

Iran promotes UK extremism – it must be stopped

Tehran's extensive network of proxies pose a threat to our values. It needs to be robustly challenged, but the UK is lagging in this task

PAUL STOTT

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Iranian interference in the UK should be at the top of the Home Secretary's 100-day review of counter-extremism. Both the director general of MI5, and the head of Counter Terrorism Policing, have detailed how Iran has [sought to commit terrorist attacks](#) in this country. There is also thuggery – on May 24 at a memorial event in Wembley for the late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, a group left the event to challenge anti-regime counter-protesters, injuring four in the fighting that followed.

Iran is supplemented in its mission by a minority of political Shias from other countries. In London this includes representatives of Iraqi Shia movements such as the [Popular Mobilisation Forces \(PMF\)](#). One part of the PMF, Kata'ib Hezbollah, is designated as a foreign terrorist organisation by the USA and is accused of killing a British soldier in Iraq in 2020. But it is not proscribed here. The Charity Commission received a dossier on two charities linked to the Bahraini opposition some months ago; as a statement noted, "We have opened regulatory cases into both to determine if there is a role for the Commission."

Some of our allies appear well ahead of the UK. The German government has closed the Iranian linked Islamic Centre in Hamburg and several affiliates. The Federal Ministry of the Interior stated the organisations were breaching the German Constitution. The Islamic Centre's former head, Hadi Mofatteh, has received a deportation order.

Avril Haines, the US director of National Intelligence, recently issued a statement on attempted Iranian influence operations in America that sought to take advantage of protests over Gaza. This is not to argue such protests are invented by or directed from Tehran. But, as Haines wrote: "It is also important to warn of foreign actors who seek to exploit our debate for their own purposes." Yvette Cooper should make a similar statement here.

German action contrasts with our approach to the [Islamic Centre of England \(ICEL\)](#) – subject of a recent Policy Exchange report. Each ICEL director since its formation has attended religious seminaries in Iran and been sent here as the personal representative of the supreme leader. ICEL commemorates Iran's Islamic Revolution and its "martyrs" – and looks to harness British Muslim anger on issues such as blasphemy.

ICEL has been the subject of a Charity Commission statutory inquiry since November 2022, over "serious governance concerns". Trustees had failed to fully comply with an action plan and official warning after an event held at ICEL eulogising the late Iranian general Qasem Soleimani.

Hamburg's investigation was conducted by Germany's Office for the Protection of the Constitution, with final decisions taken by the interior minister. In England and Wales, should responsibility for the regulation of charities, where there is a potential connection to hostile foreign states, continue to sit with an arm's length organisation?

We should stop issuing visas for Iranian ministers of religion to work here, and re-examine visas already issued. The extremism review should commit to a thorough investigation of [pro-Iranian activists](#), and their impact.

While Britain's Sunni Muslims have tended to resist Iran's siren calls, nothing about that trend guarantees its continuation. It is also time the government encouraged a greater degree of openness and clarity in the work of the security service. Continental agencies like the Dutch AIVD and German BfV, produce an annual public review of extremism. Public officials should then ensure they do not have dealings with extremist groups.

The UK has been tolerant of too much, for too long.

Paul Stott is head of security and extremism at Policy Exchange