will centralise the training they have been delivering through their Madrassah Management Training programme, of which they say,

“We are an independent organisation and have developed bespoke standards for Madrassahs which link with free resources that will help deliver an effective Madrassah facilitating the development of a 21st Century learner in the UK.” (121)

It should be once again reiterated that there is nothing wrong with good governance and best practice being brought to communities and mosques. However, where such activity is being funded in order to achieve the specific objectives of PREVENT, as is the case here, without the knowledge of communities, then the lack of transparency and accountability will inevitably bring the appearance of government propaganda.

IMAMS ONLINE



WOMEN / REVIEW / JOBS / CIVIC LEADERSHIP / INTERFAITH / EDITORIAL / EVENTS / MEDIA

BRITISH VALUES ARE MUSLIM VALUES



Above we noted that Faith Associates is run by Shaukat Warraich, who receive funding from OSCT and are associated with PR consultancies such as Breakthrough Media. As part of Shaukat Warraich's projects is the project known as ImamsOnline.com which is described by the website in the following terms:

"Imams Online has been created as an easily accessible online portal serving as a voice, information and career placement initiative aimed at prospective Islamic leaders, Imams, Chaplains, Alims, and Aalimah's. We aim to provide the necessary information to aspiring Muslim leaders that will enable and encourage them to become the future beacons of the communities they serve.

We endeavour to showcase positive Islamic content and share the thoughts and ideas of Islamic thought leadership both here in the UK and across the wider Muslim world. We aim to show that Imams and Islamic Leaders are willing and able to comment on a variety of different issues affecting the Muslim community today." (122)

As with so many of the projects mentioned above, it is unclear where the messaging of Imams Online comes from, and who directs the way that messaging takes place. As can be seen from the online CV of Joe Butcher, a researcher for Breakthrough Media, not only has he worked with projects mentioned above such as Help for Syria, Faith on the Frontline but also on Imams Online Digital Summit:

Joe Butcher Researcher



UNKNOWN

London

3 days ago

DOWNLOAD CV

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✉ CONTACT

About Me

Researcher & Production Assistant with a years experience in film, television, and online content. I have worked across development, casting, and shooting roles as a Junior Researcher; in addition to working as a Camera Op, Sound Recordist, and Runner in production. My interests and experiences derive from anthropology, sociology, international politics, art & culture, and campaign film. I wish to continue working in these subjects.

I have been trained on: Canon's XF305, 5D Mk II, and III; low level sound recording equipment; Adobe Premiere and Final Cut software. Personally, I feel I specialise in sourcing contributors, and maintaining excellent working relationships; as well as treatment writing and conceptualisation.

I have held a clean UK driver's licence for 6 years, and am of age to drive rental cars. [Read Less](#)

Calendar

Please [Sign In](#) or [Register](#) to view availability

MEDIA I WORK IN:

Broadcast Television Commercials

Corporate Communications

Feature Film Short Film

Web Creation

LOCATIONS I CAN WORK IN:

Africa Asia Australia East Anglia

Eire Europe London Midlands

North America North East

North West Northern Ireland

Scotland South America

South East South West Wales

LANGUAGE:

English (Fluent)

SKILLS/PERMITS:

Access Negotiation

Basic Driving (PLG) Casting

CRB Check

TECHNICAL SKILLS:

5D MkII Adobe Premiere

Canon XF305 Driving Licence

JOB ROLE	PRODUCTION TITLE	CHANNEL	COMPANY	DATE	COMMISSIONER
▶ Researcher	Taking Fire	Discovery	Raw TV	AUG 15 - TO PRESE...	
▶ Production Assistant	Unleash 208		33 Seconds	MAY 15 - MAY 15	
▶ Production Assistant	Made in the Navy		Generator Films	APR 15 - JUL 15	
▶ Camera Operator	D&AD Judging Week		Crane TV	APR 15 - APR 15	
▶ Camera Operator	Imams Online Digital ...		Breakthrough Media	MAR 15 - MAR 15	
▶ Casting Researcher	Great Westerner		McCann London	MAR 15 - MAR 15	
▶ Casting Researcher	Nanna State		McCann London	FEB 15 - MAR 15	
▶ Casting Researcher	Live from the Heart		McCann London	OCT 14 - NOV 14	
▶ Production Assistant	Rebuilding Somalia	Al Jazeera English	Free Radical Films	OCT 14 - NOV 14	
▶ Development Resear...	Help for Syria: Talent ...		Breakthrough Media	JUL 14 - SEP 14	
▶ Development Resear...	Rent Boys in Nairobi		Breakthrough Media	MAR 14 - MAR 14	
▶ Development Resear...	Alianza Mar Blava		Breakthrough Media	MAR 14 - MAR 14	
▶ Development Resear...	A New Deal for Somalia		Breakthrough Media	MAR 14 - MAR 14	
▶ Researcher	Faith on the Frontline:...	Community Channel	Breakthrough Media	JAN 14 - FEB 14	
▶ Producer/Director	Versus		Falmouth University	SEP 13 - MAY 14	
▶ Development Resear...	Consular Officers		Breakthrough Media	SEP 13 - SEP 13	

SEND FE

Questions must be asked of Faith Associates, and the degree to which they work closely with Breakthrough Media, and to what extent their messaging is being controlled by those outside their organisation.

Messenger:	Faith Associates supported by Hope Not Hate, Active Change Foundation and Upstanding Neighbourhoods
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media, (123) Imams online regional summits 2016 supported by Facebook and Twitter (124)
Funded by:	Unknown
Target Audience:	British Muslims
Products:	Website, (125) Facebook page, (126) and Imams Digital Summit videos (127)
Narrative:	We endeavour to showcase positive Islamic content and share the thoughts and ideas of Islamic thought leadership both here in the UK and across the wider Muslim world. We aim to show that Imams and Islamic Leaders are willing and able to comment on a variety of different issues affecting the Muslim community today. (128)
Date of release:	March 2015
Impact:	180,000 Facebook likes

FEDERATION OF MUSLIM ORGANISATIONS

The Federation of Muslim Organisations was launched in 1983 “to provide help and support for the Muslim communities in Leicester and Leicestershire, and has had a long and positive working relationship with many private, public and voluntary sector organisations over the last 32 years”. (129) FMO has “worked exhaustively on a whole range of projects covering such areas as education, housing, youth and social welfare in order to meet the needs of the Muslim community”. (130)

Over the past couple of years FMO has received from a safeguarding programme administered by Leicestershire Police and a Voluntary and Community Sector with Leicestershire County Council. Although their annual accounts do not specifically mention that the money comes from PREVENT sources, the title of money presented, ‘Safeguarding in Madrassas’, is very much indicative of the PREVENT strategy being implemented, in the same vein as the way in which KIKIT presented the source of funding for its programmes:

4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES			
	Activity	2015 £	2014 £
Leicester City Council (2014 - and Leicestershire Police)	Safeguarding in Madrassas	35,000	40,000
Leicester City Council - VCS Service Level Agreement	Service level agreement	25,000	25,000
Other interfaith and capacity building activities	Other interfaith and capacity building activities	975	2,805
		<u>60,975</u>	<u>67,805</u>

As noted above, in addition to delivering counter-narratives, FMO has also promoted the PREVENT programme itself, organising an Open Letter in support of the government to coincide with the launch of its #FightbackStartsHere campaign in July 2015. (131) In fact the FMO provided 23 of the 84 signatures, with the Active Change Foundation, Upstanding Neighbourhoods, and Inspire (see below) adding another 11 between them.

The position of the joint letter becomes more complicated

after an in-depth article on the 5Pillars website asking questions of Suleiman Nagdi and the way in which he gathered the signatures from FMO for the joint letter, allegedly without any formal process of consultation. (132) Such matters are important to clarify, as FMO is considered to have the membership of hundreds of scholars from Leicester, an important community for British Muslims, and so the questions hanging over FMO’s leadership must be addressed before the signing of joint statements can be taken as unequivocal support for government policy.

New Episode Weekly

UMMAHSONIC PODCAST - GAMES

Full Episode
27.00

LISTEN NOW

UMMAH SONIC



UMMAH SONIC

The Federation of Muslim Organisations (FMO) has been involved with a number of projects mentioned throughout this report, including the #fightbackstartshere. There is no specific information that ties PREVENT funding to FMO other than Leicestershire County Council funding for Madrassah projects, although that is not specifically marked as PREVENT. What brings FMO within the nebulous of the implementation of the PREVENT strategy, is their radio project, Ummah Sonic. Clearly hosted on the FMO domain page, Ummah Sonic ran for a one month period over Ramadan 2015. On further research, the authors of this report found the LinkedIn profile for Persephone Rizvi, who while employed at Breakthrough Media, carried out a great deal of work for Ummah Sonic:

Freelance Location Reporter

Breakthrough Media

May 2015 – September 2015 (5 months)

On behalf of Radio Ramadhan /Ummah Sonic:

Reporting exclusive events and unique stories from around the UK

Interviewing variety of guests and high profiles (Amir Khan)

Producing podcasts: health & wellbeing, charity and sport.

Presenting promotional materials for multiple social media platforms; Facebook, YouTube, Twitter

Collecting vox pops on location (Manchester, London)

Exclusive interview with Amir Khan (former world boxing champion)

Reporting from Newcastle Mela 2015 Footage: Bringing together diverse communities

Media Footage in Summary: 45,000 Facebook views.

Podcasts can be found at link attached below (official website).

Scripting

Devising Treatments

Extensive Researching



When it comes to counter narrative messaging, Breakthrough Media has worked with almost every single organisation identified within the report as delivering counter narratives. Understanding the relationship between Breakthrough Media and the government is crucial, and in particular why its work appears to be protected by the Official Secrets Act.

Messenger:	Federation of Muslim Organisations
Produced by:	Breakthrough Media (133)
Funded by:	Unknown
Target Audience:	Young British Muslims
Products:	Website (134) and podcasts of daily online radio show that aired during Ramadan. (135) Followed by occasional podcasts
Narrative:	It's not just about undertaking good deeds for the Holy month, addressing all kinds of topics that reflect on what it means to be young, Muslim, and living in Britain.
Date of release:	June 2015

CONCLUSION

“

“Doing the right thing rather than saying the right thing produces, ideally, the stronger narrative and in that sense the interaction patterns between host community and vulnerable youth constitute a non-verbal message that might better manage to prevent extremists gaining more ground in a community”.

International Centre for Counter-terrorism (136)

CONCLUSION: FROM PROPAGANDA TO ACCOUNTABILITY

This report has shown how the UK government has secretly attempted to steer the conversation within Muslim communities in Britain on issues such as ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalisation’ and garner support for its counter-terrorism policies among disaffected constituencies. While there is nothing new about governments trying to get their message across, or trying to drum-up support for their policies, the covert nature of the counter-narrative programme and the pretence that these messages come from independent, representative or ‘grass roots’ community organisations is deeply disturbing.

Under the leadership of Richard Chalk, RICU, the Home Office propaganda unit, has played a central role in delivering these campaigns. So too has Breakthrough Media, the niche PR company seemingly at the heart of the government’s counter-narrative programme. Together they have provided financial and technical support to purported community organisations for the production of their multimedia campaigns (videos, websites, podcasts, blogs etc.). These counter-narratives have in turn been presented as authentic voices within the communities they target. To suggest that the government and the organisations involved have misled the public is an understatement – rather, an experiment with much more profound consequences is now underway.

While many observers have long harboured suspicions about the relationship between the actors described in this report, the evidence of government funding has been withheld from parliament and the public. Whereas critical organisations and journalists have traditionally ‘followed the money’ in order to understand whether or not an organisation was taking money from PREVENT, changes in the distribution and reporting of PREVENT expenditure have made this much more difficult. The potential use of the Official Secrets Act – one of the most draconian pieces of legislation on the British statute book – has made investigations more difficult still. If the British government is indeed using the Official Secrets Act in this way, to protect a PR company and effectively conceal its role in producing state-sponsored propaganda, we are staring at plain abuse of power and contempt for democracy.

PREVENT has been dogged by controversy since its launch because it is and remains conceptually flawed. The practical problems and massive distrust this has created are not ‘unintended consequences’ that can somehow be addressed by piecemeal reforms, they are the manifestation of a programme that views entire communities in this country as a problem requiring hitherto unimaginable forms of state intervention. Propaganda and social engineering have always been at the heart of PREVENT, but the extent to which the government is now trying to define the contours of the legitimacy for Muslims and Islam in public life has now reached staggering proportions.

The activities revealed in this report are not just important for Muslim communities – so often the ‘canary in the coalmine’ for civil liberties and democracy in 21st century Britain. They have much more fundamental implications for ‘civil society’ and the relationship between government and citizen. If RICU is left unchecked to continue to covertly disseminate government messages on key policy issues through ‘sock-puppet’ Muslim NGOs and community organisations, we can be certain of two things. Firstly, this tactic will quickly find its way into other areas of government policy and public life. Secondly, the crisis of public trust that already afflicts politicians and government will soon extend to the third sector as a whole, as people will be unable to tell genuine ‘grass roots’ community organisations, charities and non-profits from the government-oriented NGOs (or GONGOs as they are rightly called in China and elsewhere).

Democracy requires clear lines between the security state and the police on the one hand, and civil society, public and social services on the other. This does not preclude cooperation or engagement, but provides a foundation for transparency, accountability and legitimacy. PREVENT and its counter-narratives are subject to none of these trappings.

“It is essential that there is some mechanism by which the success of work on the PREVENT strand of [the government’s counter-terrorism policy] – and the benefits of RICU in particular – can be evaluated”.

Intelligence and Security Committee Report 2010/11

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR GOVERNMENT:

1) The government must uphold its duty of openness and transparency to taxpayers, and Muslim communities in particular, regarding the execution of public policy budgets and its engagement with those communities.

- It must declare and make public all of its relationships with community groups as part of the OSCT programmes under PREVENT.
- It should publish details of the workings of RICU, its programmes and role in Muslim communities.

2) The government must change its attitude towards Muslims. It must treat them with respect and consideration rather than contempt and deceit.

- In an open society like Britain, the government must genuinely engage with Muslim communities to resolve issues concerning them rather than attempting to manufacture support for its views and programmes. The Home Office should enter into meaningful dialog with credible voices, and take into account their suggestions and criticism in order to generate viable solutions to the problems they identify.

3) The government must acknowledge the rejection by the community and academic experts of the PREVENT programme. It must take steps to bring it to an end.

FOR PARLIAMENT:

1) Parliament and the Intelligence and Security Committee in particular has an obligation to scrutinise the activities of the Home Office.

- It must ensure that all government counter-extremism programmes and the activities of the OSCT and RICU in particular are fully accountable to the electorate.
- It must introduce new rules to ensure that community outreach programmes are not subject to the same de facto level of secrecy as security and intelligence operations.
- It must seek an explanation as to whether and why the Official Secrets Act is being used to prevent scrutiny of RICUs activities and its apparent partnership with Breakthrough Media.

FOR ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTED BY PREVENT:

1) Community organisations have a duty of transparency towards their beneficiaries. They should be clear regarding their funding sources, their partners and aims.

- Beneficiaries of public services have a right to know about any engagement with PREVENT in order to make informed decisions about receiving such services. Secrecy creates suspicion and mistrust.
- Civil society groups must therefore detail their ties with counter-terrorism programmes such as PREVENT and make them public.
- Details of funds received from OSCT or other departments for the purposes of pursuing PREVENT outcomes, should ALSO be made public.
- All counter-narratives funded (or collaborated) by the central or local government should be clearly identified as such.

FOR MEMBERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY:

- Civil society plays a vital role in an open society. Charities and NGOs must do their utmost to preserve the reputation of the third sector and the trust of the public by promoting transparency regarding relationships with government agencies.
- Civil society organisations must work to pressure government to be open and transparent about its interaction and funding of members of civil society, especially in relation to politicised issues.

FOR MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

- Muslim individuals and groups must demand that the government ends deceptive practices and engages in a meaningful and genuine way.
- Muslim individuals and groups have a right and duty to ask questions to organisations purporting to serve them regarding their funding and actual aims. They should seek clarity from organisations that work on 'extremism' and terrorism issues and then engage with them on an informed basis only.

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