

BLACKLISTED

The secretive Home Office Unit silencing voices of dissent





CAGE is an independent advocacy organisation working to empower communities impacted by the War on Terror policies worldwide. The organisation highlights and campaigns against such policies in the hope to achieve a world free from oppression and injustice.

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The information gathered by the

Unit could have far reaching

consequences internationally.

INTRODUCTION

The UK government's policy on extremism is established through a number of policy documents and legislation that have been instituted since the Conservative government relaunched Prevent in 2011. The architecture of the Prevent strategy is not simply based around a duty that has been imposed on the public sector to assist those 'at risk' from being drawn into terrorism – as is statutorily obligated through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015.

Prevent forms as a nebulous cloud of actors and policies that intersect with one another, ultimately on the basis that there are perceived threats to the UK, and there is accompanying need to meet that. With that in mind, there is an intersection of interests between politicians, securocrats, neoconservatives and even those who are openly fearful of Islam as a religion. It is precisely in this meeting of interests that a form of structural racism emerges, where policy that is built around fear creates suspect communities, who are then targeted based on assumptions of who they are and what they believe.

This report provides a unique insight, for the first time, of opaque units that work as part of the government's counterterrorism policies, the Extremism Analysis Unit (EAU) and the Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU). These two units, in particular, assist the government in its Prevent strategy, by conducting research and coordinating propaganda.

The information in this report is primarily based on two sources, witness statements given by the heads of EAU and RICU in the case of Dr Salman Butt v Secretary of State for the Home Department. Paul Willis provides testimony as the head of the EAU, and the Acting Director of RICU Matt Collins. In representing the government, the court required testimony from both of these units, a view that otherwise is withheld from public purview.

SCOPE

The statutory placement of Prevent has brought renewed significance on the policy at a national level. Public bodies are under a duty to implement the policy, in order to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. The Acting Director of the OSCT Prevent and RICU Directorate, Matt Collins highlights in his evidence to the ex parte Butt case, how

"OSCT Prevent is the Directorate responsible for the policy and strategy of Prevent, part of this role involves oversight of the implementation of the Prevent Duty set out in Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015."

The Extremism Analysis Unit (EAU) operates directly under the authority of the UK Home Secretary who is accountable to Parliament. Testimony from Paul Willis as the Head of the EAU summarises the work that his department is responsible for:

"...the role of EAU is to help improve government's understanding of extremism and related trends, providing the Office for Counter-Extremism and other customer departments... with expertise and advice to inform the implementation of the Counter-Extremism Strategy and wider counter-extremism work. Examples of this work include analysis of

extremist ideologies and narratives to support campaign work and analysis of groups, networks and themes to inform policy formulation, e.g. the Review of the Funding of Extremism announced by the then Prime Minister on 30 November 2015."

Quoting Karen Bradley MP, the claim by Willis, is that the purpose of the Unit is not to blacklist any specific individual or organisation but rather to provide advice and analysis. While the EAU is presented as having an almost aloof role within the counterterrorism structure, within the Home Office's Office for Counter-Extremism (OCE) the EAU is placed within it. The analysis provided by the EAU serves the following departments within government, having six-monthly meetings with them':

- Prevent Delivery Unit (PDU)
- Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre
- Foreign Office
- Department for Education
- Department for Communities and Local Government
- Department for Health
- Police

The scope of the EAU, however, is not just limited to these bodies. Willis explains that the information gathered by the Unit could have far reaching consequences, even internationally:

"The data may be disclosed to other organisations which may include other government departments and agencies, local authorities, police and other law enforcement agencies, courts and other judicial bodies, foreign governments and other authorities, foreign law enforcement and judicial bodies, and fraud prevention bodies."

According to Paul Willis, information is not shared directly with local authorities, or indeed higher education institutions, rather, the analysis is shared with Prevent coordinators who are all funded by the Prevent Delivery Unit working under the Department for Education. The information is used by the coordinators to inform institutions about extremism.

As part of their programme of operation, RICU and the EAU are in touch with specific organisations that better compliment a government narrative on extremism. Matt Collins explains how this takes effect:

"RICU which supports civil society organisations to challenge the ideology of terrorist organisations. RICU works with the police's CounterTerrorism Internet Referral Unit to secure the removal by communication service providers of terrorist propaganda which is likely to breach UK law and which is in breach of the Terms and Conditions of their platform or communications agreements."

Where the Office for Counter-Extremism (OCE) has contracts with private sector companies to produce propaganda on their behalf through chosen 'community groups', the EAU will provide access. Paul Willis specifically highlights the relationship between the EAU and OCE through the contract with MC Saatchi – one of a number of organisations highlighted by CAGE in a 2016 report on the connection between RICU and the media industry.ix

The focus is on ideology. At no point is any recognition given to stereotyping, surveillance and disenfranchisement as factors in political violence.



FOCUS

Despite the scope of both organisations being fairly wide, the focus of both RICU's extremism unit and the EAU appears to be very much around the threat posed by the ideology of extremism. Matt Collins from RICU explains:

"Prevent: "recognises the way in which some terrorist ideologies draw on and make use of extremist ideas which are espoused and circulated by apparently non-violent organisations, very often operating within the law." Countering these types of extremism is therefore a vital part of the work of Prevent."

The EAU has a clear emphasis in its work, which according to Paul Willis is 'Understanding Islamist Extremism'xi . The largest number of employees within the organisation and workload specifically focuses on this area with experts being brought in to support that work. Willis further explains:

"The majority of our work to date has focused on organisations and themes of Islamist extremism and extreme far right concern. The Unit's work in these areas has significantly improved the government's understanding of the challenges they pose. The Unit has conducted sectoral analysis of universities, charities and extremism on-line and worked on

major projects, e.g. on sectarianism, the funding of extremism and unregulated education."xii

Although the EAU claims that the focus is on both 'Islamist' and far-right 'extremism', the numbers of those who are referred for deradicalisation through the Channel programme indicate the disproportionate way in which Muslims are targeted where 'extremism' is suspected:

"Since 2012, over 1000 people have been provided with support through Channel. During 2015 around 15% of referrals to the programme were linked to far right extremism, and around 70% linked to Islamist-related extremism."

If we take the statistics of Collins at face value, then it reveals some shocking statistics in relation to the way that Muslims are specifically targeted in the UK.

BREAKDOWN OF REFERRALS

70% of 1000 = 700 Muslims 15% of 1000 = 150 far-right cases

It would be worth highlighting the various populations of each community. The far-right, largely come from 'white' communities in the UK, which the latest statistics place at 51 million in the UK. Muslims are said to be 3 million in the UK.

700 Muslim referrals out of 3 million Muslim population = 0.00023333

150 far-right referrals out of 51 million white population = 0.00000294

The ratio between Muslim to far-right referrals is therefore:

0.00023333: 0.00000294

or

79.36:1

According to the statistics presented by RICU, a Muslim is almost 80 times more likely to be referred by Prevent for Channel deradicalisation since 2012. By any measure, this would be considered discriminatory and culminate in creating a suspect community of Muslims.

The focus on extremism is predicated on assumptions about how extremism fits into the narratives of terrorism, and how the two are linked to one another. Matt Collins from RICU attempts to go to some lengths to debunk the idea that these bodies assume a linear path, but does not state what their model for such assumptions is:

"There has in the past been controversy about the so-called "conveyer belt theory" of radicalisation, which suggests that there is an understood "pathway" towards or predictive model of terrorism. By contrast, Prevent is not predicated on a single socio-demographic profile or defined pathway, but it works on the basis that several different factors can come together to form a "perfect storm" of the conditions conducive to radicalisation to terrorism..."xiv

What Matt Collins refers to as the 'perfect storm' of conditions, while having some truth, betrays the emphasis that the units place on ideology as being the factor that needs to be deterred. At no point during the testimony of either Collins or Willis, is any recognition given to the stereotyping, surveillance and disenfranchisement of young people based around narratives that disempower them. This is evidenced by Willis who describes lectures at university campuses being 'anti-Western' without clarifying why and to what extent such content might be problematic:

"...university campuses in 2014 involving speakers who were known to have promoted rhetoric that was anti-Western, divisive or critical of core British values. However, the Unit made it clear that there should not be any publication of further more specific details derived from its records or analysis without reference back to EAU. This was not because of any doubt about the reliability or validity of our research or the assessment of the content of the statements made by the speakers in question."

While the focus of the EAU, is far more on the storage of data and analysis of what they consider to be extremism, RICU invests heavily in counter-narratives, in order to support projects they consider to be working against extremism in the UK. Around 2008, the government was investing £140 million in communities as part of its aim to stop extremism.*vi Specific bodies and events were set up in order assist with this,

including the Scholars' Roadshow, Muslim
Forums on Extremism and the largely discredited
Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
(MINAB).xvii While these organisations were
openly funded in the past, more recently it has
been difficult to ascertain the community funded
by Prevent, as the funding is not publicly
declared. Collins provides an idea though of the
extent:

"Providing grants for community-based projects aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities which can lead to an individual being drawn into terrorism: There were 130 community-based projects delivered in 2015, up from 70 in 2014, with these projects reaching over 42,000 participants. Two open competitions have so far been held for new providers to access funding from the Prevent Innovation Fund."xviii

The statements from Willis and Collins are telling, in that they reinforce the notion that Muslims are particularly problematised through the Prevent processes. Whether it is engagement with 'community groups', propaganda, funding or referrals, the emphasis of the government's strategy is overwhelmingly on Muslim communities. This focus establishes a structural form of racism and Islamophobia, but this becomes even more problematic when, as we will evidence in the next section, the sources they use in order to inform their views on terrorism and extremism are very much rooted in neoconservative politics and mistrust of Muslim communities.

The connections these organisations have to anti-Muslim bigotry makes their status as a source for RICU and the EAU deeply troubling.



SOURCES

RICU and the EAU have a remit to provide analysis The reference to the Prevent strategy basing its and research to bodies, in order to help them make informed decisions regarding extremism and extremists. It is in that context that it is important to understand the sources of their information, to see the extent to which they are able to make objective assessments. Of concern, is the extent to which the testimonies from both Paul Willis and Matt Collins focus on sources tied to neoconservative organisations in the UK ones that have specifically called for systematic discrimination against Muslim populations. According to Matt Collins:

"The 2011 Prevent Strategy, paragraph 5.37 refers to an open source survey conducted by The Centre for Social Cohesion which found that around 15% of people convicted for terrorist related offences in the UK between 1999 and 2009 had been connected with the extremist group AlMuhajiroun (now proscribed under terrorism legislation). It also states that in some cases "people who have been radicalised to the point of approving terrorism have passed through a prior extremist phase" and "some people are recruited into a terrorist organisation and radicalised at the same time.xix

epistemological understanding on the threat from terrorism being based on an analysis by the Centre for Social Cohesion (CSC) is very problematic. The organisation was set up by Civitas who have promoted Baroness Caroline Cox's vision of a civilizational struggle between the West and Islam. According to a book by Cox, published by Civitas, she says:

"[fundamentalists] may be sincere. But they may also be disingenuous or even deliberately deceptive as justified by the Islamic doctrine of tagiyya which justifies conscious deception about faith for self-protection in a hostile environment."xx

This thinking is reflected in CSC's former director Douglas Murray. Known for his mistrust of Muslims, Murray has consistently presented Islam and Muslims as being part of an existential threat to the western world, a thesis that he has refracted through conspiracy theorist Bat Ye'or's 'Eurabia' myth.xxi The conspiracy theory avers that there is an existential threat posited by Muslims who are intent on taking over Europe and is aided by a secretive deal between Arab and European leaders.

In 2006, Douglas Murray told members of the **Dutch Parliament:**

"It is late in the day, but Europe still has time to turn around the demographic time-bomb which will soon see a number of our largest cities fall to Muslim majorities. It has to. All immigration into Europe from Muslim countries must stop. In the case of a further genocide such as that in the Balkans, sanctuary would be given on a strictly temporary basis. This should also be enacted retrospectively. Those who are currently in Europe having fled tyrannies should be persuaded back to the countries which they fled from, once the tyrannies that were the cause of their flight have been removed. Conditions for Muslims in Europe must be made indicate towards the bias inherent in HJS's work: harder across the board: Europe must look like a less attractive proposition. We in Europe owe - after all - no special dues to Islam. We owe them no religious holidays, special rights or privileges."xxii

Attacking the European Convention on Human rights and undermining the rule of law, Murray has advocated a dual system of rights:

"Under Article 2 of the ridiculous and newly invented European Convention of Human Rights, European countries are "forbidden" from deporting or rendering culprits if their lives may be in danger... To win this war lives of terrorists and inciters to terrorism should be considered as pitilessly on our streets and within our society as they are on foreign battlefields... The rights of the West's people override those of the Islamist's in

their midst. And extradition should also include sending suspects away from our shores."xxiii

Finally Douglas Murrary is regularly given a platform on the right-wing Breitbart, in particular by now disgraced Milo Yiannopoulos, who describes Murrary as 'the great'.xxiv

The Centre for Social Cohesion's counterextremism research was subsumed into the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), with Hannah Stuart assuming her position as a researcher, and Douglas Murray becoming associate director. It's far-right, neoconservative funding streams

"The woman behind all this money is Nina Rosenwald, who has been dubbed the "sugar mama of anti-Muslim hate" by journalist Max Blumenthal. She funds Gatestone, where she is also president, via her New York-based megafoundation, the Abstraction Fund, and through Abstraction she has also channelled money to HJS via its U.S. fundraising arm.

"Though a relatively small amount—\$10,000 in 2011 according to the site Conservative Transparency—this funding connection is significant because it puts HJS in some notorious company. The Abstraction Fund also gives Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum the majority of its funding, which it uses for projects like Campus Watch."

"This MacCarthyist blacklisting outfit has long sought to smear leftist staff at U.S. universities, just as the new pro-Israel Canary Mission project has done with students advocating for Palestinians' rights. Though Canary Mission is operated anonymously, Pipes has been exposed by Blumenthal as working closely with those behind the project, to the extent that he provided a statement on Canary Mission's behalf."xxx

As with RICU's admittal that they have based their epistemological understanding of the threat of terrorism on work produced by the neoconservative Centre for Social Cohesion, Paul Willis explains that some of the EAU's analysis is based on evidence provided to them by staff at HJS:

"In the context of this case, it is relevant to note that EAU has been provided with information by the Henry Jackson Society ("HJS") (an independent British-based think tank) which has established an organisation called Student Rights in order to understand extremism on university campuses and undertake related lobbying. The origin of the provision of information to EAU by Student Rights is that in around 2013, and prior to the establishment of the Unit, one of the HE Prevent co-ordinators met with Student Rights and asked whether they could provide the information they were already sending to the Home Office in the form of a weekly digest, instead of on an ad hoc basis. They were happy to do this, PDU was added to the distribution list and when EAU was established it began receiving these weekly digests too. EAU still receives the digests.

Student Rights was not asked by any part of the Home Office to undertake this work and they have not received any government funds for doing so. The Claimant [Dr Salman Butt] was named in one Student Rights digest dated 14 October 2014."xxvi

The connection to Student Rights is crucial, largely due to it having been managed by Raheem Kassam. In another connection to Breitbart from those associated to the Henry Jackson Society, Kassam is Editor-in-Chief of Breitbart News London and the former chief advisor to Nigel Farage's UKIP party campaign. Of his role, Kassam, in 2015, wrote:

"In this role I oversee the entire operation of the Student Rights organisation, across the Events, New Media, Research and Campaign workflows.

"From inception to construction and delivery, I am tasked with liaising with the Universities across the UK to deliver the manifesto pledge of Student Rights, to ensure freedom of speech and freedom from political oppression for students on campuses."xxvii

Speaking of their relationship while jointly running the neoconservative blog The Commentator, Robin Shepherd in 2016 said of Kassam:

"Kassam is a psychopath, and a crook. Kassam is a nasty piece of work, and prides himself on being so. Being a 'wrong 'un' is something he relishes, as do the shabby characters who associate with him.

"Raheem Kassam is a danger to British democracy, and the rule of law. I saw at first-hand behaviour that was so appalling it was, and remains, difficult to internalise."xxviii

Raheem Kassam and Student Rights were formally condemned by the National Union of Students (NUS) Executive Committee in 2014. This was on the heels of the Liberal Democrat MP Tom Brake quitting the board of Student Rights a year earlier after having also resigned from the Henry Jackson Society.**

The connections that these organisations have to a brand of neoconservatism that promotes anti-Muslim bigotry and Islamophobia makes their status as a concerted source for RICU and the EAU deeply troubling.

Paul Willis described in further detailed how the information provided by Student Rights, was used in order to make determinations:

"First, in February 2015, the Unit was asked by the then Director General of OSCT if it could provide a rough assessment of how many events had taken place on university campuses in 2014 involving individuals who had expressed extremist views. The Unit had very limited time (the course of an afternoon) in which to complete this task and largely relied on information provided by Student Rights in the weekly bulletins mentioned above. The analyst involved in this work used his judgement as to whether the information or evidence provided by Student Rights would meet the Unit's threshold for individuals who had previously expressed views contrary to fundamental values, and then verified the events independently where possible."xxxi

As Willis accepts, they had very limited time to verify the information that was made available to them – although some independent fact checking was carried out. What is very clear, however, is that at no point does Willis mention any form of interview with those on who determinations are being made – no attempt to clarify positions before a formal policy position is taken. This is surprising, as it is also clear that the EAU is willing to meet with individuals in order to understand the complexities around what they view to be extremism. This is evidenced through a meeting with Student Rights by an officer of the EAU:

"The analyst met with Student Rights in or around March 2015 to ask about their understanding of extremism at London Universities. She did not share any information held by EAU, but sought the views and findings of Student Rights. This resulted in Student Rights sending her a paper in or around May 2015, based on their research into extremist events at selected London universities. The analyst took this and the previous EAU piece of work on events in 2014 and included some of it in her work. This included the two events mentioned above involving the Claimant. 10.6. An early draft of the paper was prepared by August 2015 and this (marked "Draft" across all its pages) included information about the Claimant [PW1, p.98]. Privacy issues relating to the Claimant were not the subject of any freestanding consideration at that time, but no new information was obtained about him, he was not the subject of any further research and I do not think any such issues were engaged. 10.7. When No.10 was putting together a press release to coincide with the coming into force of the Prevent Duty Guidance for further and higher education institutions, a request was made for case studies on extremists speaking on campuses for..."xxxii

The relationship between RICU and the EAU is crucial in understanding how determinations of extremism are made, and in particular the way in which they are tainted by institutional relationships with those who are suspicious of Muslim communities in the UK. The climate of fear that these organisations generate about Muslims indicate a faux-epistemology claimed by the units, a troubling revelation when it is considered that public and private bodies are informed by their analysis.

There is no indication that those who have had assessments made on them, are ever given an opportunity to challenge the final analysis.

CONCLUSION

The witness statements in the ex parte Dr Salman Butt case provided by Paul Willis from the Extremism Analysis Unit and Matt Collins from the Research Information and Communications Department provide an unprecedented look into the workings of the Home Office. These units help to make determinations in relation to extent of extremism in the UK, and yet do not exist in a vacuum.

With both organisations basing their assessments on poor epistemological frameworks, their analysis is further compounded by the fact that they rely on neoconservative think-tanks to understand the levels of threat. Specific references to the Centre for Social Cohesion, the Henry Jackson Society and Student classification of individuals happens in the Rights, centres their knowledge base on a particularly right-wing perspective on extremism. At no point do either units make clear that they engage with scholars and experts from the critical terrorism studies community in order to maintain some epistemological balance. Further, there is no indication that those who have had assessments made on them, are ever given an opportunity to challenge the final analysis that is stored on them - they are reliant on the individual researcher to make determinations.

The EAU operates in an environment where

determinations are provided as objective analysis to pubic bodies in order to assist them in making determinations on how to implement their Prevent statutory duties. Due to this process, these bodies will take steps to sanction individuals, or indeed 'safeguard', based on that analysis, but without the affected individual ever being able to challenge the basis under which they have been categorised. This form of 'criminalisation' forms as part of the tools of the Home Office to sanction individuals, without there being any form of due process available. Such policies result in a reduction of space for ideas to be discussed and challenged, but further increase levels of mistrust between communities. In a world where the shadows, the EAU and RICU stand as judge, jury and executioner.



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