

Tehran Calling

The Iranian Threat to the UK

Dr Paul Stott



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Published by
Policy Exchange, 1 Old Queen Street, Westminster, London SW1H 9JA

www.policyexchange.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-917201-02-5

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Executive Summary

The United Kingdom has now experienced over three decades of Iranian influence and power projection within its borders: from the Rushdie fatwa in 1989, the 2022 cinema protests against the ‘blasphemous’ Lady of Heaven movie, to the current threats to Iranian dissidents and journalists based in the United Kingdom. As Iranian flags fly at pro-Palestinian protests in this country, this report details how the Islamic Republic of Iran constitutes a multidimensional threat to British society – one which requires urgent government action.

Iran is presently a hostile state to Britain, listed alongside China and Russia as an opponent in Security Service statements. It seeks to interfere with our online systems and takes British citizens hostage. In that, it replicates the modus operandi of other authoritarian enemy regimes. Yet Iran also seeks to wield significant social and cultural influence in this country, declaring and imposing blasphemy codes, and creating institutions here that project power and influence on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is the latter dimension of the Iranian challenge that is the primary focus of this report.

Iran has spent several decades curating a politico-religious infrastructure in Britain. This centres on what is characterised here as the Islamic Republic’s UK nerve centre – the Islamic Centre of England Ltd (ICEL) in Maida Vale, west London. The director of ICEL is appointed by Iran’s spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. As this suggests, the ICEL is not merely some dry, arid religious institution; rather it sits at the centre of a substantial network of Iranian influence operations within this country. For example, a succession of senior clerical figures closely tied to the ruling regime, have travelled freely between Tehran and London – traffic that has continued even when Iran has imprisoned British citizens, such as Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

In addition, London is now host to a number of pro-Iranian activists and groups who have taken to the streets in support of the Islamic Republic. The presence of one such grouping-- the Iran-aligned Al Hashd al Sha’abi militias (Popular Mobilisation Forces, PMF) -- here in London, is detailed in this report for the first time. The significance of the PMF has been underlined in recent months against the backdrop of the instability roiling the Middle East. Iran considers itself a central player in the Palestinian struggle. In periods of heightened conflict such as have occurred recently, Iran and its supporters have sought to influence protests, and protest movements within the UK. There is limited evidence the authorities have fully scoped this reality.

Policy recommendations

1. Visas should no longer be issued to Iranian nationals to work at the Islamic Centre of England, or any institution affiliated to it. ICEL, with its director serving as the representative of Iran's spiritual leader, is an arm of the Iranian regime in this country. The UK has tolerated this arrangement for more than a quarter of a century, during which time Iran has sought to disrupt our social cohesion, attack and murder British citizens in this country, and jailed our nationals in Iran on trumped up charges. Existing visas issued to Iranian nationals to serve in any capacity at the ICEL should be revoked, and no further visas of that type issued. Other countries make do with a diplomatic representative in Britain: there is no reason to favour Iran with a religious representative, too. The ICEL itself currently faces a Charity Commission inquiry.
2. More broadly, the policy of issuing visas to Iranian clerics to minister in this country should now come to an end. Iran is a hostile, clerical state. Allowing its state trained clerics the right to enter, work in our communities and then potentially go on to apply for British citizenship is a luxury we can ill-afford. A full report should also be made to parliament concerning the visas previously issued.
3. The Charity Commission must now be expected to complete its inquiries into ICEL, which started way back on 22 November 2022, within two months. Its recently announced investigation into the Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust must also be completed within a similar time frame. The snail's pace at which the Charity Commission consistently operates is unacceptable, unfair to both those under investigation, and to the public. On 7 February 2024 it was announced that a new Chief Executive of the Charity Commission, David Holdsworth, will take office on 1 July 2024.¹ He must make it his priority to sharpen the pace and the investigative focus of this organisation – it cannot continue working in the way it has hitherto.
4. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) should be proscribed under our terrorism laws, in large part to ensure that contact between it and British citizens is effectively criminalised. It is vital though that proscription is not a glass ceiling, as it has been in the past, but instead serves as a spur for further action. Here the authorities have work to do to allay public concern – past proscriptions against the political wings of Hezbollah and Hamas have seen little action follow. The same mistake should not be made with the IRGC.²

1. Charity Commission announced next Chief Executive, Charity Commission 7 February 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-announces-next-chief-executive>

2. Much the same can also be said about Hizb-ut-Tahrir, proscribed on 19 January 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizb-ut-tahrir-proscribed-as-terrorist-organisation>

5. The role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in disputes in this country concerning blasphemy must be fully investigated. Following the independent review of Prevent, the Home Office accepted a recommendation (number 4) for an investigation into ‘blasphemy’ as part of the wider Islamist threat. This must be expanded to include Iran’s interference in these matters, with any report published in full.
6. The Home Office should launch an investigation into the activities of groups associated with the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in this country. The United States has designated Kata’ib Hezbollah, part of the PMF, as a terrorist entity since 2009.³ The UK should consider doing likewise.
7. More broadly, the Home Secretary should direct the Home Office and Security Service to counter Iranian subversion in the UK. As an immediate priority, this should include a focus on Iranian efforts to shape pro-Palestinian protests, which are likely to negatively impact UK social cohesion and counter-extremism policies.
8. The statutory Prevent Duty should be extended to the Border Force, UK Visas and Immigration and Immigration enforcement. While the preference must always be to stop people from entering the country who pose a threat to our values or our security, the maintenance of our security and our values must be factored in at every level of the asylum and immigration process. This ‘means that the authorities should place an appropriate amount of weight on the need to prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism when they consider all the other factors relevant to how they carry out their usual functions.’⁴
9. Beyond this, the Security Service should provide an annual threat statement, covering the types of extremism it is countering and providing an overview of trends such as jihadist organisations, the far-right, and the threat from national states such as Iran. In Germany, the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV) – the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution – already produces an annual report of this type. The Home Secretary must request the same of MI5. This is not to ask the Director-General of MI5 to show his hand as regards to the organisation’s capabilities or specific intelligence, more the need to recognise that significant public funding, and invisibility, are incompatible with a liberal democracy.
10. In terms of cyber-conflict, Britain faces a threat from four nations – Russia, China, Iran and North Korea. Again, the inability to communicate this threat limits public understanding. An annual report, from the Homeland Security Group, tying together information from a range of actors, including the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) is needed to fill this void.
11. The Home Secretary must reassure the Intelligence and Security Committee on the extent to which MI5 possesses language skills, the range of languages spoken by its employees and in particular the number of Persian speakers employed by the service.

3. Bureau of Public Affairs, Designation of Kata’ib Hizballah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, 2 July 2009, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/july/125582.htm>

4. HM Government, 2023, Prevent duty guidance: Guidance for specified authorities in England and Wales, p.5, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64f8498efdc5d10014fce6d1/14.258_HO_Prevent_Duty_Guidance_v5c.pdf.

12. The 2023 National Security Act potentially offers a new layer of protection against overseas threats. Where evidence exists of illegal activity being conducted in this country on behalf of Iran, the authorities must not hesitate to investigate and if necessary, prosecute those acting on behalf of Iran, for example in areas such as the harassment of the Iranian diaspora.
13. Despite Iran's often-negative reputation internationally, elements within the British state have at times been remarkably willing to reach out to the Islamic Republic. Between 2016-18, the annual Global Peace and Unity event in Glasgow brought together Scottish politicians, British Muslim representative organisations, Iranian clerics and representatives of our armed forces and Scottish police. While these events have ceased, to properly understand how Iranian influence networks are potentially built in this country, full disclosure of just what was happening here, from both the Secretary of State for Defence and Scottish government, would be welcome.
14. To better understand the diversity of different faith communities in the UK, the Office for National Statistics should allow the recording of different sectarian affiliation such as Shia Muslim or Sunni Muslim, in the census. Once proper data exists, substantive analysis of issues such as the extent to which Sunni/Shia divisions play out in this country, may begin.

Introduction

The United Kingdom has now experienced over three decades of Iranian influence and power projection within its borders: from the Rushdie fatwa in 1989, the 2022 cinema protests against the ‘blasphemous’ *Lady of Heaven* movie, to the current threats to Iranian dissidents and journalists based in the United Kingdom. As Iranian flags fly at pro-Palestinian protests in this country, this report details how the Islamic Republic of Iran constitutes a multidimensional threat to British society – one which requires urgent government action.

Iran is presently a hostile state to Britain, listed alongside China and Russia as an opponent in Security Service statements. It seeks to interfere with our online systems and takes British citizens hostage. In that, it replicates the modus operandi of other authoritarian enemy regimes. Yet Iran also seeks to wield significant social and cultural influence in this country, declaring and imposing blasphemy codes, and creating institutions here that project power on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is the latter dimension of the Iranian challenge that is the primary focus of this report.

In Jack Straw’s 2019 book analysing British-Iranian relations, *The English Job: Understanding Iran*,⁵ the former Foreign Secretary offered a potted guide to the byzantine nature of the Iranian state, noting how rival interest groups tended to advance different and often competing policies. This makes it hard to understand, explain and react sensibly to what can seem irrational or self-defeating policies. This is not a bug but an integral feature of the Khomeinist state, where the Supreme Leader acts as final arbiter in all things, deriving his power from holding in balance the rivalries that such a system deliberately encourages.

The challenge for the United Kingdom is not necessarily to read these competing trends (though that can be at least as well achieved by judicious use of open source and expert analysis readily available outside Iran, as it can through the heavily circumscribed work of our Embassy there), but to limit the damage from those actions of Iran which threaten our domestic national interests, in particular our social cohesion and liberal democracy. This report seeks to make clear the nature and scale of the Iranian ideological and physical challenge and propose action to mitigate the damage it can do.

This report covers both the years before the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas on Israel, and the period afterwards. Those attacks served as a reminder that Iran’s influence upon other organisations and particular nation states is not an abstract question, but one with a direct bearing upon

5. Jack Straw, (2019), *The English Job: Understanding Iran*. London: Biteback. See for example p.266.

national and international security. Robin Simcox, the Commissioner for Countering Extremism, has stated ‘what is underappreciated is the scale of Iranian-backed activity in this country; and the extent to which Iran attempts to stoke extremism here.’⁶ This report is an attempt to reverse that lack of appreciation and understanding. Only when armed with a proper grasp of the challenge Iran poses, can action follow.

To this end, the report is divided into three main sections.

- Chapter one primarily examines the Islamic Centre of England Ltd (ICEL), which effectively operates as the Iranian Government’s British nerve centre, sitting at the heart of a network of institutions that project influence on behalf of the Islamic Republic. It is that broader network that is then examined in chapter two. While many within the Iranian diaspora in the UK are hostile to Tehran, it also home to a number of activist organisations that promote pro-Iranian positions.
- In Chapter three the analysis moves to the subject of Iranian state hostility towards British citizens and our values, and the threat that Iran poses to dissidents, exiles and those it claims to be guilty of blasphemy.

6. ‘Countering Extremist Threats in the UK: An address by Robin Simcox’, 19 October 2023, <https://my.rusi.org/events/countering-extremist-threats-in-the-uk-an-address-by-robin-simcox.html>

Chapter 1: The Islamic Centre of England Ltd (ICEL): Iran's Nerve Centre in the United Kingdom

The Islamic Centre of England (hereafter ICEL), based in a converted cinema in Maida Vale, west London,⁷ is a UK-registered charity.⁸ It describes itself as a Shia religious and cultural centre whose stated aim is:

*The advancement of the religion of Islam in accordance with the principles and tenets of the Shi'ah Ithna Ashari Muslim faith; the advancement of education amongst the Muslim community; the provision of facilities in the interests of social welfare for the recreation and leisure-time occupation of Muslims.*⁹

In keeping with this ambition, the ICEL provides a range of community services – for example operating the Teyban School of the Islamic Centre of England since 1998. This currently provides Quran education classes for “230 students in the age groups of 5 to 15 years.”¹⁰

The ICEL, however, is no ordinary religious charity/institution. Its 1996 memorandum of association stated that ‘at all times at least one of the trustees shall be a representative of the Supreme Spiritual Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran’.¹¹ At least until 2017, the charity’s accounts included the same sentence: ‘At all times one of the trustees shall be a representative of the Supreme Spiritual Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran.’¹²

In reply to a written question in November 2021 by Dr Andrew Murrison MP, concerning the relationship between ICEL and the Iranian Government, FCDO Minister of State James Cleverly replied that:

*The Islamic Centre of England (ICE) and its director, Hojjat al-Islam Seyyed Mousavi, are the official religious representative of Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the UK. The ICE is distinct from the Iranian Embassy in London, which is the official diplomatic representation of the Government of Iran.*¹³

However, since Iran is a self-declared Islamic Republic, headed by a cleric who is the nation’s Supreme Leader, holding a position that is effectively above the constitution and separate from and superior to the government of the day, drawing a distinction between political and religious structures is questionable, and it may even be argued, superfluous. This backdrop ensures that in any discussion of Iranian influence in the UK, the ICEL deserves close attention.

7. <https://ic-el.uk/about-us/>
8. Charity number 1058998: <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1058998>
9. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1058998/governing-document>
10. <https://ic-el.uk/teyban/>
11. Andrew Norfolk, Scholar spreads Iranian propaganda in Britain, 11 January 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/scholar-spreads-iranian-propaganda-in-britain-3q90fvzxd>
12. ICEL charity accounts, End of year accounts, 31 December 2017, p 2. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1058998/accounts-and-annual-returns>
13. Iran: Islamic Centre of England, Question for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UIN 69590, 4 November 2021. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-11-04/69590/#>

have overlapped with the December 2006 declaration from Iran's foreign minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, that Iran sought unity between Muslims, and the subsequent May 4-6 2008 Islamic unity conference in Tehran.²⁰

Hujjat-al-Islam Abdul Hussein Moezi / Mo'ezzi was the second director of ICEL (July 2004-March 2014). Moezi previously served as legal deputy of the ministry of internal affairs in Iran, and director of the Islamic Centre of Vienna. After his ICEL role, he became the Supreme Leader's representative at a major charity, the Iranian Red Crescent Society.²¹ He was also a trustee of the Hawza Ilmiyya's fundraising arm, the Irshad Trust.²² The Times noted that Moezi was 'personally appointed by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to be his special envoy to the UK,' and that he also told Muslim servicemen and women in Britain to quit the armed forces because their involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts is forbidden by Islam.²³

Hujjat-al-Islam Mohammad Ali Shomali was the third director of ICEL (March 2014-June 2019). Shomali was formerly the director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies in Qom, director of the Manchester Islamic Centre, and tutor and director of the Hawza Ilmiyya in London.²⁴ In 2018, the Islamic Republic of Iran's International Quran News Agency (IQNA)²⁵ described Shomali as the 'representative of the Supreme Leader in Britain'.²⁶

Since leaving his position at the ICEL, Mohammed Shomali has remained in the United Kingdom and played a part in some prominent inter-faith initiatives. On 14 September 2023, for instance, he was pictured with the Archbishop of Canterbury at a Christian Muslim Forum event at Lambeth Palace.²⁷ Mohammad Shomali is currently Director of the Risalat International Centre for Education and Dialogue, in Stanmore, London.²⁸

Hujjat-al-Islam Seyed Hashem Moosavi / Sayyed Hashem Mousavi was appointed the fourth director of ICEL in July 2019. An announcement by the Iranian AhlulBayt News Agency (ABNA) in June 2019 left little doubt as to the close relationship between ICEL and Tehran, as the baton was passed, at the direction of Ayatollah Khamenei, from Mohammad Ali Shomali to Seyed Hashem Moosavi:

Hujjat al-Islam Mousavi will be appointed as the new head of the Islamic Centre of England and the representative of the Supreme Leader in the United Kingdom.

On Friday, June 14th, the Islamic Centre of England issued a letter of invitation to scholars and believers to attend the farewell ceremony for Hujjat al-Islam Mohammad Ali Shomali and the introduction of Hujjat al-Islam Sayyed Hashem Mousavi as the new representative of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei, in the United Kingdom...

*Hujjat al-Islam Mousavi is the fourth president of the Islamic Centre of England and the representative of the Supreme Leader in the United Kingdom*²⁹

20. 'Iran's Shi'a Reach Out to Mainstream Salafists', Alex Vatanka, CTC Sentinel, Vol 1 Issue 7, 2010, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Vol1Iss7-Art7.pdf>
21. <http://web.archive.org/web/20210620043946/https://ic-el.uk/hujjat-al-islam-abdul-hussein-moezzi-mobile/>
22. Sean O'Neill, Muslim students 'being taught to despise unbelievers as filth', 20 April 2006. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/muslim-students-being-taught-to-despise-unbelievers-as-filth-gh6k75lwlh8>
23. Richard Kerbaj, Muslims must quit British Forces, says Iranian envoy Abdolhossein Moezi, 14 November 2009. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/muslims-must-quit-british-forces-says-iranian-envoy-abdolhossein-moezi-f3hp0rzmssd>
24. https://web.archive.org/web/20210620071646/https://ic-el.uk/dr_shomali-mobile/
25. IQNA, 'about us': <https://iqna.ir/en/about>
26. London Hosts Gathering of Muslim Scholars, Preachers, 13 May 2018. <https://iqna.ir/en/news/3465816/london-hosts-gathering-of-muslim-scholars-preachers>
27. Archbishop of Canterbury, 14 September 2023, <https://twitter.com/JustinWelby/status/1702364126721266011?t=9gkV-2Ga-RrPpV4z2M8SR7g&s=19> Mohammad Shomali is in pictures one and four.
28. Risalat International Centre for Education and Dialogue, Companies House, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/15011413/officers>
29. Hujjat al-Islam Mousavi will be appointed as head of Islamic Center of England, 10 June 2019. http://web.archive.org/web/20220620064747/https://en.abna24.com/index.php/news/hujjat-al-islam-mousavi-%E2%80%8Ewill-be-appointed-as-head-of-islamic-center-of-england_949193.html

Moosavi had previously taught at the Al-Mahdi Institute in Birmingham; he served as the Islamic International Foundation and College Director in the Philippines; and as director of Hawza Ilmiyya seminary since 2019. Significantly, his academic research included a study of the ‘Rights and duties of Muslims as a minority in non-Islamic societies’.³⁰ In addition, Moosavi has led Friday prayers at several Shia centres in Britain whilst he was ICEL’s Director – examples listed on the ICEL website in 2019 included Luton, Tooting, Birmingham, Hounslow, Woking, Watford and the Dar ul Islam Foundation in Cricklewood.³¹

On 22 November 2022, the Charity Commission launched an inquiry into ICEL (see more below for further details).³² On 1 December 2022 Companies House records state that Seyed Moosavi ceased to be a person with significant control at the ICEL.³³ On 6 December 2022 he resigned as a secretary of the company.³⁴ Use of the “wayback machine” internet archive to examine the ICEL website suggests that on 20 June 2021 Moosavi was referred to as the ‘Incumbent Director’ of the ICEL, with a contact email address of ‘Director@ic-el.com’.³⁵ This was still the case in November 2022,³⁶ and as late as 7 December 2022 another page on the ICEL website still referred to Moosavi as Director of the centre.³⁷ However his title changed at some stage in the following weeks or months, and by 29 January 2023 he was merely described as the Centre’s Imam.³⁸ On 24 March 2023 the wayback machine records Seyed Moosavi with the slightly different title of Incumbent Imam of the ICEL.³⁹

At the time of writing the ICEL website, in its profile of Hashem Moosavi describes him as the Incumbent Imam of the Islamic Centre of England,⁴⁰ while the ‘About Us’ section of the webpage states he has been the ‘Centre’s Imam since July 2019’.⁴¹ Until relatively recently, however, the institution’s website carried a ‘message by [the] ICEL Director’, in which Moosavi stressed the ‘pure intention’ of the ICEL.⁴² Even so, the LSE academic Roham Alvandi has described Moosavi as ‘the propagandist-in-chief- of the Iranian regime in London’.⁴³

1.2 Commemoration of Iran’s Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Centre of England has frequently held events to mark the 1979 Islamic revolution, the most recent example being organised on 11 February 2022 when ICEL director Seyed Hashem Moosavi joined the Iranian Ambassador H.E. Mohsen Baharvand.⁴⁴ In 2019 the commemoration took the shape of a ‘Faith and the Contemporary World’ forum, intended to celebrate the milestone of the ‘40th Anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran’. ICEL’s Facebook page recorded the speakers in its promotional material.⁴⁵

30. https://ic-el.uk/hiwm_seyed_hashim_moosavi/

31. Visits of the Director of ICEL to Other Islamic Centres, 9 August 2019. http://web.archive.org/web/20191227044651/http://www.ic-el.com/en/show_news.asp?id-num=1424&state=news

32. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-launches-inquiry-into-islamic-centre-of-england>

33. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/03142456/persons-with-significant-control>

34. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/6d3061Pst-vpLn13TSUED3hFNJZY/appointments>

35. https://web.archive.org/web/20210620062146/https://ic-el.uk/hiwm_seyed_hashim_moosavi/

36. https://web.archive.org/web/20221128074842/https://ic-el.uk/hiwm_seyed_hashim_moosavi/

37. <https://web.archive.org/web/20221207022256/https://ic-el.uk/about-us/>

38. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230129000022/https://ic-el.uk/about-us/>

39. https://web.archive.org/web/20230324215032/https://ic-el.uk/hiwm_seyed_hashim_moosavi/

40. https://ic-el.uk/hiwm_seyed_hashim_moosavi/

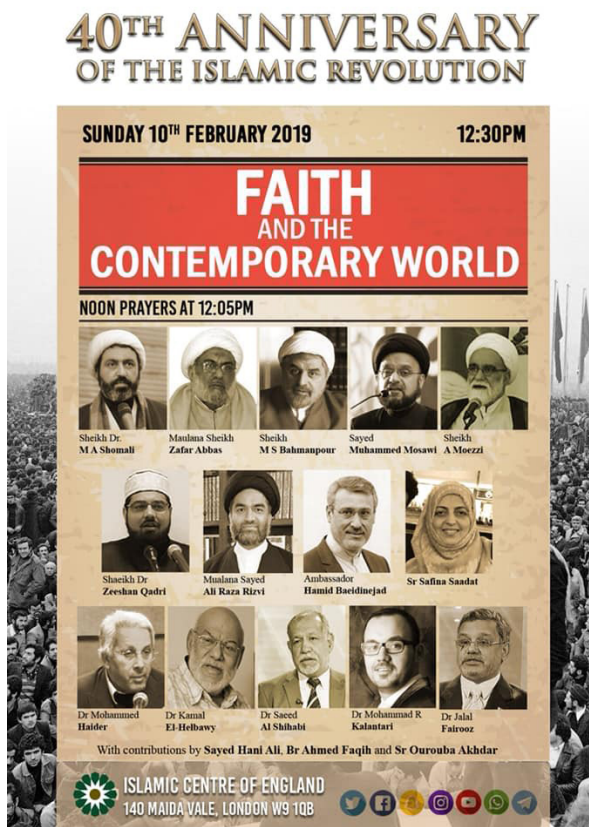
41. <https://ic-el.uk/about-us/> Correct at 31 January 2024.

42. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210728031150/https://ic-el.uk/about-us/>

43. Roham Alvandi, UK should expel mouthpiece of Iran’s supreme leader, 29 September 2022. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-should-expel-mouthpiece-of-irans-supreme-leader-9lvhk8rkt>

44. <https://ic-el.uk/events/celebrating-the-43rd-anniversary-of-the-victorious-islamic-revolution/>

45. Islamic Centre of England, 9 February 2019: <https://www.facebook.com/IslamicCentreEngland/photos/on-the-40th-anniversary-of-the-victory-of-the-islamic-revolution-in-iran-the-isl/1685727258196203/>



Director of the ICEL Mohammad Ali Shomali was among those listed to speak, as was former ICEL Director Sheikh Abdul Hussein Moezi, and Sheikh Muhammad Saeed Bahmanpour, discussed later in this text. Another speaker, Dr Kamal El-Helbawy (1939-2023), is described on an archived page of the ICEL website as the ‘Founder of Muslim Association of Britain’.⁴⁶ In an interview in 2014, Dr El-Helbawy supplied further details about his political lineage, stating he had served as “the spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood in the West and ran the media centre for the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK”.⁴⁷ He was also prominent in the Islamic Unity Forum, of which he was a director.⁴⁸ The appearance of such a figure from the world of Sunni Islam, at an event marking the Iranian revolution, held at a leading Shia centre in London, is a reminder Islamists are capable of working across the sectarian divide, and that the example of Iran’s Islamic revolution continues to inspire them decades later.

Other ICEL events have marked the anniversary of the passing of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s founder, Ayatollah Khomeini. For example, in 2021, it held an event to commemorate the 32nd year since Khomeini’s death, which featured a number of activist speakers including the ICEL’s director Hashem Sayeed Moosavi.⁴⁹

46. 40th Anniversary of Islamic Revolution, February 2019. http://web.archive.org/web/20200106093809/http://www.icel.com/en/show_news.asp?id-num=1369&state=news
47. Basil El-Dabh, The Brotherhood ‘deviated’ from original focus, prioritised politics over revolution: Kamal Helbawy, 2 June 2014. <https://dailynewsegyp.com/2014/06/02/brotherhood-deviated-original-focus-prioritised-politics-revolution-kamal-helbawy/>
48. Islamic Unity Forum, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/06414918/officers>
49. <https://twitter.com/HadaviTehrani/status/1399732215362301960>

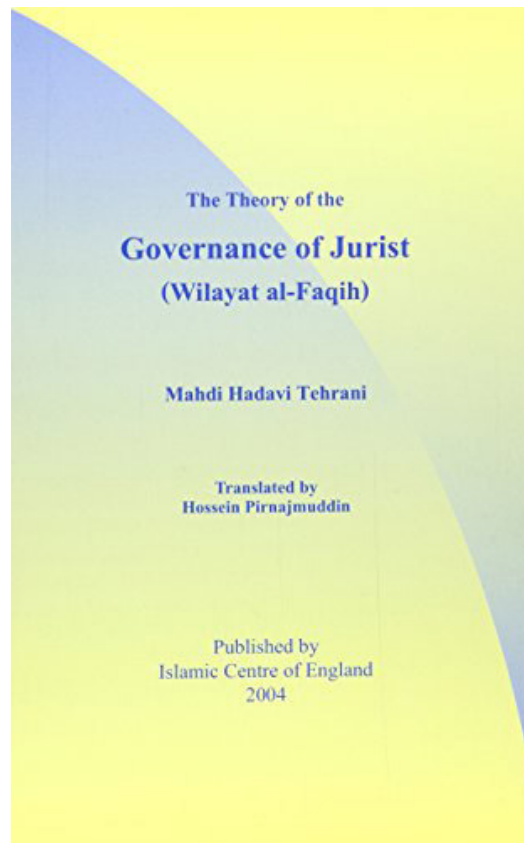


The connection between ICEL and the Iranian clerical regime can also be observed elsewhere. The organisation's website claims a publishing arm, The Spring Institute,⁵¹ and ICEL has also published books explaining key theological conceptions from within the Iranian system. One such volume was a 2004 translation of Mahdi Hadavi Tehrani's *The Theory of the Governance of Jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih)*, a key concept developed by the Islamic Republic's founder and first Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.⁵² The author, Tehrani, has himself gone on to become an Ayatollah and is a prominent academic and seminary teacher in Iran.⁵³

51. <https://ic-el.uk/the-spring-institute/>

52. <https://www.shiabooks99p.com/product/the-theory-of-the-governance-of-jurist-wilayat-al-faqih/>

53. <https://www.al-islam.org/faith-and-reason/biography-ayatullah-mahdi-hadavi-tehrani>



1.3 Controversy: the Charity Commission steps in

In January 2020, the ICEL held a commemorative event following the assassination of IRGC-Al-Quds commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of the PMF. At that gathering, the Director of the institution, Seyed Hashem Moosavi played a prominent role (see below).

54



54. Serat News, 5 January 2020 : <https://www.seratnews.com/fa/news/488571>



The Charity Commission -- the regulator for registered charities in England and Wales, responsible to parliament but independent of government⁵⁵ -- subsequently issued a warning to the ICEL, commenting that:⁵⁶

The event risked associating the charity with a speaker who may have committed an offence under the Terrorism Acts, as the speaker was filmed during the event appearing to praise and call for support for Soleimani. The trustees failed to intervene or provide a counter narrative. The following day the trustees organised a further event for Soleimani and published statements on the charity's website offering condolence and praise for him.

It should be noted that this backdrop did not prevent the ICEL from accessing support under the government's furlough programme, being awarded £109,476 in 2020;⁵⁷ and £129,556 in 2021,⁵⁸ under the Covid Job Retention Scheme. This, despite the fact that the ICEL did not appear to have been an enterprise that was struggling financially – the organisation's year end 2021 accounts indicated that it had more than £4.2 million in reserve.⁵⁹

On 22 November 2022 the Charity Commission announced a statutory inquiry into ICEL. This came after the official warning in 2020, and a follow-up case in 2021 which found it to be only partially compliant with actions required by the official warning.⁶⁰ The Charity Commission is not a prosecuting authority,⁶¹ but can conduct statutory inquiries under Section 46 of the Charities Act 2011. Where such an inquiry has been set up, many of the Commission's powers kick in, such as being able to demand evidence or statements from those running a charity.⁶² In practice, investigations tend to focus on several core issues - the protection of charitable property and whether trustees are acting in the interests of the charity, to ensure it is being properly run, that it is complying with its

55. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission/about>
56. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-regulator-issues-official-warning-to-islamic-centre-of-england-ltd>
57. Islamic Centre of England. End of year accounts, 31 December 2020. https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A11235535&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=1058998
58. Islamic Centre of England, End of year accounts, 31 December 2021. https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A12251970&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=1058998
59. Islamic Centre of England, End of year accounts, 31 December 2021, op cit.
60. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-launches-inquiry-into-islamic-centre-of-england>
61. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/risk-framework-charity-commission/regulatory-and-risk-framework>
62. Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2017. Guidance: Statutory inquiries into charities: guidance for charities. See section 4.3 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1132522/CC46.pdf

defined charitable purposes and not behaving in a way as to undermine public trust and confidence in charities.⁶³

A key drawback with the Charity Commission is the speed that it takes to conduct inquiries, sometimes taking 1-2 years from announcement to culmination. This perhaps reflects a legalistic approach focused purely on regulatory issues, as opposed to seeking to establish wider aspects of a charity's behaviour or direction. It is not at all clear that a change such as providing greater resources would assist in addressing this.⁶⁴ On 10 May 2023 the Charity Commission announced that it had appointed an interim manager at the ICEL on 4 May 2023. Their press release stated:⁶⁵

Emma Moody of Womble Bond Dickinson (UK) LLP, the appointed interim manager, will have all the powers and duties of the charity's trustees, and is appointed to the exclusion of the current trustees. As part of the appointment, she will conduct a review of the charity's governance and administration and make recommendations to the Commission based on her findings.

This statement further observed that 'The Commission's inquiry remains ongoing.'⁶⁶

The appointment of Ms Moody was in many ways unremarkable – under the Charities Act 2011, where a statutory inquiry is underway, interim managers may be appointed by the Charity Commission if it is satisfied misconduct or mismanagement has occurred, or where it is necessary to protect the charity's property. This process is clearly explained on the organisation's website.⁶⁷ As such, whilst not a daily occurrence, this type of intervention is far from irregular – at the time ICEL was one of seven such examples listed in press releases on the Charity Commission website since 2021. Charity Commission interventions in this period include interim managers being appointed to an autism charity in Devon and Cornwall,⁶⁸ an educational charity in Gloucestershire,⁶⁹ a charity established by a Russian businessman sanctioned under the UK's Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019,⁷⁰ a Christian church in south London,⁷¹ a further Christian church in south London,⁷² and an Islamic educational trust in Luton.⁷³

The appointment of Emma Moody, however, quickly became a campaign issue in certain activist circles. On 26 May 2023 the 5Pillars website reported that the ICEL had 'shut its doors after the Charity Commission appointed a non-Muslim interim manager.' The report went on to state:⁷⁴

The Maida Vale centre – which is affiliated to Iran – has been under investigation by the Charity Commission since a vigil for assassinated Iranian general Qassem Soleimani was held there in 2020. British officials and Zionist organisations have also called for the centre to be closed down and have targeted it.

There is no expectation, or provision, in the Charities Act for those appointed as interim managers to be from specific national, ethnic or religious backgrounds. In its coverage, the Iranian state broadcaster, Press

63. The author is grateful to a former employee of the Charity Commission for guidance here.

64. As above.

65. 'Charity regulator appoints Interim Manager to the Islamic Centre of England,' Charity Commission for England and Wales, Press release, 10 May 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-regulator-appoints-interim-manager-to-the-islamic-centre-of-england>

66. 'Charity regulator appoints Interim Manager to the Islamic Centre of England,' Charity Commission for England and Wales, Press release, 10 May 2023. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-regulator-appoints-interim-manager-to-the-islamic-centre-of-england>

67. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-the-charity-commission-appoints-interim-managers/how-the-charity-commission-appoints-interim-managers>

68. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-appoints-interim-managers-to-devon-and-cornwall-autistic-community-trust>

69. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-appoints-interim-managers-to-south-gloucestershire-charity>

70. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-appoints-interim-manager-to-the-potatin-foundation>

71. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-appoints-interim-managers-to-gilbert-deya-ministries>

72. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statements-on-live-cases-charity-commission#statements-released-in-2023>

73. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-regulator-appoints-interim-manager-to-rabia-educational-trust>

74. 5 Pillars, 'Major Shia mosque shuts down after Charity Commission appoints non-Muslim manager,' 26 May 2023, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2023/05/26/major-shia-mosque-shuts-down-after-charity-commission-appoints-non-muslim-manager/>

TV, declared that the centre had been 'effectively shut down.' It illustrated this argument by stating the declared aim of the ICEL is to advance the religion of Islam:⁷⁵

In light of this, the appointment of a non-Muslim in overseeing the operational affairs of the mosque has been a particularly contentious and sensitive issue for the local Shia community.

A group calling itself Friends of the Islamic Centre issued a statement which declared that it was now 'religiously unbecoming' and 'wholly improper' to continue attending congregational prayers at the centre.⁷⁶



A five-point statement against the Charity Commission had initially been circulated on 18 May 2023, again raising the issue of a non-Muslim being appointed to oversee ICEL.⁷⁷ Political demonstrations were to follow. Footage from a protest held outside ICEL on 1 June showed a banner declaring 'Charity Commission and Dictator Emma Moody Hands Off Our Islamic Centre' and placards saying 'Dictator Emma Moody Get out of our Islamic Centre'.⁷⁸

75. Omar Ahmed, Press TV, 'Islamic centre of England 'takeover' restricts Muslim political expression, 2 June 2023, <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/06/02/704564/Islamic-Centre-of-England--takeover--restricts-Muiliim-political-expression>

76. UISAE Official, (Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe) 23 May 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CslwcSjIEFC/>

77. Mohammad Ali Araki, Facebook, 20 May 2023, https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02e12eyhdk-9cpKTVYMHRmSaKJZAaN94EzGo-j85688NK7A1f6ZEYcfxzksBMmvxUsXLI&id=100031954931276&paipv=0&eav=AfaOnocKGXg5C6N41Q-CAQJJPAMFu1tc5bXQIRfS_C4CgPNJs-jTq9arzf0xPXvtrJS0&rdrr

78. Saeed Pourreza, Press TV, Friends of London Islamic Center oppose non-Muslim manager appointment, 2 June 2023, <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/06/02/704541/London-Islamic-Center>



In a feature on the protest, Press TV referred to the 2020 event at ICEL where Qassem Soleimani was commemorated following his assassination in Iraq, and then interviewed Massoud Shadjareh of the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC). Mr Shadjareh stated:⁷⁹

At the height of terrorism in Britain, IRA, when they actually, individuals died even in bombing or in prison, they were given all their rights in Catholic Church, nobody said you should deny the religious right of someone because they had been accused of this or that or even proven. So why suddenly when someone is, has passed away we cannot feel sympathy or complain that they'd been unlawfully killed?

Support for the ICEL, and opposition to the imposition of an interim manager was further declared in an open letter sent to Orlando Fraser, the Chair of the Charity Commission, on 31 May 2023. Published on the IHRC website, this complained of 'Islamophobic British state policies' and went on to observe:⁸⁰

The appointment shows a clear lack of understanding of the needs of the Islamic centre and its congregation. To appoint an interim manager who is not from that faith community, not aware of its spiritual and religious needs, nor aware of the specific needs of that particular congregation, shows us that the Charity Commission has yet again failed to protect the best interests of a Muslim religious centre and its congregation.

79. Saeed Pourreza, Press TV, Friends of London Islamic Center oppose non-Muslim manager appointment, 2 June 2023, <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2023/06/02/704541/London-Islamic-Center> The interview is at 01:34

80. Islamic Human Rights Commission, Letter to Charity Commission re Islamic Centre of England, 31 May 2023, <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/letter-to-charity-commission-re-islamic-centre-of-england/>

81. <https://web.archive.org/web/20080410142751/http://www.mcb.org.uk/committee/21.php> https://web.archive.org/web/20100218011806/http://www.mcb.org.uk/chomepage.php?com_id=5

Among the signatories were the afore mentioned Massoud Shadjareh of the IHRC, Sayyid Samir Al-Haidari of Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission (AIM), and Hossein Ataei of the Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe (UISAE). (For more on these three organisations see chapter 2). They were joined by Muhammad Rabbani of CAGE, Abbas Ali of InMinds, and Inayat Bunglawala, an activist who formerly held multiple roles within the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), including Assistant Secretary General.⁸¹ Among the non-Muslims to sign their support were the former Bristol University Professor David Miller, and ex-MP Chris Williamson, who

together co-host the programme *Palestine Declassified*, on Iran's Press TV.⁸²

A WhatsApp group entitled 'Friends of Islamic Centre' was created in May 2023, and promoted on Facebook.⁸³ There, a statement signed by 'Friends of Islamic Centre,' and posted by Mohammed Ali Araki, argued the Charity Commission's actions were an attack on 'Muslim self-determination':⁸⁴

This is a very concerning development that demonstrates how the state apparatus, not only interferes in Muslim community affairs and forces its own narratives upon us, but also brazenly chooses a non-Muslim to have certain powers over a Muslim institution, with a view to coerce and bully the Muslim community to adhere to the Commission's world views. It also clearly demonstrates the Commission's disrespect and indifference to Muslim self-determination and is yet another example of them forcing a state sponsored version of Islam on the Muslim community.

Mohammed Ali Araki is the grandson of Ayatollah Mohsen Araki,⁸⁵ the founder of the Islamic Centre of England, and a prominent activist in London in his own right.

The Friends of Islamic Centre WhatsApp group soon grew to over 1000 participants and operated as the central hub for organising protests outside the centre. The first was held outside the ICEL on Thursday 1 June 2023, a process repeated on 8 and 15 June. While the identity of the group founder is unclear, just four accounts held 'admin' status, and two of the numbers are associated with Ahlulbait Islamic Mission (with the name of 'Samir'), and the Islamic Human Rights Commission.⁸⁶

The administrators periodically left the group open for messages and the public organising was chiefly driven by 'Samir', using a phone number associated with the Ahlulbait Islamic Mission.⁸⁷ Of the 1025 numbers listed on 7 June 2023, at the height of the protests, the majority were from the UK – but there were at least thirty participants with an Iranian mobile number, and a few dozen from other nations in the Middle East such as Iraq and Yemen.

Of the messages on the group, two stand out, both posted on Thursday 8 June 2023 in the short period administrators opened up the group to all members to post. One was a post apparently praising Qassem Soleimani, from a UK registered mobile. The other was by an individual with a Canadian phone number -- offering what was described as a Persian army uniform, with an IRGC patch. Both are reproduced below.⁸⁸

82. <https://www.presstv.ir/Section/150108>

83. <https://www.facebook.com/mohammadali.araki/posts/pfbid02e12eyhdk9cpKTVY-MHRmSaKJZAaN94EzGoj85688NK7A1f-6ZEYcfzksBMmvxUsXLI>

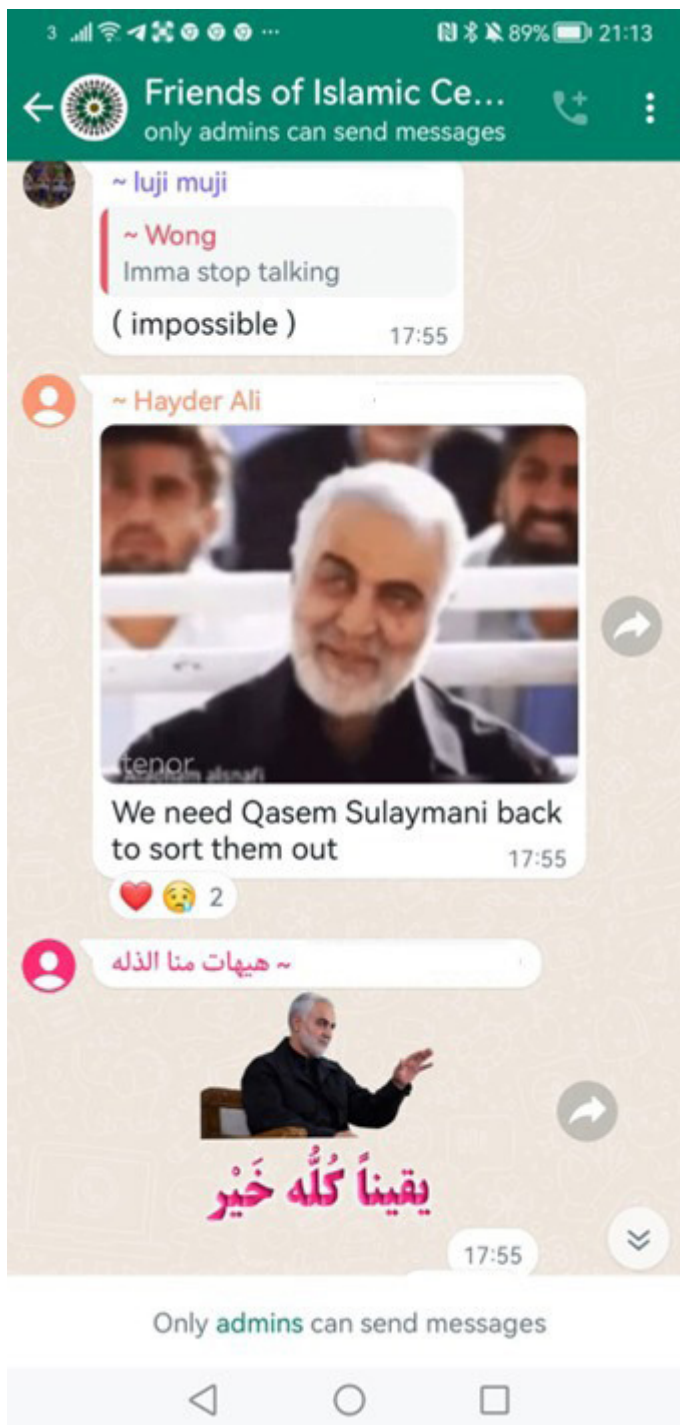
84. <https://www.facebook.com/mohammadali.araki/posts/pfbid02e12eyhdk9cpKTVY-MHRmSaKJZAaN94EzGoj85688NK7A1f-6ZEYcfzksBMmvxUsXLI>

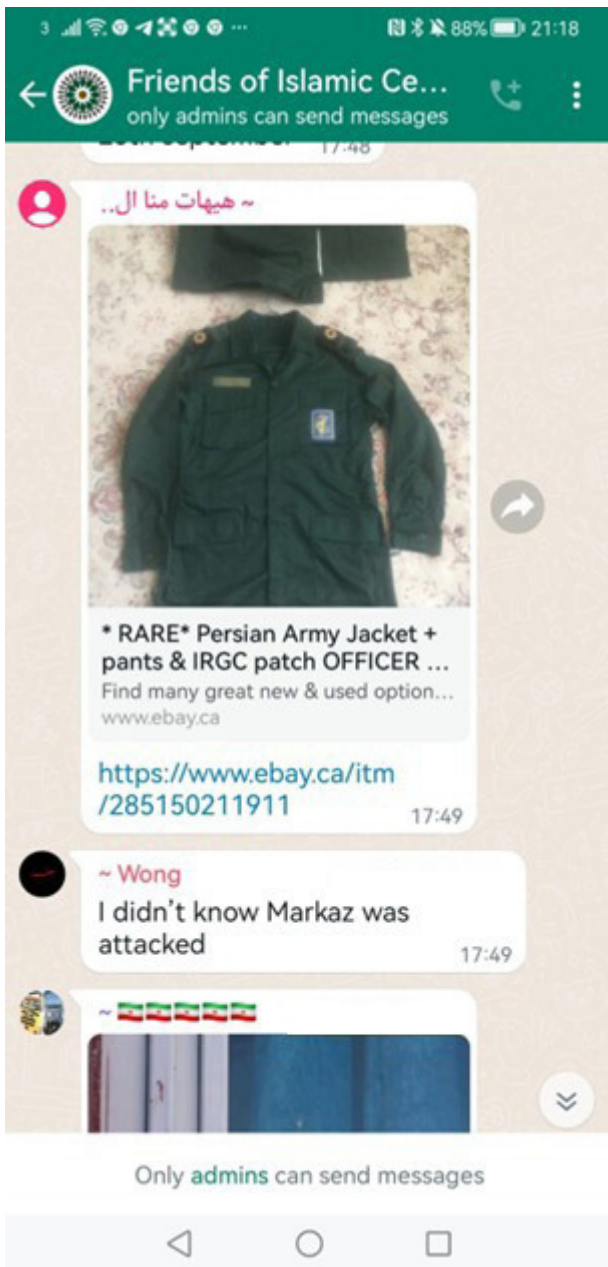
85. <https://www.facebook.com/mohammadali.araki/posts/938598873881935>

86. Screenshot from the Friends of Islamic Centre WhatsApp group, taken 7 June 2023. Copy in the author's possession.

87. The number appears on AIM's Telegram group, and also on its website, for example in promotional material for its 2019 Children's Camp. See for example the poster at <https://www.aimislam.com/camp-2019/>

88. Both taken from the Friends of Islamic Centre WhatsApp group, on 8 June 2023. Original screenshots in the author's possession.





On 6 June 2023 the Charity Commission’s interim manager, Emma Moody, responded to criticism, telling the website Civil Society, one of the main news sites covering the NGO and charity sector, that she was committed to working collaboratively with the ICEL. She added:⁸⁹

I always approach my work with compassion, understanding and a desire to secure the best possible outcome for the charities with which I work, for the good of the communities they serve. Media reports on why the centre closed are misleading – the decision was not made by the Charity Commission nor as a result of my appointment as interim manager. The trustees and I wish to re-open the centre as soon as possible, and once we do so, we can then focus on supporting the charity’s future effective governance.

89. Lea Legraien, Interim manager defends appointment at Muslim charity after criticism, 6 June 2023, <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/interim-manager-defends-appointment-at-muslim-charity-after-criticism.html>

Despite the divisions that had occurred, the campaign against Emma Moody appeared to peter out, with protests ceasing. On 1 July 2023 Mohammed Ali Araki took to social media to not only insist the campaign was ongoing, but to place it in a political context:⁹⁰

Any claims about the Islamic centre of England becoming open again, is false. The legal battle with the charity commission is still ongoing. It is a religious duty upon anybody who cares about their religion to stand up against this oppression. I am saying this as a follower of the Islamic Revolution, not as a scholar or any religious authority. Join the battle and share the sweet taste of freedom once we have won.

The next month, on 9 August 2023 the announcements page of the ICEL website⁹¹ included a statement on the reopening of the facility. ICEL stated that the ‘trustees have been unable to open the centre in recent weeks because it has been necessary to seek new insurance to enable the centre to operate’. The ICEL went on to add that it had been working with the Interim Manager (IM), Emma Moody to do this, and liability insurance had now been found. ‘We will continue to work with the IM to enable the reopening of the Centre and continue its programme of events.’⁹² That the Charity Commission does not appear to have been blown off course or intimidated by the campaign and complaints against Ms Moody, is admirable.

1.4 Conclusion

At the time this report goes to press, the Charity Commission is yet to publish the outcome of the November 2022 statutory inquiry into launched into ICEL. That is a far from satisfactory position.

Putting aside the issue of the ICEL, the Charity Commission appears to have a potentially increasing workload. On 25 November 2023, Orlando Fraser, Chairman of the Charity Commission, wrote an opinion-piece and gave a series of quotes to the Sunday Telegraph. An article by Edward Malnick, entitled ‘Watchdog to crack down on charities hosting anti-Semitic extremists’ reflected on accusations some mosques have allowed extreme sermons to be conducted on their premises since 7 October 2023. Orlando Fraser was quoted as stating:⁹³

At a time of heightened tensions, people expect charities to lead the way in bringing us together. That does not mean that they must avoid sensitive or controversial issues – charities are free to campaign so long as it relates to their charitable purposes. But I am clear that they have a responsibility to do so with respect, tolerance and consideration for others. They must avoid inflammatory rhetoric that stokes division and may undermine trust in the sector.

These words are fine, but Orlando Fraser must work with the incoming Chief Executive Officer, David Holdsworth, to turn them into a timely reality in terms of investigative delivery.⁹⁴

90. <https://www.facebook.com/mohammadali.araki/posts/929817761426713>

91. <http://web.archive.org/web/20231110120622/https://ic-el.uk/category/announcements/>

92. <https://ic-el.uk/announcement/>

93. ‘Watchdog to crack down on charities hosting anti-Semitic extremists’, Edward Malnick and Patrick Sawyer, Sunday Telegraph, 25 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/11/25/watchdog-crack-down-charities-anti-semitic/>

94. David Holdsworth takes office on 1 July 2024.

Chapter 2: The pro-Islamic Republic Influence Network in the UK

2.1 The Pro-Islamic Republic Influence Network

Whilst the Iranian diaspora in the United Kingdom is often characterised by its hostility to the Islamic Republic, comparatively little has been published concerning pro-Islamic Republic Shia communities in the UK, whether they are of Iranian, Iraqi or other national backgrounds. The exact number of Shia Muslims living in the UK is unknown, and, according to a response by the Office of National Statistics, cannot be answered under the existing measures and without in-depth research.⁹⁵ In 2017 it was estimated that around six per cent of the UK's mosques were run by and for Shias, with approximately three per cent by the Twelver Shias, to which the majority of Shia in the UK belong.⁹⁶

The ICEL is one of the largest religious institutions in what is sometimes referred to as a 'Shia triangle' centered on the London boroughs of Westminster, Brent and Harrow.⁹⁷ Beyond that rather narrow geographical focus, ICEL has been involved in establishing a number of other Shia organisations across the UK – one example being the Tawheed Newcastle Islamic Centre, which states on its website that it was “founded in 1998 under the supervision of the Islamic Centre of England.”⁹⁸

More broadly still, the ICEL effectively operates at the centre of a wider network of institutions that together promote an agenda that is conducive to the interests of the Iranian Islamic Republic. This chapter of the report examines some of the key component parts of that network, and also considers some of the ways in which it operates.

2.1.1 The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC)

The IHRC is another London-based organisation that has enjoyed a clear connection to the Iranian state. Between August 2006 and December 2022, Dr Saied Reza Ameli, the secretary of a leading policymaking body in Tehran - the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution⁹⁹ - was an IHRC director.¹⁰⁰ Indeed Mr Ameli co-founded the IHRC in 1997, and served as a trustee of its charitable arm the IHRC Trust during 1997 – 2016.¹⁰¹ It was Iran's Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution that drew up the tougher guidance on the compulsory wearing of the hijab, and it should be noted that on 6 July 2023, HM Government, in a new listing of Iranian

95. The number of Shia Muslims living in the UK, Office for National Statistics, 5 January 2021. [The number of Shia Muslims living in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

96. British Muslims: Mosques. Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 2018. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/british-muslims-mosques/>

97. See for example Innes Bowen (2013) *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent*, London: Hurst, p. 135

98. <https://www.tnice.co.uk/>

99. Andrew Norfolk, Scholar spreads Iranian propaganda in Britain, 11 January 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scholar-spreads-iranian-propaganda-in-britain-3q90fvzxd> <https://sccr.ir/keywords/2/6840/Dr-Saeed-Reza-Ameli>

100. IHRC: <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04716690/officers>

101. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/saied-reza-ameli-b18a14119/details/experience/>

related sanctions, added the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution to its financial sanctions list.¹⁰² Dr Ameli had previously combined academic positions in London and Tehran, working as a lecturer in the Social Sciences department at the University of Tehran, and being a member of faculty at the Islamic College for Advanced Studies, London.¹⁰³

Ameli, who in 2006 called for all British school and work uniforms to include a hijab option, helped to launch the policy on women's clothing that led to widespread protests (protests which were brutally repressed by the regime's forces leading to dozens of deaths in Iran). After the Supreme Council published the guidelines on 'chastity and hijab' in 2019, Ameli said that they were needed for 'social health, protection of the family'. He claimed foreign television shows were designed to 'weaken chastity and hijab'.¹⁰⁴

His official role in the Iranian regime notwithstanding, Syed Ameli co-wrote an IHRC-published book in 2015 titled 'Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK'.¹⁰⁵ In a quote used in promotional material for the book, Dr Katy P. Sian – Senior Lecturer at the University of York's Department of Sociology – wrote that the text "provides shocking insight into the UK as an ever developing 'Stasi state' rife with hatred for the 'suspect' Muslim community". She concluded by asserting that the book "carefully combines conceptual rigor and brute facts to lift the lid on the rise of Islamophobia in contemporary British society".¹⁰⁶

As well as organising the Al-Quds day demonstration (see below) and operating a London bookshop and events space,¹⁰⁷ the IHRC also operates a legal arm, IHRC Legal.¹⁰⁸ This is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, and it is approved by the UK government to provide legal advice. The IHRC is financed by a charity called the Islamic Human Rights Commission Trust, which is located in the same building in Wembley.

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner stated in 2019 it "became aware of the allegation that one of the directors of the Islamic Human Rights Commission, Saied Ameli, was directly aligned with the Iranian state's foreign and domestic agenda". A spokeswoman told *The Times* that: "As no action has been taken against the organisation, or any charges brought against Mr Ameli, the [office] has no grounds to remove the regulated organisation and its two immigration advisers from our scheme." Furthermore, she said the two regulated advisers were "not subject to any complaint allegations, or 'fitness' concerns we are aware of".¹⁰⁹

2.1.2 Ahlul Bayt - the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Mission (AIM)

The term "Ahlul Bayt" is a reference to 'People of the House' – i.e. the family of Muhammad, particularly his daughter Fatimah, her husband Ali (Muhammad's cousin), their children Hasan and Husain ibn Ali and their descendants.¹¹⁰ This reflects the core Shia – but not Sunni - belief that the legitimate leadership of the Muslim community – the Ummah – should be vested in the direct family of the Prophet and their descendants. The Ahlul

102. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168157/Notice_Iran__Human_Rights__060723.pdf

103. See the back cover of Saied Reza Ameli, 2002, *Globalization, Americanization and British Muslim Identity*, London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies.

104. David Brown and Andrew Norfolk, Iranian linked to hijab crackdown is director of British migrant charity, 12 October 2022. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iranian-linked-to-hijab-crackdown-is-director-of-british-migrant-charity-7729fcrkp>

105. <https://www.houseoftaha.com/collections/political-thought/products/environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk>

106. <https://www.houseoftaha.com/collections/political-thought/products/environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk>

107. <https://www.ihr.org.uk/>

108. <https://www.ihrlegal.org.uk/>

109. David Brown and Andrew Norfolk, Iranian linked to hijab crackdown is director of British migrant charity, 12 October 2022. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iranian-linked-to-hijab-crackdown-is-director-of-british-migrant-charity-7729fcrkp>

110. See Azim Nanji, (2008) *Dictionary of Islam*, London: Penguin, p. 8 – 9.

Bayt Islamic Mission, usually known as AIM, describes itself thus: ‘AIM is a UK based Shia Muslim organisation offering spiritual, educational, cultural and recreational activities for the community.’¹¹¹ At the time of writing AIM does not give an address on its website’s contact page.¹¹² AIM (under the name Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission (AIM)) was an MCB affiliate in 2018.¹¹³ As the MCB no longer publishes a full list of affiliates, it is unclear if this is still the case.

In a 2018 statement concerning divisions within the Shia community, AIM Islam situated itself in a distinct manner:¹¹⁴

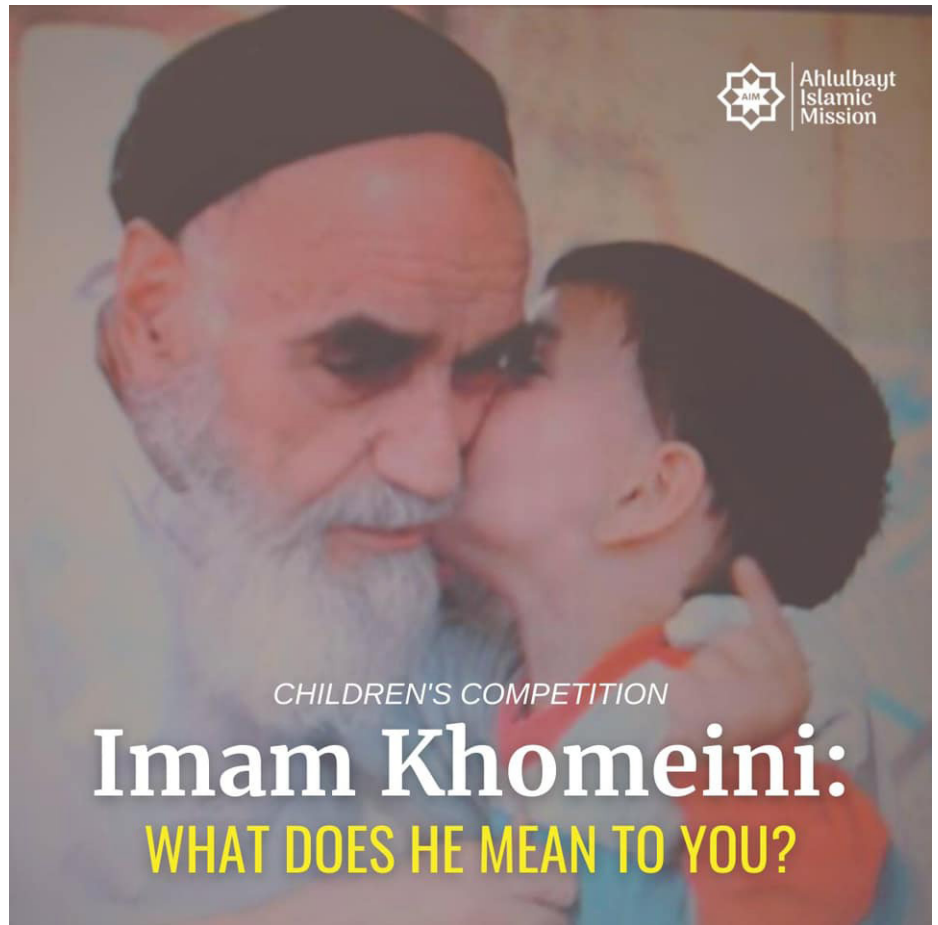
Our natural position has always been and will always remain that of love and respect for other organisations and centres, including the Islamic Centre of England, the Office of Ayatollah Khamenei, which we consider our innate home.

In line with this, AIM has reproduced on its website statements from the Supreme Leader, for example his 2017 analysis “In Islam, religion and politics go hand in hand”.¹¹⁵

AIM is not shy of promoting contentious figures: on New Year’s Eve 2021 its twitter account posted a video of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini.¹¹⁶ When the satirical French newspaper Charlie Hebdo mocked Iran’s current spiritual leader, AIM replied in a statement that ‘Ayatollah Khamenei is for many Muslims a symbol of religious Islamic authority, scholarship and reverence.’¹¹⁷

On 27 May 2021 the cleric Syed Abbas Abedi posted an AIM poster on his Facebook page, advertising a children’s competition: ‘Imam Khomeini: What does he mean to you?’ This encouraged children aged 12 and under to make a short video, in English, explaining the importance of the Ayatollah, with a potential prize of £10 to spend at the AIM shop.¹¹⁸

111. <https://www.aimislam.com/about/>
112. <https://www.aimislam.com/contact/> Correct at 31 January 2024.
113. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181005001524/https://mcb.org.uk/about/affiliates/>
114. <https://www.aimislam.com/aim-stands-for-unity-with-both-shia-and-sunnah/>
115. <https://www.aimislam.com/ayatollah-khamenei-islam-religion-politics-go-hand-hand/>
116. <https://twitter.com/aimislam/status/1609263338076229639>
117. <https://www.aimislam.com/aim-condemns-charlie-hebdo-slander-against-ayatollah-khamenei/>
118. Syed Abbas Abedi, 27 May 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10225708405477973&set=pb.1265312578.-2207520000.&type=3>



Elsewhere, in the run-up to the 2019 general election, AIM issued a 26 November 2019 statement in support of Jeremy Corbyn, and “argued a government led by him would further more favourable outcomes for society.” While admitting to having some undeclared reservations, AIM expanded:¹¹⁹

we believe it is worth mentioning that for the first time in a generation, we are witnessing a political discourse that speaks seriously about: improving social welfare, a sensible foreign policy which includes recognising the Palestinian cause, fairness and equality, combating all forms of racism, standing against tyranny and empowering the oppressed.

A week before this statement, AIM had published a 19 November 2019 post on their website which reproduced the Supreme Leader’s view on elections in countries outside Iran. This stated:¹²⁰

In general, it is obligatory to participate in elections that will lead to the prevention of corruption or its increase, or if not participating will lead to the weakening of Islam and Muslims.

It was to this background that on 10 December 2019 AIM returned to the question of voting Labour. Stressing what they saw as the rise in Islamophobia and the imperial ambitions of the Conservative government, they concluded:¹²¹

119. <https://www.aimislam.com/state-ment-uk-general-elections-2019/>

120. <https://www.aimislam.com/ayatollah-khamenei-participating-elections/>

121. <https://www.aimislam.com/update-clarification-on-voting-in-uk-general-elections/>

Bearing this in mind and upon understanding the jurisprudential verdicts of our righteous scholars, particularly that of Ayatollah Khamenei, we believe it is necessary to vote in the elections in order to bring a Corbyn led government to power this coming Thursday.

After violence broke out between pro and anti-regime protestors outside ICEL on 25 September 2022, AIM reproduced a statement by Seyed Hashem Moosavi, the ICEL's Iranian-appointed director. This praised 'the brothers and sisters who protected the Islamic Centre of England after the violent Islamophobic riots.'¹²² Warming to this theme, Moosavi went on 'to extend my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the faithful, insightful, and passionate youth of different nationalities for attending the peaceful gatherings in front of the Islamic Centre of England.'

On 27 September 2020 a three-and-a-half-hour-long stream entitled 'Hashd rally live from London' was broadcast on the YouTube channel of the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Mission (AIM).¹²³ This refers to the Iraqi Hashd Al-Sha'abi (also known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces, PMF). An umbrella organisation comprised of multiple militia groups, it is perhaps indicative that the most substantive study of the PMF, by Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik and Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi is entitled 'Honoured not contained'.¹²⁴ Writing in 2020, shortly after the assassination of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, Knights et al describe the PMF as:¹²⁵

a young, dynamic, and partly formed organization, including both its civilian commission in the prime minister's office (the Popular Mobilization Commission) and its fielded armed forces (the Popular Mobilization Forces). It is heterogeneous in its factional makeup, yet one can also say that it has become rather overcentralized in leaders from one IRGC-backed faction—Kataib Hezbollah.

Kata'ib Hezbollah has been a US-designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation since 2009, having been "responsible for numerous terrorist acts against Iraqi, U.S., and other targets in Iraq since 2007".¹²⁶ Kata'ib Hezbollah is believed to have been responsible for a March 2020 rocket attack on the Taji military base in Iraq, which killed two Americans,¹²⁷ and a female British soldier, Lance Corporal Brodie Gillon.¹²⁸

The video on the AIM You Tube channel shows that during the rally, posters of Kata'ib Hezbollah commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis were displayed on several of the cars participating in the procession.¹²⁹ Al-Muhandis was killed in the US drone strike which targeted Qassem Suleimani and his team as they left Baghdad airport in January 2020.¹³⁰ The car rally stopped next to the Iraqi embassy in London, where three unidentified people with Iraqi accents spoke in favour of the PMF and against ISIS.¹³¹ A Kuwaiti TV channel also covered the rally, and filmed two speakers after the rally ended,¹³² among them Sheikh Hassan Al-Turaiki (Abu Mehdi), Imam of the Cricklewood-based Dar Al-Islam Foundation. Al-Turaiki concluded by thanking similar convoys in the US and Australia. It is unclear whether the campaign in support of the PMF is still active. Its flags have been on display on other occasions in London – for example

122. <https://www.aimislam.com/message-of-appreciation-from-the-islamic-centre-of-england-to-the-insightful-believers/>
123. Hashd Rally live from London, 27 September 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=hZbsh8iexss&feature=emb_logo
124. Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik and Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, 2020, 'Honoured not contained : The future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces', The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/honored-not-contained-future-iraqs-popular-mobilization-forces>
125. Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik and Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, 2020, p. xxii
126. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/july/125582.htm>
127. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-51842744>
128. <https://www.gov.uk/government/fatalities/ministry-of-defence-confirms-the-death-of-lance-corporal-brodie-gillon>
129. See for example at 18:57, 44:32, 46:23, 53:13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=hZbsh8iexss&feature=emb_logo
130. Umesh Moramudali, The Hambantota Port Deal: Myths and Realities, 11 January 2020. https://www.strategicstudyindia.com/2020_01_11_archive.html
131. Hashd Rally live from London, 27 September 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=hZbsh8iexss&feature=emb_logo (1:21:00 onwards)
132. A Short Biography of Sayed Husain Baraka Al-Shami Al-Galebi, 23 June 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OuZ2T2X_L6o

in May 2021 during an anti-Israel demonstration, alongside the IRGC flag. This was reported on the Iranian MEHR news agency website, which noted protestors ‘waved flags of the Resistance Front and the IRGC’.¹³³ On 6 February 2024 a TikTok account named aliuk313 posted a further video of a cavalcade of cars in London with PMF flags and posters on display. The date of this protest is unclear – it may be fresh footage from a recent demonstration, or old imagery aliuk313 has decided to post only now.¹³⁴

This February the US-based Brookings Institution reported that since 7 October 2023, Iran-backed militias have attacked US forces in Iraq and Syria at least 160 times; this includes the drone attack in Jordan, close to the Syrian border in which three American troops were killed.¹³⁵ The US intelligence assessment of the Jordan attack is that “those attacks in Jordan were carried out by the umbrella group, Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a group that is supported by Kataib Hezbollah. Kataib Hezbollah is one of the participants.”¹³⁶

On 7 February 2024, a Kata’ib Hezbollah commander was killed in a US strike in Baghdad.¹³⁷

The PMF played an important role in defeating Islamic State and possesses considerable influence in Iraqi politics. In November 2016 Iraq’s parliament passed a law making the Hashd an official state entity, formally headed by the Prime Minister as commander-in-chief. The academic Adel Barakwan has written of the group’s rise:¹³⁸

It’s indicative of the Hashd’s growing importance that in July 2023 the government budget recorded its headcount as 238,075 (compared to 122,000 in 2021) or 6% of the civil service, with a payroll of around \$2.65bn (1.8% of the total national budget). By way of comparison, the army has a staff of 454,000 and the interior ministry 700,000.

While these figures may be open to question due to the nature of Iraq’s governance, control exists in name only; the PMF is factionalised and some of its sections at times will clash directly with government.

The Dar Al-Islam Charity

The afore mentioned Dar Al-Islam is a UK-registered charity (1018530)¹³⁹ and company (02674582),¹⁴⁰ whose centre is based in Cricklewood. According to the Charity Commission’s website, it operates in accordance with the tenets of Twelver Shiism.¹⁴¹ It is reported to have had strong ties with the Islamic Dawa Party, the main Shia Islamist party in Iraq,¹⁴² which has also governed the country. Sheikh Hassan Al-Turaiki leads Friday prayers at Dar Al-Islam and was Secretary General of the Islamic Unity Forum,¹⁴³ discussed earlier.

House of Taha

The merchandise section of AIM’s website (www.shop.aimislam.com) automatically redirects to www.houseoftaha.com. This organisation registered with Companies House in November 2022, with a sole director, a British citizen named Samir Haidari.¹⁴⁴ In October 2023 a second

133. MEHR News agency, VIDEO: Pro-Palestine protestors wave IRGC flag in London, 23 May 2021. <https://en.mehrnews.com/news/173822/VIDEO-Pro-Palestine-protestors-wave-IRGC-flag-in-London>
134. https://www.tiktok.com/@aliuk313/video/7332334387654053152?_r=1&_t=8jITFAWdf7o
135. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3658472/statement-from-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-on-an-attack-against-us/>
136. The White House, National Security Council, On the record press call on US military operations in the Middle East, 2 February 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2024/02/02/on-the-record-press-call-on-u-s-military-operations-in-the-middle-east/>
137. Ahmed Rasheed and Timour Azhari, Kataib Hezbollah commander killed in Baghdad in US strike, 9 February 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/sound-loud-blasts-heard-iraqs-baghdad-reuters-witness-2024-02-07/>
138. Adel Bakawan, In Iraq, the Hashd calls the shots, October 2023. <https://cfri-irak.com/en/article/in-iraq-the-hashd-calls-the-shots-2023-11-03>
139. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1018530/contact-information>
140. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/02674582/officers>
141. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/02674582/charges/Wa11hj4aZtffpqIJITYT7Z9PIB4>
142. Christopher Baker, Beth R. Crisp and Adam Dinham, Re-imagining Religion and Belief: 21st Century Policy and Practice, Policy Press, 2018, pp. 66-67.
143. <http://albylad.com/article.php?id=422864>
144. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/p0H2pa-pA9EimKCEanudJTIZUlc/appointments>

director, Zahir Haidari, joined.¹⁴⁵ The House of Taha website previously sold the PMF's flag for £10, with the description: 'A white Hashd Al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation) flag, with a matte and shiny finish on opposite faces.' That page came complete with an image of such flags raised during what appears to be a demonstration in Embassy Gardens. Embassy Gardens is in the Nine Elms area of London, home to the new United States Embassy. Another image showed the PMF flag attached to a car. At some stage in 2023 the flag and images were removed from the House of Taha website, but the images are still available via the wayback machine.¹⁴⁶



The books sold by House of Taha include items published by groups sympathetic to Iran such as the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC),¹⁴⁷ and a text dedicated to Mohsen Hojaji, an IRGC officer who served as an adviser to pro-Syrian government forces during the Syrian Civil War. He was captured and beheaded by ISIS.¹⁴⁸

House of Taha was reportedly launched in 2021 and is described as being the home 'of important titles from Ayatollah Khamenei and stories of the Shuhada'.¹⁴⁹ The standard meaning of Shuhada' in Arabic is "martyrs", or witnesses. The House of Taha gives a correspondence address at Companies House of 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London, United Kingdom, WC2H 9JQ. No postal address is currently given on its website contacts page.

145. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/kpG1IA6zB-TUQDzusoS-o2cg9eok/appointments>

146. House of Taha, Hashd Al-Shaabi Flag: <http://web.archive.org/web/20220520194824/https://www.houseoftaha.com/collections/clothing/products/hashd-al-shaabi-flag>

147. Saeid R. Ameli and Arzu Merali, Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK, Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2015. <https://www.houseoftaha.com/collections/political-thought/products/environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk>

148. With His Head Held High - The Story of Shaheed Mohsen Hojaji, compiled by Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, May 2022. <https://www.houseoftaha.com/products/shaheed-mohsen-hojaji-book>

149. Basira Press staff, Move Over Bezos: 5 Independent Islamic Bookstores to Support, 31 January 2022. <https://basirapress.org/2022/01/31/move-over-bezos-5-independent-islamic-bookstores/>

2.1.3 The Hawza Ilmiyya seminary, Willesden, west London

The Hawza Ilmiyya of England is ‘an Islamic seminary for the traditional learning of the Islamic disc’ [sic].¹⁵⁰ At the time of writing the Hawza Ilmiyya website is being redesigned, but a 2021 version is available via the “wayback machine” internet archive.¹⁵¹ The Hawza seminary offers free accommodation to students from outside London, and in 2022 was running a degree course accredited by the seminary in Qom, Iran.¹⁵²

150. <https://www.facebook.com/hawzaengland>

151. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210916204630/https://hawza.uk/>

152. Hawza Ilmiyya of England, Facebook post, 21 September 2022. Since deleted – copy in the author’s possession.

153. <https://web.archive.org/web/20181005001524/https://mcb.org.uk/about/affiliates/>

154. **The Islamic College:** 133 High Road, Willesden, London, NW10 2SW. <https://islamic-college.ac.uk/contact-us/> Hawza Ilmiyya of England: 133 High Road, Willesden, London, NW10 2SW. <https://web.archive.org/web/20210916204630/https://hawza.uk/>

155. See <https://www.facebook.com/hawzaengland> - correct at 29 October 2023.

The Hawza seminary is attached to what was previously called the Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS, now referred to simply as the Islamic College – see below).¹⁵³ Indeed, the Hawza Ilmiyya and the Islamic College are based in the same building, once again in northwest London, on Willesden High Road,¹⁵⁴ and the Hawza Ilmiyya Facebook page gives its website address as that of the Islamic College.¹⁵⁵ They share a single

fundraising arm, the Irshad Trust.¹⁵⁶ The founder and first principal of the Islamic College, Mohammad Jafar Elmi came to London in the 1990s having been prominent in Hawzas in Qom and Tehran.¹⁵⁷

In 2006, *The Times* obtained extracts from the medieval al-Hilli texts, written by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli, a 13th century Shia scholar from Iraq, which were being taught to students at the seminary. Students training to be Imams were reportedly being taught fundamentalist doctrines which describe non-Muslims as ‘filth’.¹⁵⁸ The al-Hilli text names disbelievers as one of ten types of filth and impurities; the doctrine also states that ‘The water left over in the container after any type of animal has drunk from it is considered clean and pure apart from the left over of a dog, a pig, and a disbeliever.’¹⁵⁹

2.1.4 The Islamic College

The Islamic College for Advanced Studies (ICAS) was founded in London in 1998.¹⁶⁰ In 2008 it simplified its name to ‘Islamic College’ and expanded its range of courses. The college has a Facebook page,¹⁶¹ Twitter account,¹⁶² and a website.¹⁶³ Until 2020 Al-Mustafa University in Iran claimed on their homepage that the Islamic College of London was an international branch or affiliate school.¹⁶⁴

Al-Mustafa University has international branches and affiliate schools, such as Islamic College of London, Indonesia Islamic college and Ghana Islamic College.

Al Mustafa University was created as part of the Iranian regime’s attempt to ‘spread the word’ of its interpretation of Shia doctrine across the Muslim world – through ‘exporting revolution’¹⁶⁵

The founding fathers of the 1979 Revolution believed that for the country to attain its objective, it needed to occupy a space in the educational sector of the Muslim world. Hence, the Islamic Republic outlined the strategy of educational diplomacy that is sponsoring a host of educational initiatives, such as the establishment of *Jāmicah al-Muṣṭafā al-Cālamīyyah* or al-Mustafa International University (MIU).

The UK-based Islamic College engages in outreach work, and acts in collaboration with other organisations such as ICEL, as demonstrated by the logos of both organisations appearing on the call for papers below:¹⁶⁶

156. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1056468/charity-overview>

157. <https://www.facebook.com/hawzaengland/posts/1774039479498716>

158. Sean O’Neill, Muslim students ‘being taught to despise unbelievers as filth’, 20 April 2006. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/muslim-students-being-taught-to-despise-unbelievers-as-filth-gh6k75lwh8>

159. Sean O’Neill, 2006, op cit.

160. <https://web.archive.org/web/20230927025320/https://islamic-college.ac.uk/about/history/>

161. <https://www.facebook.com/TheIslamicCollege>

162. https://twitter.com/IslamicCollege_

163. <https://islamic-college.ac.uk/>

164. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200222040109/http://en.miu.ac.ir/index.aspx>

165. <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/irans-educational-diplomacy-in-the-muslim-world-activities-of-al-mustafa-international-university-in-malaysia-and-afghanistan-2>

166. https://twitter.com/IslamicCollege_/status/932925133056036866



The Islamic College opened a partnership with Middlesex University in 2002. As part of a wider expansion at the college, the relationship deepened in 2007.¹⁶⁷ The following courses were declared as validated by Middlesex:¹⁶⁸

- Cert HE Qur'anic Arabic (validated)
- BA Honours Islamic Studies (validated)
- BA Honours Hawza Studies (validated)
- BA Honours Islamic Law (validated, awaiting validation)
- MA Islamic Studies (validated)
- MA Islamic Law (validated, under review)
- DProf Muslim Cultures: Promoting Muslim Contributions to Intercultural knowledge.

Until 2022, when links between the Islamic College and Iran were exposed (see below), Middlesex University appears not to have questioned their own relationship with the Islamic College, insisting that the specific courses that it validates are appropriate.¹⁶⁹ This appeared to shift following a media expose published in December 2022.¹⁷⁰

167. <https://web.archive.org/web/20090704124659/http://www.islamic-college.ac.uk/index/About%20Us.html>

168. <https://www.mdx.ac.uk/business-and-partnerships/academic-partnerships/our-partners/uk-partners2/islamic-college>

169. See Middlesex response to Times query. <https://archive.ph/NA4bG#selection-1005.87-1009.222>

170. <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/minutes-from-a-shul-the-college-that-is-iran%27s-hidden-uk-%27foothold%27-6QPD8zp83EpeJcxCbeabCZ>

All of our partnerships are regularly reviewed and we undertake thorough due diligence before formalising any collaborative relationship. We are grateful to the JC for bringing these serious allegations to our attention and we will be raising them with the Islamic College as a matter of urgency.

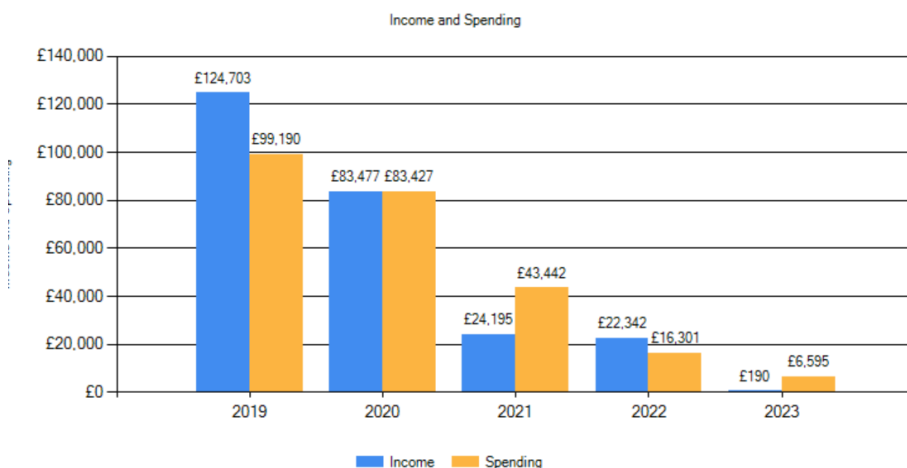
On 4 March 2023 it was announced that both parties had agreed to terminate their relationship, and that Middlesex University was working with the Office for Students to ensure a smooth transition for those students on existing courses.¹⁷¹ The Islamic College website currently states that its relationship with Middlesex University:¹⁷²

will expire on 31 December 2023. However, all The Islamic College’s students registered onto collaborative programmes with Middlesex University by the above-mentioned date, will be supported to complete their studies beyond the end date of the collaboration and will be awarded a Middlesex University degree upon successful completion of the programme.

At the time of writing, it is unclear if the Islamic College will find another institution to partner for its degree courses, and the text quoted above has not been updated to reflect that we are now in 2024.

2.1.5 The Al-Mahdi Foundation/Al-Mahdi Centre, Glasgow

The Al-Mahdi Foundation in Glasgow (also known as Al-Mahdi Islamic Centre of Glasgow), is a Scottish Charity (SC002123); founded in 1986.¹⁷³ ¹⁷⁴ The registered address is 65 Albert Road, Crosshill, Glasgow G428DP. According to the accounts on the Scottish Charity Regulator website, its income and spending levels appear to have dwindled in recent years.¹⁷⁵



The Al-Mahdi Foundation website partners with Greener Scotland – a programme of the Scottish Government – and the Climate Challenge Fund. The Al-Mahdi Foundation website reproduces both logos and appears fully focused on sustainability issues. In April 2018, the Al-Mahdi Foundation recruited for the post of a Sustainability Project Manager based in Glasgow with a salary of £24,000 - £25,500.¹⁷⁶ And the Foundation even offers services such as residential energy audits.¹⁷⁷

171. University watchdog 'engaged' in talks with London College over Iran links, 4 March 2023. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/04/university-watchdog-engaged-talks-london-college-links-iranian/>

172. <https://islamic-college.ac.uk/about/> as at 31 January 2024

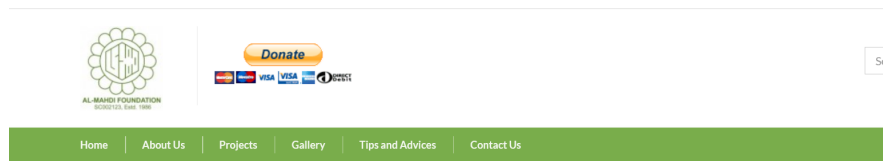
173. <http://www.almahdi-foundation.org.uk/>

174. <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC002123>

175. <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC002123>

176. <https://twitter.com/goodmovesjobs/status/982277143194492928>

177. <http://www.almahdi-foundation.org.uk/>



Our Key Services

- . Conduct home energy audits
- . Advise the community members on energy awareness
- . Advise on making your home energy efficient
- . **Raising** awareness on reducing carbon emissions
- . Awareness on carbon literacy
- . Comparison of your annual gas & electricity energy consumption

Feel free to contact the Al-Mahdi Foundation to book yourself in for a home visit from us!

However, the description of Al-Mahdi on the Scottish Charity Regulator website provides an entirely different focus for the energies of the Foundation, stressing its role as a place of Islamic worship.¹⁷⁸

The aims of the Congregation are inter alia (a) to provide a place of worship with Clergyman. (b) to provide a place for Muslim religious education and staff the same. (c) to provide a place for secular education in a religious environment and staff the same. (d) to fund the foregoing from the generosity of the Congregation. (e) to fund charitable purposes including the setting up of charitable trusts for widows and orphans and destitute families. (f) generally, to expand the influence of Islam as a religious way of life.

A 7 November 2023 report in *The Times* described the Al-Mahdi Centre as an outpost of the Islamic Centre of England in London, adding that it “has openly displayed the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran and an image of Ayatollah Khomeini.”¹⁷⁹ Two images of the Iranian flag, displayed at a meeting in the centre, are reproduced in the article. In 2021, when Hosseini Matin (Chargé d’affaires of Iran to the UK) took to social media to name voting centres in the UK for those wishing to participate in the Iranian elections, the Al-Mahdi Foundation’s Glasgow premises was one of the 11 locations listed.¹⁸⁰

There has also been criticism of individuals associated with the centre. Dr Ali Salamati, a past treasurer at the Al-Mahdi Foundation, featured in negative press coverage “after it emerged he had praised Iran’s foreign minister on Facebook and participated in an online conference celebrating the country’s revolution.”¹⁸¹ Media reports in 2021 stated that “He attended the controversial Quds rally in central London and has also shared a post on Facebook praising Iran’s foreign minister Javad Zarif for defending the country’s right to pursue a missile programme.”¹⁸²

Ali Salamati has enjoyed some prominence in Scottish politics, serving as an SNP councillor from 2022-23 in East Kilbride, having been

178. <https://www.oscr.org.uk/about-charities/search-the-register/charity-details?number=SC002123>

179. ‘Islamic centre ‘must be investigated’ over alleged links to Iran, *The Times*, 7 November 2023, <https://archive.ph/21vj7>

180. <https://twitter.com/smhmatin/status/1404494457983098881>

181. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamic-centre-must-be-investigated-over-alleged-links-to-iran-zmsvphc6>

182. <https://www.thejc.com/news/sturgeons-link-to-anti-gay-iran-cleric-d7j7i4xp>

an unsuccessful candidate in 2017.¹⁸³ He was appointed to the SNP's Policy Development Committee and Conduct Appeals Committee at the 2022 SNP conference,¹⁸⁴ and represented the Al-Mahdi Foundation on the Cross-Party Group on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice in January 2022.¹⁸⁵ In 2018 he was to be found representing the Al-Mahdi Foundation on the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party group on Tackling Islamophobia.¹⁸⁶ However, Dr. Salamati resigned as a Councillor in May 2023, citing the pressure of overseas work commitments.¹⁸⁷

On 9 November 2023 *The Times* published its report that Al Mahdi had been given approximately £193,000 of government funding:

*The Al-Mahdi Foundation received Climate Challenge funding up to 2020 to support awareness raising of climate change issues among disadvantaged and ethnic minority communities and to make their community building more energy efficient.*¹⁸⁸

If subsequent reports are to be believed, the amount given appears to have been almost double that (£372,000), stretching back to 2014.¹⁸⁹

2.1.6 Islamic Students Association of Britain (ISAB)¹⁹⁰ and the Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe (UISAE)

The Islamic Students Association of Britain has a long history. Based at the Kanoon Towhid centre in Hammersmith since 1985, it has its origins in Iranian student organisations that predate the Islamic revolution.¹⁹¹ The centre is owned by a registered charity, No. 1040652, called the Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust.¹⁹² In 2020 the trust had £1.9 million in fixed assets¹⁹³ – presumably the Kanoon Towhid centre itself. One of the Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust's three trustees is Seyed Hashem Moosavi of the ICEL.¹⁹⁴

In August 2023 *The Times* reported that the ISAB had held online meetings where commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had addressed students.¹⁹⁵ This is potentially very serious, as the IRGC has faced a series of sanctions from the UK government, most notably those of 6 July 2023¹⁹⁶ and 14 December 2023.¹⁹⁷ IRGC leaders face travel bans and asset freezes in an attempt to restrict their influence and in response to Iran's hostile activities – online meetings with people in the UK may potentially circumvent such restrictions.

This was not the first time a potential connection could be observed between the Kanoon Towhid and the Islamic Republic. Following the 2020 assassination of Qassem Soleimani, the Kanoon Towhid centre advertised both a protest outside the American embassy,¹⁹⁸ and its own commemorative event, to be addressed by 'Iranian officials in London'.¹⁹⁹

183. https://www.southlanarkshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/11403/ward_9_east_kilbride_west_declaration_of_resultspdf
184. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/snp-criticised-after-alleged-apologist-28253019>
185. https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/cross-party-groups/challenging-racial-and-religious-prejudice/challenging-racialandreligiousprejudice_20220125_minutes.pdf
186. https://archive2021.parliament.scot/CrossPartyGroups/Session5CrossPartyGroup/Minutes/Islamophobia_20180130.pdf
187. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/in-your-area/lanarkshire/south-lanarkshire-councillor-resigns-29871015>
188. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iran-base-in-glasgow-gets-200-000-climate-change-funding-273sr6vxp>
189. <https://www.scottishdailyexpress.co.uk/news/politics/snp-government-handed-372k-mosque-31672091>
190. The group's name is also given as the Islamic Student Associations of Britain, and the Islamic Students Associations of Britain.
191. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/kanoontowhid/about/>
192. Caroline Wheeler and Gabriel Pogrud, Iranian state now biggest threat to the UK, 6 August 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a02bd760-33c9-11ee-bd0d-b217d7a83feb?shareToken=9a5180295554a2e46019040e423dd370>
193. https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A10675642&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=1040652
194. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/1040652/trustees> As at 31 January 2024
195. Charlie Parker and Emma Yeomans, Iran's Islamic armed forces tell students in UK to wage war on Jews, 5 August 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/irans-islamic-armed-forces-tell-students-in-uk-to-wage-war-on-jews-b8vth2tbh>
196. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-steps-up-action-to-tackle-rising-threat-posed-by-iran>
197. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-iranian-sanction-regime-comes-in-to-force>
198. https://t.me/kanoontowhid_ISA/1577
199. https://t.me/kanoontowhid_ISA/1579



#US_TERRORISM
LONDON PROTEST

“Join us for the protest against the heinous criminal act ordered by President Trump and carried out by American terrorists on Friday 3rd January 2020 In Baghdad.”

SUNDAY 5TH JANUARY 2020
AT 12:30 - 15:30

OUTSIDE THE U.S. EMBASSY, LONDON, SW11 7US

Islamic Student Associations
of Britain



DABIR.UK.UISAE@GMAIL.COM



The Remembrance Ceremony of
Martyr Gen Qasem Soleimani

{ English Speeches will be delivered by
Iranian Officials in London }

Sunday | 5th of January | 17:30 | Kanoon Towhid London
30-32 Southerton Rd, Hammersmith, London W6 0PH



A subsequent picture shows the head of the Islamic Centre of England, Seyed Hashem Moosavi, addressing the 5 January 2020 Kanoon Towhid meeting.²⁰⁰ Seyed Hashem Moosavi was seated next to the Iranian national flag and a picture of Soleimani. Appended to the table where he sat was a drawing of Qassem Soleimani and the militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF).



On 14 February 2024 the Charity Commission issued a statement announcing a statutory inquiry into Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust – the body which owns the Kanoon Towhid centre, from which the ISAB had operated.²⁰¹ This declared:

200. Since deleted from Telegram, copy in the authors possession.

201. Regulator to investigate Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust over event held at its premises, Charity Commission, 14 February 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-to-investigate-al-tawheed-charitable-trust-over-event-held-at-its-premises>

The regulator is investigating an event that was held by an external organisation at TUCF's premises in 2020. The charity's current trustees, who were not in office at the time, told the Commission the event was a 'religious remembrance programme' for Major General Qasem Soleimani, organised by a third party and not the charity itself. At the time of his death, Soleimani held a senior position in Iran's military, serving as Commander of both the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Qods Force.

The investigation was utilising video footage it had received:²⁰²

the Charity Commission is aware that speakers praised Soleimani and could hear anti-Semitic chants being made during the event. The Commission has significant concerns about these matters and will be examining what controls the charity has in place for events and external speakers.

Just two months after its 2020 commemoration for a man designated as a terrorist in the United Kingdom, the ISAB used a Telegram site to launch its 'Peace through Ali' campaign, stating 'We proudly present; #Peace_Through_Ali. A Campaign, brought to you by Islamic Student Associations of Britain in partnership with over 30 other Islamic Organisations.' It went on to stress that, 'It is very important for the Shia community to show Unity, Strength and Solidarity, as well as express its devotion to Love, Peace and Kindness.'²⁰³

Although the profile of the Islamic Students Association of Britain is far lower than that of the largest grouping that claims to represent Muslim students, the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), there is at least one example of the authorities feeling the need to reach out to the grouping. In 2020 Inspector Afran Rahouf, North Yorkshire Police's Operational Lead for Faith and Belief, gave an online talk to the ISAB on the subject of 'Racism and Islamophobia'.²⁰⁴ When asked about this event, a North Yorkshire Police spokesman stated of Inspector Rahouf's presence:²⁰⁵

A key part of [his] role was to promote North Yorkshire Police's commitment to encourage and reflect diversity within the force. He attended with the sole intention to raise awareness of policing as a credible career path with students from an underrepresented minority ethnic group." They added: "Since the online event in 2020, the Islamic Students Association of Britain has made no further contact with [Inspector] Rahouf or with North Yorkshire Police.

A 22 January 2024 BBC report into the Islamic Students Association of Britain named a former IRGC Commander Ezzatollah Zarghami, who is now sanctioned in the UK, as having been advertised as speaking to the students group. The BBC article states Zarghami has "boasted of training Hamas in Gaza prior to the 7 October attacks. In an interview on Iranian state TV, he also described how he had provided Hamas with missiles."²⁰⁶ Further revelations also concerned Mohammad Hussain Ataei Dolat-Abadi, also known as Hossein Ataei, a past Secretary of the ISAB, who currently serves as Secretary of the Union of Islamic Students Associations of Europe (UISAE). Ataei was pictured attending a 2 January 2023 audience in

202. Charity Commission, 14 February 2024, op cit

203. https://t.me/kanoontowhid_ISA/1600

204. 'Senior police officer responsible for 'faith relations' addressed IRGC linked group', Jewish Chronicle, 10 August 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/senior-police-officer-responsible-for-faith-relations-addressed-irgc-linked-group-wpc501p3>

205. 'Senior police officer responsible for 'faith relations' addressed IRGC linked group', Jewish Chronicle, 10 August 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/senior-police-officer-responsible-for-faith-relations-addressed-irgc-linked-group-wpc501p3>

206. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-68016330>

Tehran between Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe.²⁰⁷

As suggested by Ataei's shifting roles, the ISAB operates as part of the Europe wide grouping, UISAE, and the latter institution's materials are frequently promoted by the former.²⁰⁸ In 2023 the UISAE was one of the sponsors of the annual Al-Quds day march in London (see below).²⁰⁹ Although most of its social media posts are in Persian, it makes occasional statements in English, for example on 23 May 2023 reproducing on Instagram a 'Friends of Islamic Centre' statement that was produced when the Islamic Centre of England was in dispute with the Charity Commission.²¹⁰

On 2 February 2023 the aforementioned Ataei gave an interview to the Fars News Agency in Iran.²¹¹ Part of the interview was taken up with discussions of reforms to the UISAE and its new constitution, which also includes the launch of an advisory council of Iranian students abroad. Ataei went on to give some fascinating insight into the breadth of the UISAE's activities - claiming the organisation has 40 active officers operating at offices in the following countries: Armenia, Ukraine, Russia, Azerbaijan, Hungary, France, Germany, Spain, Holland, Italy, Austria and with a total of 11 offices in England. When asked about the character of the UISAE, Ataei replied that, "The distinguishing feature of the Union is the introduction of the fundamental thought and principles of the Islamic Republic in European countries."²¹²

In assessing the Islamic Students Association of Britain and the Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe it should be noted that the Iranian authorities take a distinct approach to student bodies in the west, with supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei issuing an annual message to students in Europe, and as can be seen above in the case of Mohammed Ataei, meeting its leaders. It was therefore appropriate that the Supreme Leader's 2017 version of this message, published in English on the Ayatollah's website,²¹³ and reproduced in London by AIM Islam,²¹⁴ is headed 'Muslim students in Europe have a great responsibility.'

2.1.7 Lebanese Youth Foundation (LYF)

Based at 14 Brondesbury Road in Kilburn in northwest London, the Lebanese Youth Foundation (LYF) was formed in 2015,²¹⁵ and shares its premises with the Imam Hussain Mosque which is also known as the Lebanese Welfare Community London.²¹⁶ The LYF's Facebook page contains images and videos of its events, some of which illustrate a distinct overlap between the spiritual and the political. On 30 July 2023, for instance, it hosted a talk by Sheikh Moutaz al Wehwah, held during the tenth night of the Shia festival of Muharram. Entitled 'The law of replacing a nation' the LYF FB page summarises the talk in the following manner.²¹⁷

207. In picture one he is third from the left: <https://english.khamenei.ir/photo/9381/lmam-Khamenei-met-with-members-of-the-Union-of-Islamic-Students>

208. See for example https://t.me/kanoontowhid_ISA/1739

209. <https://www.ihr.org.uk/international-al-quds-day-2023-rally/#:~:text=Once%20again%20the%20International%20al-Quds%20Day%20will%20be,will%20take%20place%20on%20Sunday%2016th%20April%202023> and also UISAE Official, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CreV6anHjB/> 15 April 2023

210. UISAE official, 23 May 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CslwcSjIEFC/>

211. https://www-titr-online.translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fa&tl=en&_x_tr_pto=wapp

212. https://www-titr-online.translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fa&tl=en&_x_tr_pto=wapp

213. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/4582/Muslim-students-in-Europe-have-a-great-responsibility-Ayatollah>

214. <https://www.aimislam.com/muslim-students-europe-great-responsibility-ayatollah-khamenei/>

215. See information on its Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LebaneseYouthFoundation>.

216. <https://www.mosquedirectory.co.uk/mosques/england/london/brent/kilburn/imam-Hussain-Mosque-Kilburn-Brent/442>

217. Lebanese Youth Foundation, Facebook, 30 July 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/LebaneseYouthFoundation/posts/296500339704125>

He emphasizes the need for humility among believers and strength against non-believers, warning that Allah will replace those who turn away from their faith. Drawing from historical examples, including the Battle of Khabar and the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Sheikh Moutaz illustrates how Allah's favor can shift from one nation to another.

The term 'strength against non-believers' is a distinct one, as yet again is centrality of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran.

Elsewhere, it can be seen that the LYF promotes the theology of regime-aligned Iranian clerics. A 2017 image on its website, for instance, promised that Sheikh Mansour Leghaei would explain how 'a woman [can] attain high spiritual and intellectual levels in Islam'. In 2020 Sheikh Leghaei was again utilised in a Q and A on the LYF Facebook page,²¹⁹ concerning Ramadhan, and a link is given to the website 'Ask the Sheikh.com.' Ask the Sheikh is a question and answer website about Islam 'designed for both Muslims and non-Muslims around the world, with particular emphasis on people living in the West.'²²⁰ The site disseminates the views of what it sees as the three most important sources of religious knowledge – Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Sistani and Grand Ayatollah Makareem Shirazi.²²¹ This is done via an expert scholars panel of seven clerics, headed by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei in Iran, and with Sheikh Mohammad Saeed Bahmanpour as the UK representative.²²²

At the time of writing Sheikh Leghaei, is banned from entering Denmark 'in consideration of the public order'.²²³ Sheikh Leghaei lived in Australia from 1994 until 2010, when he was expelled from the country as the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) the country's domestic intelligence agency, suspected him of 'acts of foreign interference.'²²⁴ This was strongly resisted by Sheikh Leghaei, and in 2015 the United Nations Human Rights Committee, in a judgement that was not legally binding, found the Australian government had breached his human rights by deporting him and separating Sheikh Leghaei from his family, who remain in Australia.²²⁵ In its response, the Australian government stated "Dr Leghaei was removed from Australia on the basis that he was lawfully assessed as a direct risk to Australia's national security."²²⁶

2.1.8 The School of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRIS)

Opened in 2001, the School of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in northwest London, is run for girls and boys aged six to 17. The school is often abbreviated as IRIS, standing for Islamic Republic of Iran School.²²⁷ One section of the facility, which teaches the Iranian curriculum in Farsi, is attended by pupils whose parents work at the Iranian embassy. The second section includes pupils from the local community.²²⁸ On special occasions, the children perform at the ICEL, for example Imam Mahdi's birth celebration in 2023.²²⁹

Each OFSTED inspection the school received between 2016 and 2022 rated it inadequate.²³⁰ After a further inspection in 2023, it was reported that the school's proprietor had been incorrectly recorded on the

218. <https://www.facebook.com/LebaneseYouthFoundation/photos/1675235089377568/1931927903708284>

219. <https://www.facebook.com/LebaneseYouthFoundation/posts/pfbid063s-Ga7UZTLiAD5rgSU6tzG1ikfBUP-Z8aWQ9LecDfz9L2ZPHqEDTpxfMeTfYNYCwYwpl>

220. <http://www.askthesheikh.com/about-us/>

221. <http://www.askthesheikh.com/about-us/>

222. <http://www.askthesheikh.com/about-the-sheikh/>

223. <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Religious-works/Religious-preachers-with-entry-ban>

224. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/sheikh-to-be-deported-but-wife-and-one-child-to-stay-20100517-v80g.html>

225. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/30/australia-expelling-iranian-sheikh-violated-human-rights-un-body-finds>

226. Leghaei et al (1937/2010) v Australia, Australian Government Response, 19 November 2015, <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/publications/leghaei-et-al-v-australia-19372010-australian-government-response>

227. The school has a website at <http://iris-school.co.uk/>

228. Andrew Norfolk, Scholar spreads Iranian propaganda in Britain, 11 January 2020. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scholar-spreads-iranian-propaganda-in-britain-3q90fvzxd>

229. <https://ic-el.uk/blog/2023/03/10/annual-celebration-of-the-birth-anniversary-of-imam-zaman-a-s-at-the-islamic-centre-of-england/>

230. <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/27/133385>

Department for Education’s register as being headmaster Seyed Hosseini, when actually “The proprietor body is the Embassy of Iran in London.”²³¹ The PhD of Abbas Hosseini states of the school: “The Ministry of Education runs several schools outside Iran, mainly in the Persian Gulf countries as well as some European countries in which 13,703 students are enrolled, one of which is IRIS School in London.”²³²

The report from the 2023 OFSTED inspection records that the DfE had written to the school that March to announce it was to be removed from the register of independent schools.²³³ This would mean that, pending any appeals process, the school would have to close.

There was also an Iranian School of Manchester, which operated in the city from 1995 until its closure on 30 June 2005.²³⁴ While this school may have closed, premises at its address, 86 East Road, Longsight, Manchester M12 5GY continued to be in operation, serving for example as a polling station in the 2021 Iranian election.²³⁵

2.2 A Network of Shared Activism

What makes the above institutions so significant – beyond the intrinsic interest in their separate constitutions and outlook – is the fact that they collectively constitute an informal network of organisations that works to promote an agenda conducive to the Iranian Islamic Republic. On numerous occasions, over the last decade and more, these institutions have coalesced to form ad hoc coalitions that sponsor, or host events designed to advance a pro-Tehran narrative within the UK. In this next section of the report, we will consider some of the more striking examples of this joint activism.

2.2.1 Joint Events

A good example of a typical event that draws in different parts of the pro-Iranian network came in October 2016, when the ICEL came together with the Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission (AIM), and the Lebanese Youth Foundation (LYF), to co-organise a series of lectures at the Islamic Republic of Iran School (IRIS) in Kilburn. One lecturer within that series, the American-Iranian Shaykh Hamza Sodagar, was scheduled to speak for the 10 nights of Muharram – the holy month during which Shia Muslims remember the martyrdom of the Imam Husain. However, Hamza Sodagar proved a controversial choice: he had previously posted a video listing five ways in which gay people could be killed in Islam, including by beheading and burning.²³⁶ AIM offered a robust defence of Shaykh Sodagar, stating that he was not advocating the killing of homosexuals and that his words had been taken out of context.²³⁷

Shaykh Hamza explained the position of Islam on homosexuality, and that it is not compatible with Islam. This is a clear and undeniable position that is upheld by Islam as found in Islamic scripture and tradition. In this regard, it must be understood, as was mentioned in the very same lecture series, that Islamic penal code cannot be administered outside the framework of law enforcement and legal process within a legitimate government.

231. Inspection report, School of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 19 September 2023, p. 6 <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50232685>

232. Language and Culture The importance of Cultural Language to enhance the teaching and learning of Persian language in a Persian Heritage Language school, Seyed Abbas Hosseini, 2021, Middlesex University PhD thesis, <https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/download/213b08b64cb0c5a2be869c6227802d4d4b19e07ec27029edb-5bace655b7f30aa/1905085/SAHosseini%20thesis.pdf> p. 19-20.

233. Inspection report, School of the Islamic Republic of Iran, op cit

234. <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/Establishments/Establishment/Details/105600#school-dashboard>

235. <https://twitter.com/smhmatin/status/1404494456598974474>

236. Dave Burke, Islamic hate preacher who called for gay men to be beheaded is teaching children as young as six at a school in London, 6 October 2016. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3825696/Islamic-hate-preacher-called-gay-men-beheaded-teaching-children-young-six-school-London.html>

237. US Muslim preacher ‘who advocated beheading of gay men allowed to lecture in the UK’, Siobhan Fenton, Independent, 7 October 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/hamza-sodagar-us-muslim-preacher-who-advocated-beheading-of-gay-men-allowed-to-lecture-in-the-uk-a7348886.html>

As of May 2022, Shaykh Sodagar has been – like the afore-mentioned Sheikh Leghaei -- banned from entering Denmark for two years, on the grounds that his presence might prove detrimental to “public order”.^{238 239}

2.2.2 The Peace and Unity Conference

In 2019 Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and Scotland’s Chief Constable withdrew from a conference that had been organised in Glasgow under the theme ‘Peace and Unity’ by the Ahlul Bayt Society Scotland (ABSS).²⁴⁰ Concerns had been raised over the presence of the former ICCEL Director Dr Mohammad Shomali - who was reported to have likened gay marriage to bestiality. Sturgeon’s spokesman said she would not attend because of a ‘diary clash’ and Communities Minister Aileen Campbell MSP would take her place.²⁴¹

In previous years this event, had brought together a series of community representatives, politicians and members of Scottish public bodies. One undiscussed aspect of this has been the presence of British military figures, seated somewhat incongruously breaking bread with Iranian clerics. On 6 November 2018, for instance, the First Minister’s twitter feed pictured Ms Sturgeon speaking to the Peace and Unity conference. Immediately in front of her can be seen Harun Khan, the then Secretary General of the MCB. To his right is Sheikh Mohammad Shomali of the Islamic Centre of England, and to his right, an unknown military officer in British Army uniform.²⁴²



238. <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Religious-workers/National-sanction-list/?anchor=C0848E0180C34017BFB14D-C9BC116572&callbackItem=7C5D-2D143D284E4EB-2829BA5F0F04837&callbackAnchor=B758A980A5554BD194437B85368D-84D0C0848E0180C34017BFB14D-C9BC116572>

239. ‘Religious preachers with entry ban’, Denmark, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-GB/Words-and-concepts/US/Religious-workers/Religious-preachers-with-entry-ban>

240. <http://web.archive.org/web/20220422030045/http://peaceand-unityscotland.co.uk/>

241. Marc Horne, Nicola Sturgeon pulls out of conference with Iran cleric Dr Mohammad Shomali, 20 November 2019. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nicola-sturgeon-pulls-out-of-conference-with-iran-cleric-dr-mohammad-shomali-1gks796mn>

242. <https://twitter.com/ScotGovFM/status/1059923285541093381/photo/1>

A closer shot of Mr Shomali and his companion may be viewed below.



In 2017 Army HQ Scotland tweeted a similar image, but of Mohammed Shomali with Major General Bob Bruce, the then Military Secretary and General Officer, Scotland – the head of the British Army in Scotland.²⁴³



243. <https://twitter.com/ASengaged/status/926374644734717953/photo/1> On Bruce, see <https://www.theroyalscots.co.uk/trustees/#:-:text=Major%20General%20Bob%20Bruce%20CBE%20DSO%20Vice%20Chairman,commanded%20C%20Company%20in%20Colchester%20and%20Northern%20Ireland.>

The third Peace and Unity conference back in 2016 had also seen a military presence, as illustrated in the images below.²⁴⁴



The soldier in this image also sat at the top table with Nicola Sturgeon and Mohammad Shomali. Mr Shomali was flanked by Dr Saied Reza Ameli, discussed below in the context of the IHRC, who spoke to delegates in the name of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought.²⁴⁵ Members of that body are appointed personally by Ayatollah Khamenei:²⁴⁶

The Word Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought was established in 1990 by the order of the Supreme Leader of Islamic Republic of Iran and the appointment of the Secretary General and members of the Supreme Council by His Holiness.

Dr Ameli can be seen at the top table with Nicola Sturgeon, Chief Constable Phil Gormley of Police Scotland, and the above military officer in this image, which Peace and Unity Scotland later uploaded to their Facebook page on 1 October 2018.²⁴⁷ As at 31 January 2024, this image remains the header photograph on the Peace and Unity Scotland Facebook.²⁴⁸

As discussed earlier in this report, Dr Saied Reza Ameli was at the time of this event a member of the Iranian government's Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, as well as being a founder member of the UK lobby group the Islamic Human Rights Commission.²⁴⁹

244. See the conference video at 00.55 <https://vimeo.com/187469438>

245. Conference video, 29: 48 <https://vimeo.com/187469438>

246. <https://iuc.taqrib.ir/iuc37/en/contact-us>
The reference to 'His Holiness' here is not to the Pope, but to the Supreme Leader of Iran.

247. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=978270905694634&set=a.458246689668861>

248. https://www.facebook.com/peaceandunityscotland/photos_by The FB page itself has been quiet since 4 February 2021.

249. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/saied-reza-ameli-b18a14119/details/experience/>



The decision by members of the British army to engage, in uniform, with clerics and a political figure appointed by the Iranian government, which has been consistently hostile to the United Kingdom and bears responsibility for multiple lethal attacks on British military forces in Iraq, raises difficult questions. It would be interesting to know if these engagements were cleared by the Ministry of Defence. Did the Secretary of State for Defence know? Given our poor relations with Iran, Iranian involvement in attacks on British service personnel in Iraq²⁵⁰ and their arming of the Taliban in Afghanistan,²⁵¹ such questions matter.

2.2.3 Promoting Islamic (Islamist) Unity

In chapter 1 it was noted that the ICEL had hosted an event to mark the Iranian Islamic revolution which featured the late Muslim Brother, Kamal El-Helbawy. This was a far from isolated example of how the ICEL and the wider pro-Iranian network has sought to promote what it calls “Islamic Unity”, through cooperation with Islamist activists from both the Sunni and Shia parts of the Islamic world. On 29 July 2017, for example, ICEL founder Ayatollah Mohsen Araki returned to London and posted images on his Facebook page of a meeting with the exiled Muslim Brotherhood leader Ibrahim Mounir (1937-2022). Araki posted the following in English and Persian:

‘The picture that scared some in Egypt. Ayatollah Araki meeting officials from Ukhwan Al-Muslimeen [the Muslim Brotherhood] in London to discuss Islamic unity.’²⁵²

250. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4312516.stm

251. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12694266>

252. <https://www.facebook.com/ayatollaharaki/posts/1729015530725381>



Also present was Egyptian-Canadian author Jamal Badawi.²⁵³ This was not the first meeting between Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan in Arabic) to have a British connection; indeed those pictured above were involved in the Islamic Unity Forum initiative discussed earlier.²⁵⁴

There are further examples. In the brief period from 2012-13 that the Muslim Brotherhood was in power in Egypt, Qassem Soleimani of the IRGC travelled to Cairo to meet President Morsi’s foreign affairs advisor, Essam al-Haddad.²⁵⁵ For many years, Mr al-Haddad lived in Britain, where he co-founded the Islamic Relief charity.²⁵⁶ Islamic Relief is an MCB affiliate.²⁵⁷ After the Muslim Brotherhood was removed from power in a coup, its representatives met with Iranian officials, this time in Turkey in 2014, in order to try to develop an alliance against Saudi Arabia. Once again, there was a British connection: among the Ikhwan’s representatives to meet the Iranians were two British-based Egyptians – Ibrahim Mounir, pictured above, and Mahmoud el-Abiary.²⁵⁸ On 10 July 2021 Ayatollah Mohsen Araki returned once more to the UK, to attend the 14th Islamic Unity meeting, held in London.²⁵⁹

The ease with which clerics associated with the Islamic Republic of Iran can come and go between London and Tehran, taking part in strategic meetings and events, is particularly notable in the case of Ayatollah Araki. It is surely worth asking why, given the poor level of Anglo-Iranian diplomatic relations in recent years, and Iran’s treatment of our own citizens, Ayatollah Araki is able to enter the country and attend meetings here.

Unless Iranian clerics are using diplomatic passports, there appear to be two types of visas by which they may enter this country to work: a religious workers visa, valid for up to two years,²⁶⁰ or a Minister of religion visa,²⁶¹ which lasts for three years and one month. After five years, it is then possible to apply to settle in the United Kingdom. Given the brutal conduct of the Iranian clerical regime, its treatment of both its own citizens and Britons whom it detains, and its willingness to encourage blasphemy codes in this country (discussed later in the report), further information on these individuals and the decision-making process by

253. <https://www.alarabiya.net/iran/2019/05/01/%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%86%D9%8-A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%9F> Article translated by an Arabic speaker.

254. Islamic Unity Forum <http://islamicunity.uk/%d9%86%d8%a8%d8%b0%d8%a9-%d8%b9%d9%86-%d9%85%d9%86%d8%aa%d8%af%d9%89-7%d9%84%d9%88%d8%ad8%af%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%a9/>

255. [thetimes.co.uk/article/iranian-spy-chiefs-visit-to-cairo-was-meant-to-send-a-message-to-america-qxrgkws09dw](https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-panel-calls-immediate-release-essam-and-gehad-el-haddad-egypt)

256. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-panel-calls-immediate-release-essam-and-gehad-el-haddad-egypt>

257. Again, this information is as per the MCB’s last clear statement on its affiliates, from 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181005001524/https://mcb.org.uk/about/affiliates/>

258. <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/18/iran-muslim-brotherhood-quds-force/>

259. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/463130/Ayatollah-Araki-Islamic-society-s-power-depends-on-returning>

260. <https://www.gov.uk/religious-worker-visa>

261. <https://www.gov.uk/minister-of-religion-visa>

which they are issued visas, is imperative.

In March 2023, the following question was raised with government:²⁶²

To ask His Majesty’s Government how many (1) religious workers visas, and (2) Minister of Religion visas, have been issued to Iranian subjects since July 2015; who were those visas issued to; and what plans they have, if any, to review this system.

The following answer was received:²⁶³

The Home Office publishes data on entry clearance visas in the Immigration system statistics quarterly release. Data on ‘Religious Worker (previously Tier 5)’ visas issued to Iranian nationals are published in table Vis_D02 of the ‘Entry clearance visa applications and outcomes’ detailed datasets. Information on how to use the dataset can be found in the ‘Notes’ page of the workbook. The latest data relates to Q4 (October to December) 2022.

We are unable to discuss individual cases for GDPR reasons.

There are no plans to review the Immigration Rules governing Religious Workers or Ministers of Religion.

This answer – in effect ‘here’s how to look it up yourself’ – eventually produced the following information on immigration statistics since 2005:²⁶⁴

Figure 1: Visas issued by HM government to Iranian clerics

Religious visas ISSUED to Iranian nationals 2005-2022							Religious visas DENIED to Iranian nationals 2005-2022											
Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Types*	Total	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Types*	Total					
2005		1	1	1	3 MoR,	3	2005											
2006	2	1	5	7	1 MoR, 14 RW	15	2006		1	1	3	5 RW	5					
2007	5	2	9	9	1 MoR, 24 RW	25	2007	6		3	7	16 RW	16					
2008	5	6	7	6	1 MoR, 23 RW	24	2008**	1	6	4		11 RW	11					
2009	2				2 MoR	2	2009				1	1 RW	1					
2010			1		1 RW	1	2010	2			1	1 MoR, 2 RW	3					
2011				2	2 RW	2	2011											
2012		1	1	1	1 MoR, 2 RW	3	2012				1	1 MoR	1					
2013			4		1 MoR, 3 RW	4	2013				1	1 MoR	1					
2014		1	1	4	3 MoR, 3 RW	6	2014			1		1 MoR	1					
2015	2	1		1	3 MoR, 1 RW	4	2015			1		1 RW	1					
2016						0	2016	1		1		2 RW	2					
2017	1	1	1	1	1 MoR, 3 RW	4	2017											
2018		1	1		1 MoR, 1 RW	2	2018		2			1 MoR	1					
2019	1	1	1		2 MoR, 1 RW	3	2019				1	1 RW	1					
2020			1		1 MoR	1	2020											
2021						0	2021											
2022		1			1 RW	1	2022											
Grand total						100	Grand total						44					
					Minister of Religion													
					Religious worker													
Settlement visas for Iranians who were on MoRs							Visa Extensions for Iranians who were on MoRs*											
2009	2013	2018	2019	2020	2021		2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	1	1	2	2	1		2	1	1	1	4	3	5	3	3	1	2	8
Three religious workers we also granted extensions in 2011 and 2019 (x2)																		

RW – Religious workers visa
MoR – Minister of religion visa

262. <https://members.parliament.uk/member/4903/writtenquestions#expand-1601477>

263. <https://members.parliament.uk/member/4903/writtenquestions#expand-1601477>

264. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-data-tables-year-ending-december-2022>

In total 100 visas have been issued to Iranian religious figures since 2005. 21 were to Ministers of Religion, 79 were religious workers visas and a total of 8 Iranian Ministers of Religion have then been given settlement visas. 44 visas were denied in the same period. It can be noted that a high number of rejections came in 2007-8 – this was during a period of particularly poor Anglo-Iranian relations under President Ahmadinejad.

Given what we know about the regime in Tehran, is it in our national interest for a hundred Iranian clerics to settle in Britain? A follow-up article pressed the government:²⁶⁵

No doubt some of these Religious Workers and Ministers of Religion are admirable men and women of God. But can the Home Office vouch for all of them? Who in the wider UK system is monitoring their ideological evolution on an ongoing basis – bearing in mind the historic reluctance of MI5 and others to devote much resource to non-violent extremists who fall beneath the terrorism threshold?

Soon afterwards, Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick announced an internal review of visa policy towards Iran.²⁶⁶

The Independent Review of Prevent

Here it must be added that the February 2023 independent review of the Prevent counter-terrorism programme, conducted by William Shawcross, called for the Home Office to:

*Explore extending the Prevent Duty to immigration and asylum (through UK Border Force, Immigration and Protection Directorate) and to job centres via the Department for Work and Pensions).*²⁶⁷

In their response to Shawcross, the Home Office accepted his proposals, stating²⁶⁸:

We accept this recommendation and agree that all organisations who work with people at risk of radicalisation should have strong and robust processes in place to identify and refer these individuals to Prevent. We will work closely with partners, including those in Border Force, Immigration and Asylum, and in the Department for Work and Pensions, to explore how Prevent can be embedded operationally in these sectors. We will scope extending the Prevent Duty to Border Force, Immigration and the Department for Work and Pensions. This will be explored fully, together with other recommendations for legislative changes, as part of the refresh of the CONTEST strategy.

On 18 July 2023 the Home Secretary published a refresh of the CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy.²⁶⁹ It contained no reference to extending the statutory Prevent duty in the immigration field. In a section marked ‘Transforming Prevent’ it is stated ‘In line with this recalibration, the Prevent Duty will be redefined, the statutory guidance updated and the Prevent vulnerability framework tightened.’²⁷⁰ It therefore remains to be seen if the Shawcross recommendations, when it comes to counter-terrorism policy and Britain’s borders, are to be adopted.

265. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/25/public-deserves-know-why-britain-giving-visas-iranian-clerics/>

266. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/25/public-deserves-know-why-britain-giving-visas-iranian-clerics/>

267. [Independent Review of Prevent \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134828/The_response_to_the_Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf) p.159.

268. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134828/The_response_to_the_Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf p. 14.

269. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-con-test-2023>

270. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1171169/CONTEST_2023_print-ready.pdf p. 31

2.2.4 Al-Quds Day

The Al-Quds day rallies, usually held on the last weekend of Ramadan, were initiated by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 to show solidarity with the Palestinians.²⁷¹ Over time they have spread internationally, but in several western cities, including London, they have become increasingly controversial -- either due to displays of antisemitism or instances of support for terrorist organisations.²⁷² In London the march is organised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC),²⁷³ and among attracts significant clerical support. For example, a report of the 2016 procession pictures Mohammed Shomali, the then head of the Islamic Centre of England, on the demonstration.²⁷⁴

Last years event was on Sunday 16 April 2023, with a long list of sponsoring groups.²⁷⁵ These comprised the IHRC, Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission (AIM), Ahlulbayt Sisters, Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK, Black Lives Matter Coalition, Scotland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, InMinds, 5 Pillars, Neturei Karta, Fight Racism Fight Imperialism, Uhuru Movement, Jewish Network for Palestine, Union of Islamic Student Societies in Europe, Black Activists Rising Against Cuts, Idara-e-Jaajeriya, and the Convivencia Alliance.

271. <http://en.imam-khomeini.ir/en/n41862/International-Quds-Day-a-legacy-of-Imam-Khomeini>

272. <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/al-quds-march>

273. <https://5pillarsuk.com/2022/04/26/pro-palestinians-march-through-london-on-al-quds-day/>

274. 'United for Palestine', Sukant Chandan, Islamic Human Rights Commission, Annual Newsletter 2016, p. 16

275. <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/international-al-al-quds-day-2023-rally/>



In 2023, the march was scheduled to end with no fewer than 14 speakers from across the activist spectrum, starting with Huda Ammouri of Palestine Action.²⁷⁶ The others listed were Rev Stephen Sizer, Ahammed Hussain (MPAC UK), Delia Mattis (BLM), Ali Erkaslan (Revolutionary Communist Group, the publishers of “Fight Racism Fight Imperialism”), Massoud Shadjareh (IHRC), Les Levidow (Jewish Network for Palestine and the Convivencia Alliance), the journalist Richard Medhurst, Luwezi Kinshasa (Hands Off Uhuru), Chris Williamson (ex-Labour MP), Jon Maxted (from George Galloway’s Workers Party), Rabbi Ahron Cohen (Neturei Karta), Mick Napier (Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign) and Farrah Koutteineh (Key 48).

The rally started with a distinctly clerical feel, with Shia clerics grouped

276. <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/al-quds-day-rally-to-attracts-thousands-from-across-uk/#:~:text=This%20year%E2%80%99s%20event%20%28https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ihrc.org.uk%2Finternational-al-quds-day-2023-rally%2F%29%20is%20scheduled%20for%20Sunday,hear%20speeches%20by%20prominent%20anti-apartheid%20guest%20speakers%20including%3A>

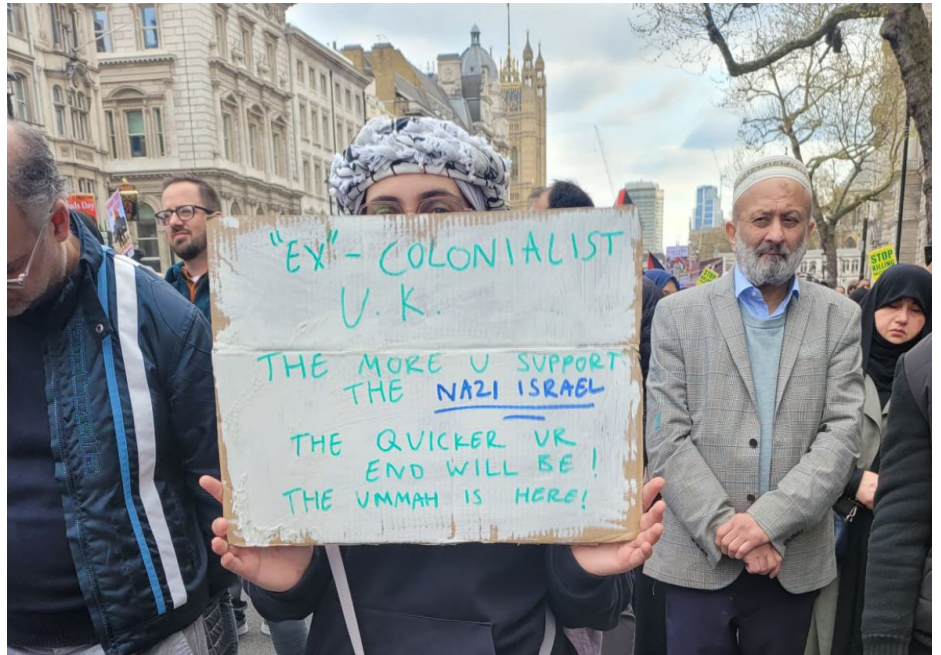
at the start, beneath a banner of the IHRC.



Veneration of the late head of the IRGC, Qassem Soleimani could also be observed, with a somewhat over-sized photograph of him completing the route of the march.



Other images threatened the end of the United Kingdom:



Also present at the London Al-Quds march was the white and black flag of the Iraqi Hashd Al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilisation) group, pictured below in the background whilst a demonstrator from the Neturei Karta (NK) group sets fire to the Israeli flag. The NK is a small Jewish sect that is fiercely anti-Zionist, to the extent that its followers have met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi last year at the United Nations,²⁷⁷ and in 2006 travelled to Tehran for a holocaust denial conference.²⁷⁸

277. Anti-Zionist Jews meet Iranian President Raisi at UN conference, MEMO Middle East Monitor, 21 September 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230921-anti-zionist-jews-meet-iranian-president-raisi-at-un-conference/>

278. Satmars: Jews at Iran holocaust conference 'Reckless outcasts', 16 December 2006, <https://archive.ph/R0KTQ>



As the march reached the House of Parliament, Sheikh Hassan Al-Turaiki from Dar Al-Islam in Cricklewood (an organisation discussed earlier in this report) could be seen among the leaders towards the front of the demonstration.²⁷⁹

Though such events in the capital tend to dominate the coverage, it should be noted that Al-Quds Day is not merely a London-based affair. Parallel events are also held across the country – events which are important in highlighting other nodes within the pro-Iranian network. In May 2020, for example, the Masjid-e-Ali Centre in Luton organised lectures to mark Al-Quds Day, which it labelled ‘an international day to support the oppressed against the oppressor’.²⁸⁰ The decision to commemorate Al-Quds Day in this fashion was entirely in keeping with the wider affinities of this Luton-based institution, which has a history of welcoming pro-Tehran individuals as speakers. Hence in February 2018,²⁸¹ then again in

279. Islamic Human Rights Commission, Quds Day 2023: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=926966228509843 16 April 2023. See at 35:24

280. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/photos/pb.100064354792792.-2207520000./2900155960053194/?type=3>

281. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/photos/pb.100064354792792.-2207520000./1579595432109260/?type=3>

both February 2022²⁸² and May 2022,²⁸³ the Masjid-e-Ali Centre hosted the ICEL’s former director Mohammad Ali Shomali. In August 2019, the same mosque welcomed ICEL’s then director Seyed Hashem Moosavi (spelt in the invitation as Seyyed Hashim Musawi), who was referred to as the ‘representative of Ayatullah Khamenei.’²⁸⁴ A promotional picture for the event, posted on the mosque’s Facebook page, shows both men:



282. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/photos/pb.100064354792792.-2207520000./4744903498911755/?type=3>

283. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/photos/pb.100064354792792.-2207520000./5037876399614462/?type=3>

284. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/photos/pb.100064354792792.-2207520000./2299562790112517/?type=3>

285. <https://www.facebook.com/masjideali.luton/videos/470867540295237> Last checked 31 January 2024

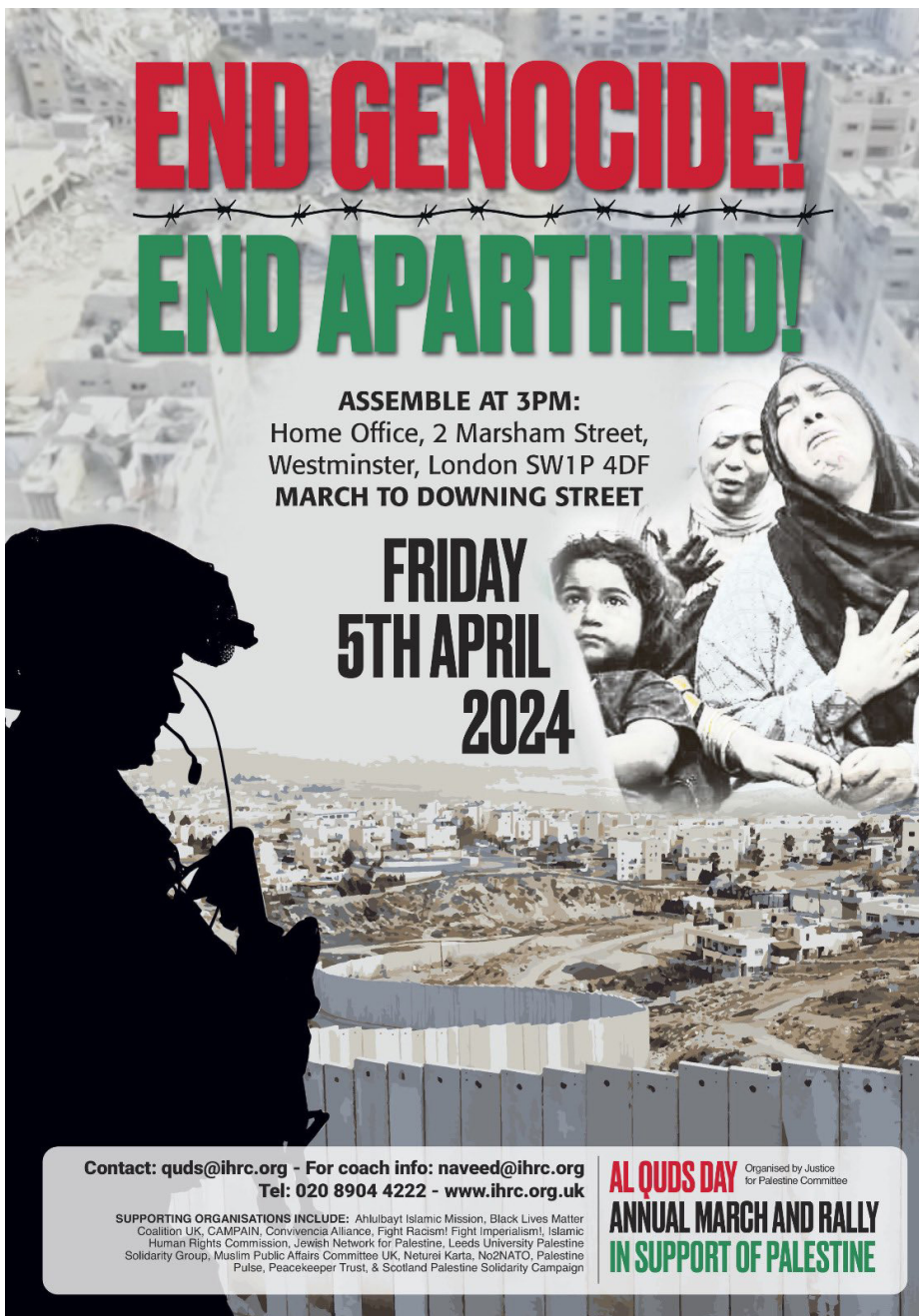
286. <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/280440/contact-information>

287. https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A12446872&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvceRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&_uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=280440

Furthermore, following the assassination of Qassem Suleimani in January 2020, the Masjid-e-Ali Centre held a commemorative event in what appears to be the centre’s car park, posting a video on its Facebook page.²⁸⁵ The backdrop to the speakers featured an image of Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis of the Iraqi PMF, who died alongside Soleimani. The Masjid-e-Ali Centre is a registered charity, number 280440.²⁸⁶ In its 2021 accounts, it received support from the government to the tune of £117,396 – presumably covid related.²⁸⁷

In 2024, the Al-Quds march was held on Friday 5 April, heading from the Home Office to Downing Street. In their material for the event, the IHRC states “IHRC has campaigned for Palestinian liberation since its

inception. Join our annual Al Quds Day Rally.”²⁸⁸ A promotional poster lists some fourteen groups as supporters.



2.3 Conclusion

As is clear from the foregoing, the Iranian Islamic Republic uses a range of institutions across the UK to advance an agenda conducive to its interests. Collectively, the organisations identified in this report constitute a soft power network, which promotes a series of narratives and ideas amenable to the regime in Tehran. What should be done about this? The first step is obviously recognition, and taking on board the manner in which the organisations and individuals detailed here overlap and interact. Given Iran is a country dominated by very different ethics and values to our

288. <https://www.ihrc.org.uk/quds-day-2024/>

own and is a state with which we have long had poor relations, the need exists to consider Iranian soft power as a challenge to be countered. More seriously still, issues such as the potential interaction between Muslim students in this country and the IRGC raises security issues which cannot be quickly discounted.

There are several issues raised in this chapter where government intervention is overdue – for example on the issue of Iranian clerics entering the UK. For the Islamic Republic’s ideals to be replicated and upheld in this country, it requires the output of both representatives of the Iranian regime, but also those willing to aid, support and platform those representatives. It is here where the authorities can, and indeed should, break the chain.

It is for this reason that in the policy recommendations, at the start of this report, we recommend the cessation of the issuing of visas for Iranian nationals to work at the ICEL, or organisations affiliated to it. Equally the issuing of visas allowing Iranian clerics to work in this country, must also cease. Allowing the Islamic republic’s clerics to enter the UK in order to work in our communities is a luxury we can ill-afford.

At several points in this section the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), and the various groups associated with it, occur. Knowledge of these groups is generally low in the UK. However, that should not give them a free pass to campaign and organise in this country, while they are involved in violence in the Middle East. A Home Office investigation is overdue.

Chapter 3: The Islamic Republic as a hostile actor

This chapter looks at the extent to which Iran poses a threat to the United Kingdom, its citizens and those resident here. The Iranian challenge to British national security and social cohesion is a complex one, traversing questions of terrorism, extremism, street protest, internet security and community relations. In the words of the Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Robin Simcox ‘Iran proves that countering the activities of hostile states is not only a geopolitical imperative. It is also a local imperative.’²⁸⁹

3.1 The Cyber Threat

A segment of the Iranian-related threat the UK government must respond to involves countering cyber threats. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) aims “to make the UK the safest place to live and work online.”²⁹⁰ It is part of GCHQ,²⁹¹ and Iran is one of the challenges the centre faces. Consider the work it published in 2022 on Iran’s use of malware,²⁹² and that organisation’s joint report with the FBI and US Cyber Command on Iranian cyber-attacks against its adversaries.²⁹³ This followed action taken by the United States in 2020, when it seized over 100 web domains held by the IRGC for its online campaigns. These included the domain *criticalstudies.org* – not perhaps an activity one associates with the Islamic Republic of Iran.²⁹⁴

Iran has also run fake websites designed to promote Scottish separatism,²⁹⁵ and appears in Facebook’s analysis of what it refers to as ‘coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB)’ online.²⁹⁶ A 2022 Facebook report on this problem refers to 29 such Iranian networks – indicating Iran is second only to Russia in this activity.²⁹⁷ After the US seizure of Iranian domains described above, the Islamic Republic switched its tactics:²⁹⁸

Starting early 2021, deceptive campaigns focused more on politics in the target countries and were linked to smaller groups, like academics or people with a background in teaching English as a foreign language, without an apparent link to any larger state entity.

In July 2021 it was discovered Iranian hackers had posed as an academic at SOAS University of London, sending emails advertising a conference entitled: ‘The US Security Challenges in the Middle East’. From there a link was sent in order to harvest passwords and usernames of those approached.²⁹⁹ In 2023, following reports that the Electoral Commission

289. <https://my.rusi.org/events/countering-extremist-threats-in-the-uk-an-address-by-robin-simcox.html>

290. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-ncsc/what-we-do>

291. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/annual-review-2023>

292. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/news/uk-and-allies-expose-iranian-state-agency-for-exploiting-cyber-vulnerabilities-for-ransom-operations>

293. <https://www.cisa.gov/uscert/ncas/alerts/aa22-055a>

294. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/uk-ed-states-seizes-27-additional-domain-names-used-iran-s-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>

295. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16592877.fake-pro-independence-facebook-page-originated-iran-taken/>

296. Meta, Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour Report, December 2022. <https://about.fb.com/news/2022/12/metas-2022-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-enforcement/>

297. Meta, Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour Report, December 2022. <https://about.fb.com/news/2022/12/metas-2022-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-enforcement/>

298. Meta, Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour Report, December 2022. <https://about.fb.com/news/2022/12/metas-2022-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-enforcement/>

299. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-57817463>

had suffered a cyber-attack aimed at stealing voters' data (an attack ultimately attributed to China)³⁰⁰ the UK was described as being in a 'grey zone cyber conflict' with four countries - Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.³⁰¹ Indeed in January 2023 the NCSC had put on record the activities of an Iranian group known by the names TA453 (APT42/Charming Kitten/Yellow Garuda/ITG18) which did not seek to disrupt the general public, but was much more precise in phishing: "targeted sectors included academia, defence, governmental organisations, NGOs, think-tanks, as well as politicians, journalists and activists."³⁰²

In an election year, we need to be particularly on our guard against such disruption. That a significant threat to our online safety comes from four particular nations is reiterated in the NCSC's 2023 Annual Review, which concludes of our critical national infrastructure (CNI) "While criminality online is the most significant threat in terms of volume, the most advanced threats to CNI come from nation states, including Russia, China, Iran, and DPRK."³⁰³

3.2 Iranian terrorist plots in the UK

Assistant Commissioner Matt Jukes, the head of counter-terror policing, has observed that 15 Iranian plots to kill or kidnap people on British soil have been discovered since January 2022.³⁰⁴ This figure has also been confirmed by MI5 Director General Ken McCallum.³⁰⁵ And in MI5's annual threat update for 2022, McCallum, made the following statement:

*Iran projects threat to the UK directly, through its aggressive intelligence services. At its sharpest this includes ambitions to kidnap or even kill British or UK-based individuals perceived as enemies of the regime. We have seen at least ten such potential threats since January alone. We work at pace with domestic and international partners to disrupt this completely unacceptable activity. The Foreign Secretary made clear to the Iranian regime just last week that the UK will not tolerate intimidation or threats to life towards journalists, or any individual, living in the UK.*³⁰⁶

This marked a significant shift in the language coming out of the Security Service. The equivalent speech in 2021, for example, was less specific about the threat posed by the Islamic Republic, merely placing Iran alongside other states such as Russia and China.³⁰⁷

Indeed, including the above examples, there are only seven historical mentions of 'Iran' on the Security Service website³⁰⁸, the others being:

- The challenge of uncertainty in Iran, in a 25 June 2012 speech by Director-General Jonathan Evans on the 2012 Olympics and beyond.³⁰⁹
- A mention of Iran on the page concerning counter-proliferation (WMDs).³¹⁰
- A passing reference to Iran as a threat in a 2018 speech to a symposium in Berlin with the German intelligence agency the BfV by Director-General Andrew Parker.³¹¹

300. Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden, 'Cyber security and UK Democracy', <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-03-25/debates/096EB6E9-21A1-40A5-A7F4-247C52AFC070/Cyber-SecurityAndUKDemocracy>, Hansard, 25 March 2024.

301. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/08/09/electoral-commission-cyber-attack-china-iran-north-korea/>

302. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/news/spear-phishing-campaigns-targets-of-interest>

303. <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/annual-review-2023/resilience/case-study-securing-cni>

304. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/02/16/school-massacre-plots-foiled-britain-counter-terror-police-reveal/>

305. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-speech-at-university-of-glasgow>

306. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update> The Foreign Secretary had summoned the Iranian Ambassador's deputy over threats to Iranian journalists in this country, earlier in the month: [Foreign Secretary summons Iranian Chargé d'Affaires over threats to journalists in the UK - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-summons-iranian-charg%C3%A9-daffaires-over-threats-to-journalists-in-the-uk)

307. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>

308. All information correct as of 31 January 2024.

309. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/the-olympics-and-beyond>

310. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/counter-proliferation>

311. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-andrew-parker-speech-to-bfv-symposium>

- Two references, including to covert threats from Iran in a joint FBI/MI5 speech about the threat of China on 6 July 2022.³¹²

Furthermore, the nature of the above references merely underlines the extent to which the November 2022 update marked a signal shift in the description of the Iranian threat made publicly by MI5. Yet, the existence of press reports in earlier years about the danger posed by the Islamic Republic to Iranian exiles in the UK indicates that this is not a new problem. For example, as far back as 2019, the Iranian-Scottish Association – an anti-regime grouping -- complained of Tehran developing intelligence on exiles, in a *Times* article entitled ‘Iranian spies ‘threatening dissidents in the streets’.³¹³ On 25 June 2021, the BBC issued a statement appealing to the United Nations to support its Persian staff, facing Iranian threats to kidnap them and take them to Tehran.³¹⁴

How might we characterise the security challenge posed by the Iranian government in the UK? Three examples from 2022, and one from 2023 are outlined below. Some exist at what might be described as a nuisance level – consider the 9 October 2022 bomb threat made to a venue in Hammersmith, which was due to host the dissident Iranian singer Dariush. This saw the gig abandoned, while concert goers stood in the street chanting about their homeland ‘one solution, revolution’.³¹⁵ The following month, events took a more serious turn, with threats made to two journalists at the Iran International TV station in London,³¹⁶ and the police placing journalist Aliasghar Ramezani, formerly of BBC Persian and latterly of Iran International, under protection.³¹⁷ In Foreign Secretary James Cleverly instructed the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to summon Iran’s Chargé d’Affaires, noting that ‘In recent years, the Metropolitan Police have contacted a number of UK-based journalists, having received credible information about a threat to their lives.’³¹⁸

On 11 February 2023, meanwhile, Magomed-Husejn Dovtaev, an Austrian citizen of Chechen heritage, was arrested in London after conducting surveillance of offices belonging to Iran International in Chiswick, west London. Iran International is a Saudi-funded channel, which produces content critical of the Islamic Republic regime; it routinely hosts exiled opposition figures. Dovtaev was subsequently charged with ‘collecting information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism’ and remanded in custody.³¹⁹ He was convicted on 20 December 2023,³²⁰ with a Metropolitan Police statement declaring:³²¹

His actions were chilling and put into sharp focus our wider concerns about threats emanating from Iran that continue to be directed towards certain individuals and media organisations here in the UK.

At sentencing on 22 December 2023, Judge Richard Marks, who jailed Dovtaev for three and a half years,³²² commented that, while there was no direct evidence into how Dovtaev’s video footage would have been

312. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/speech-by-mi5-and-fbi>

313. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iranian-spies-threatening-dissidents-on-the-streets-vr63nm6x7>

314. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-57599746>

315. <https://news.sky.com/story/chants-of-one-solution-revolution-after-london-concert-by-iranian-singer-evacuated-over-bomb-threat-12717088>

316. <https://archive.ph/pD9cd>

317. <https://archive.ph/MBE9H>

318. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-summons-iranian-charge-daffaires-over-threats-to-journalists-in-the-uk>

319. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/man-charged-with-terrorism-offence-462094>

320. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/counter-terrorism-investigation-into-hostile-reconnaissance-leads-to-conviction-477217>

321. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/counter-terrorism-investigation-into-hostile-reconnaissance-leads-to-conviction-477217>

322. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/man-jailed-for-terrorism-offence-after-attempting-hostile-reconnaissance-in-west-london-477325>

actioned, he was “satisfied to the criminal standard of proof that an attack of some sort on Iran International was the plan of those who were behind this.”³²³

Elsewhere, in a Commons statement on 20 February 2023, the Minister for Security Rt Hon Tom Tugendhat MP outlined the threats to journalists from the regime in Tehran, and provided new information on Iranian intelligence gathering aimed at Jewish and Israeli individuals in Britain from 2020-22. In particular, Tugendhat accused an Iranian-based member of the IRGC, Mohammed Mehdi Mozayyani, of having ‘worked to conduct a lethal operation against Iranian dissidents here in the United Kingdom’.³²⁴

Alleged IRGC involvement in the type of activity outlined above was cited as a factor in moves to proscribe the group in the UK, a legal route taken by the United States in 2019.³²⁵ It should be noted that as well as threats to kill, the potential for kidnapping also exists, with several instances of Iran seizing, or attempting to take dissidents, forcing them against their will to return to Iran for an ‘apology’ or ‘trial’. Recent examples include two cases in the United Arab Emirates,^{326 327} one in the United States,³²⁸ and a well-publicised incident in South Korea involving the sportswoman Elnaz Rekabi, who returned to Iran and saw the family home demolished in what appears to be punishment for her competing in a climbing event overseas without her hijab.³²⁹

On 19 January 2023, the European Parliament voted to encourage the European Union to take a series of restrictive measures against Iran, including the proscription of the IRGC.³³⁰ It remains to be seen if this is followed by legislation. In the United States President Donald Trump proscribed the IRGC in 2019.³³¹ In the UK media, the possibility of designating the IRGC a terrorist group has been persistently floated in recent years, with reported Home Office support.³³² Conversely, the FCDO are said to be opposed to any such move.³³³ The Foreign Office reportedly fears that if the IRGC were proscribed in the UK, Iran would retaliate by expelling the British ambassador.³³⁴

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly spoke to the Commons on 6 July 2023. After observing that ‘The cowardly attacks planned by the Iranian regime on British soil violate the most elementary rules of diplomatic relations between states’,³³⁵ Mr Cleverly set out a renewed sanctions strategy against both participants in the Iranian regime and those who provide it with assistance. He did not however, declare his support for proscription of the IRGC in the UK. On 13 November 2023 James Cleverley moved from the post of Foreign Secretary to become Home Secretary, and there is little evidence that proscription is currently imminent. Yet given the scale of the threat posed by the Iranian regime it is perhaps worth revisiting this question. The potential expulsion of the British ambassador to Iran, or even the enforced closure of the UK embassy, must be weighed against the cost of failing to respond meaningfully to repeated Iranian attempts to commit murderous attacks in this country.

Meanwhile, perhaps the strongest argument against proscription

323. ‘Terror scout jailed for spying on Iranian TV channel in London before ‘planned attack’, ITV News, 22 December 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2023-12-22/man-jailed-for-spying-on-iranian-tv-channel-in-london-before-planned-attack>

324. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-02-20/debates/29A8956F-795C-430F-BBA8-25D93A5A2FCB/SecurityThreatToUK-BasedJournalists#contribution-BEAAF3EC-9271-45B7-8E35-DC08A4F-614DC>

325. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps/index.html>

326. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0dvt77p>

327. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/iran-ali-karimi-alleged-kidnap-b2210772.html>

328. <https://archive.ph/6awfT>

329. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63847173>

330. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/01/european-parliament-slaps-sanctions-irans-irgc>

331. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps/index.html>

332. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/01/02/irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-set-proscribed-terror-group/>

333. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/02/04/foreign-office-accused-resisting-proscribing-irans-revolutionary/>

334. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jul/06/uk-shies-away-from-designating-iran-revolutionary-guards-as-terrorist-group>

335. James Cleverly, The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, Iran, Hansard Vol 735, 6 July 2023, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-07-06/debates/4F4C55A1-2720-4CB3-BCD1-9556B65D2E3A/Iran>

of the IRGC is that such action may in practice prove largely cosmetic. The proscription of the political wing of Lebanese Hezbollah in 2019,³³⁶ and that of Hamas in 2021,³³⁷ does not appear to have been followed by sustained action against either group's infrastructure in the UK. It is unclear if Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas have closed any political networks they had in London. In the absence of annual published reports on such groups from within government, proscription currently appears to be the end of the process, rather than the start-point for further action that might disrupt hostile actors.

Indeed, without clear statements from Government or the intelligence agencies as to what action follows such legislation, or what the deterrent effect of proscription may be, a degree of cynicism about applying the same approach to the IRGC appears legitimate. Would the proscription of the IRGC act as a glass ceiling, as it seems to have done in regard to Hamas and Hezbollah, or would it provide a springboard for a truly substantive response? If it were seriously to consider the move, the Government would need to offer reassurance that it was being implemented as part of a serious and sustained plan of action to counter IRGC activity in this country.

Finally, London witnessed a serious incident on Friday 29 March 2024, when Iran International journalist Pouria Zeraati was reportedly stabbed as he left his London home. His attackers are unknown, but the investigation into the attack is being conducted by counter-terrorism police.³³⁸ Another Iran International journalist, Sima Sabet, was at the same time advised to move out of her home by the police for security reasons.³³⁹

3.3 Hezbollah in the United Kingdom

In June 2019 media reports emerged linking the Lebanese Shia terrorist group Hezbollah, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, to an alleged terror plot disrupted by the British authorities back in 2015. The investigation followed the arrest and conviction of a Lebanese-Canadian man in Cyprus, Hussein Bassam Abdallah. He admitted to being a member of Hezbollah and was jailed for six years after storing 65,000 ice packs (a key element in ice packs is ammonium nitrate, widely used in terrorist bombs). Photocopies of a fake British passport were found in Abdallah's possession. A police investigation saw four properties raided in northwest London and three metric tonnes of ammonium nitrate discovered, although no court cases ensued.³⁴⁰ In responding to press coverage, the Iranian embassy in London strongly rejected any connection between Iran and terrorism.³⁴¹

Earlier in 2019 the UK had proscribed Lebanese Hezbollah's political wing, having made its security organisation and military wing illegal in 2001 and 2008 respectively.³⁴² Being a member of, or inviting support for Lebanese Hezbollah, may bring a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

On 18 April 2023 HM Government announced that all assets in the UK held by Nizem Ahmed, an alleged Hezbollah financier, had been frozen using counter-terrorism powers. Seven companies associated with Mr Ahmed were also listed.³⁴³ Officers from the National Terrorist Financial

336. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizballah-to-be-banned-alongside-other-terrorist-organisations>

337. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-to-ban-hamas-from-uk>

338. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/30/iran-international-revolutionary-guards-journalist-stabbed-london>

339. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/30/iranian-journalist-told-sima-sabet-met-police-to-leave-home/>

340. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/09/iran-linked-terrorists-caught-stockpiling-explosives-north-west/>

341. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/09/iran-linked-terrorists-caught-stockpiling-explosives-north-west/>

342. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizballah-to-be-banned-alongside-other-terrorist-organisations>

343. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/suspected-hizballah-financier-sanctioned-under-counter-terrorism-regulations>

Investigation Unit also arrested another man, Sundar Nagarajan, with police stating that Mr Nagarajan is wanted by the United States on fraud and money laundering charges.³⁴⁴ In December 2023, Sundar Nagarajan was extradited to face trial in the USA.³⁴⁵ This February, a series of valuable paintings reportedly owned by Nizem Ahmed, were seized by the National Crime Agency. Mr Ahmed, who has also been sanctioned by the United States, is believed to be resident in Beirut.³⁴⁶

3.4 The fatwa and attempt on the life of Sir Salman Rushdie

The best-known threat to a British national from Tehran came in the form of the 1989 fatwa (religious ruling) issued by the Ayatollah Khomeini against the author Salman Rushdie, after the September 1988 publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses*. It is worth reproducing Khomeini's words in full:³⁴⁷

I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of the "Satanic verses" book, which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Quran, and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death. I ask all Muslims to execute them wherever they find them.

The fatwa served as a dramatic attempt to impose the laws of Islam concerning blasphemy – or more specifically Khomeini's interpretation of them – on the streets, libraries and bookshops of the United Kingdom. As the former Labour MP for Blackburn Jack Straw was to later write: 'Ayatollah Khomeini came to Blackburn in 1989. Figuratively, not literally – but you could feel his presence in parts of the town as if he were there in person.'³⁴⁸ In response, Rushdie went into hiding, and a succession of terrorist attacks – in Japan, Norway and Italy³⁴⁹ – occurred against those involved in the translation and distribution of the text. Attempts were made at the diplomatic level to bring about the retraction of the fatwa; indeed in 1999 the UK upgraded its diplomatic representation in Tehran to full ambassadorial status, after the Iranian Foreign Minister had appeared to disavow the fatwa in a 1998 speech to the UN.³⁵⁰

Still, opposition to Rushdie never quite faded within some part of Britain's Muslim communities; nor did the Iranian presence in these debates. In 2007 the award of a knighthood to Salman Rushdie was met with anger by some British Muslim representatives, who declared: 'We see this as a deliberate provocation and insult to the 1.5 billion Muslims around the world.' An open letter to this effect, published by *The Guardian*, brought together the director of the Islamic Centre of England, Abdul Hossein Moezi, with the following individuals and organisations:³⁵¹

- Ali al-Hadithi, Federation of Student Islamic Societies,
- Bashir Mann, Muslim Council of Scotland,
- Dr Abdul Wahid, Hizb ut-Tahrir,
- Dr Ahmad ar-Rawi, Muslim Association of Britain,

344. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-eng-land-london-65318192>

345. <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/indian-man-arrested-uk-terror-funding-case-extradited-us-9074940/>

346. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/uk-police-take-custody-of-23-paintings-seized-from-collector-accused-of-financing-hezbollah-2443018>

347. The text is reproduced in Salman Rushdie (2012), Joseph Anton, London: Vintage Books, p. 5

348. Jack Straw, (2020), op cit, p. 217.

349. Christopher Andrew, (2010). *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5*. London: Penguin, p. 800.

350. Jack Straw, (2020), op cit, p. 239

351. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/26/religion.bookscomment>

- Dr Mamoun Mobayad, Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association,
- Dr Muhammad Abdul-Bari, Muslim Council of Britain,
- Massoud Shadjareh, Islamic Human Rights Commission,
- Maulana Faiz Siddiqui, Muslim Action Committee,
- Muhammad Sawalha, British Muslim Initiative,
- Saleem Qidwai, Muslim Council of Wales,
- Sheikh Abdulhossein Moezi, Islamic Centre of England,
- Sheikh Shafiq-ur-Rahman, United Kingdom Islamic Mission.

In time, Rushdie was to return to a generally normal life, especially after relocating to the United States. It was to prove a near fatal error. On August 12 2022 Rushdie was seriously injured in a knife attack at a literary event in New York State.³⁵² A 24-year-old American of Lebanese heritage, Hadi Matar, was arrested at the scene, and was subsequently charged with attempted murder and assault. He has pleaded not guilty.³⁵³ Matar was not even born at the time of the fatwa.

3.5 Iran, the 7 October 2023 Hamas terror attacks and the UK

On 3 October 2023 Ayatollah Khamenei took to social media to declare that the ‘usurper regime’ (Israel) is coming to an end, and that the ‘anti-occupation movement in Palestine is more energetic more alive and more prepared than ever’.³⁵⁴ Four days later, Hamas launched its assault on Israel, sparking the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. Already, these events have had a major impact on the United Kingdom, and even here there are signs of Iranian state efforts to influence British political debates and protests. This has been made plain by Robin Simcox, the Commissioner for Countering Extremism, who has described how Iran’s activities in this country go beyond the type of violence threatened against Salman Rushdie.³⁵⁵ Simcox also spoke out against the way in which Iran could ‘brazenly threaten British citizens and other nationals in the UK, without any apparent consequence’.³⁵⁶

In line with all this, a number of the protest marches held during the last several months bear signs of Iranian involvement. Just ahead of the large 28 October 2023 protests across the country in support of the Palestinians, *The Times* reported that ‘Iranian agents are creating unrest in Britain by stoking protests, senior police have said as they prepare for a fresh round of demonstrations’.³⁵⁷ This intervention was described as coming via a combination of online disinformation, and Iranian agents being present at protests.

At the subsequent London rally for Palestine on 28 October, the Iranian flag could clearly be seen as the marchers started out from Embankment:

352. <https://archive.ph/ERRno>

353. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/aug/13/hadi-matar-charged-with-attempted-of-salman-rushdie>

354. https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1709169077598511570

355. <https://my.rusi.org/events/countering-extremist-threats-in-the-uk-an-address-by-robin-simcox.html>

356. Hate marches in Britain are a wake-up call to all decent people, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hate-march-is-a-wake-up-call-to-the-west-xrn-9nzm8l>

357. Iran is hijacking UK pro-Palestinian protests, police warn, 27 October 2023. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/iran-agents-uk-pro-palestine-protests-9f8pst-6vf>



At the earlier protest on 14 October, meanwhile, protestors chased the Iranian dissident Vahid Beheshti, who camps outside the Foreign Office in Whitehall in a campaign to get the IRGC proscribed. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that one of the crowd was carrying a picture of the late IRGC leader Qassem Soleimani, and that a group of 50 police officers eventually formed a supportive ring around Mr Beheshti, and the site where he protests.³⁵⁸ That site is regularly covered in posters denouncing the Islamic Republic of Iran, and is a meeting place for some of London's Iranian dissidents. Among the literature distributed on the march in London that day were flyers extolling Ayatollah Khamenei as the leader of the Muslim ummah (nation), and his declaration that the 'Zionist regime is dying'.³⁵⁹

358. Watch: mob of pro-Palestinian protestors chase Israel supporter until police step in, 15 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/15/pro-palestinian-protesters-chase-israel-supporter-london/>

359. <https://twitter.com/hardtimeshere11/status/1713305754101260550>



Elsewhere, in Bradford on 27 October 2023, a group called ‘Global Peace Journey’ organised a candlelit vigil that was held for the ‘martyred and injured in Palestine’. Among the speakers at that gathering was Molana Syed Ibrar Hussain Naqvi, a Shia cleric from Wakefield in West Yorkshire. In his contribution, Mr Naqvi denounced Israel’s actions against the Palestinians, and western media coverage of the conflict. The speech finished with praise for the role of Tehran:³⁶⁰

The world has seen that the country of Iran has reminded the world that we stand with the innocent. Imam Khomeini said that the Muslims can unite on one thing and that is the innocence of the Palestinian people.

It is certainly the case that Iran has looked favourably on the anti-Israeli protests held in Britain in recent months. On 15 October the pro-IRGC Pedarefetnah channel on Telegram showed BBC footage of the huge march in London with the caption “pro-Palestine protests in London are, from this perspective, burning Israeli sycophants even more!”³⁶¹

Similarly, the Iranian Embassy in London issued statements in Persian, on 18 and 29 October. The first of these declared support for what it

360. GPJ Vigil for the Palestinian People - 27-10-2023 - Molana Syed Ibrar Naqvi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQOoDlqzr4>

361. <https://t.me/pedarefetneh/159767> 15 October 2023. Persian text translated by a fluent speaker.

described as the Palestinian resistance.³⁶² The second statement pictured and quoted Charge d’Affaires of the Embassy, Hosseini Mateen. As well as condemning Israel, he criticised the British media and argued that the actions of Islamic groups fighting against Israel were within the framework of international law.³⁶³ This was not to be the last time Mateen entered into controversy. On 2 January 2024 the Iranian embassy in London held an event marking the fourth anniversary of the ‘martyrdom’ of IRGC-Quds force leader Qassem Soleimani,³⁶⁴ and Mateen led the eulogies.³⁶⁵

3.6. Stopping Iranian Subversion

It is clear whose job it is to protect the UK from Iranian state terrorism: the police and the security services. Yet one might ask whose job it is to counter Iranian state-led subversion – tackling the process whereby Iran tries to influence political, religious, educational or cultural organisations, or shape contemporary protest movements, to its own ends. Whereas an increasing amount is known about Iran’s online subterfuge, and its terrorist activities, comparatively little information appears to be available as to how concerned the Security Service is about Iranian subversion in the United Kingdom. Indeed, subversion, once a core task of MI5, appears to have been removed from the contemporary focus of the Security Service. Until recently on its website, MI5 stated “We no longer undertake counter-subversion work, and would only resume doing so if our monitoring of emerging threats suggested an increase in the subversive threat.”³⁶⁶

Indeed, if the outward comments of the security services are to be taken as record, since 1979 Iran’s activities in this country have been seen, not in terms of subversion, but as a potential terrorist threat. The idea that Iran may be seeking to influence British Muslims, and that it may be someone’s job to stop this, has not been openly articulated by the Security Service. For example, Dame Stella Rimington refers to Iran in her memoirs as one of a series of countries, alongside Libya, Syria and Iraq, using terrorism as an arm of foreign policy.³⁶⁷

In his authorised history of MI5, *The Defence of the Realm*, the historian Christopher Andrew noted how, “The hate campaign against Rushdie, though its significance was not fully grasped at the time, began the radicalisation of a minority of young British Muslims.”³⁶⁸ What Andrew failed to add, though, was that the Iranian state had clearly played a part in that radicalisation, a process of subversion that was to have a long-term impact on our social cohesion. Kenan Malik, for example, in his book *From Fatwa to Jihad*, points out that British Muslims Kalim Siddiqui and Ghayasuddin Siddiqui were at Tehran airport in February 1989 after a conference, when Mohammad Khatami (then Iran’s Minister of Religious Guidance and later President) arrived to seek their views on *The Satanic Verses*.³⁶⁹ The next day, the Ayatollah Khomeini issued his fatwa, sentencing Rushdie to death. Significantly, the Siddiquis’ UK-based Muslim Institute had initially not bothered to campaign against the *Satanic Verses*. But as Malik observed, ‘once the Ayatollah had delivered his death sentence ... the Institute discovered the Rushdie affair to be the most important issue facing

362. [هونایب - ندنل -ناریا یدالسا یرومج ترافس](#)
[هرایبرد ندنل رد ناریا یدالسا یرومج ترافس](#)
[\(mfa.ir\)نیطسلف تلوجت](#) Analysis conducted by a Persian speaker.

363. [یاهنایب - ندنل -ناریا یدالسا یرومج ترافس](#)
[ار زغ عیاجف هرایبرد یراک نایب یسئلگنا](#)
[\(mfa.ir\)دنراکب رانک](#) Analysis conducted by a Persian speaker.

364. https://twitter.com/Iran_in_UK/status/1742547471060873324

365. <https://twitter.com/smhmatin/status/1742279688213483549>

366. <https://web.archive.org/web/20240207185837/https://www.mi5.gov.uk/what-we-do>

367. Stella Rimington, (2001). *Open Secret: The Autobiography of the former Director-General of MI5*. London: Hutchinson, p. 212.

368. Andrew, (2010), op cit, p. 800

369. Kenan Malik (2009). *From Fatwa to Jihad: the Rushdie Affair and its Legacy*. London: Atlantic Books, p. 7-8

Muslims.³⁷⁰ An ‘anti-Rushdie tour’ of British universities was launched, and Ghayasuddin Siddiqui’s biographer later claimed that, ‘The fatwa was echoed in every corner of Britain and it was readily clear that Rushdie’s home was becoming a dangerous place for him’.³⁷¹

In this way, then, the Rushdie affair laid bare the capacity of the Iranian state to damage British social cohesion. Nor was it the last such occasion. Rather, a second example of Iran’s ability to stir the pot of religious prejudice within the UK emerged during 2021-22, again around the issue of blasphemy. The *Lady of Heaven* protests, which occurred at a series of English cinema chains in June 2022, centred on a film produced by a Kuwaiti Shia cleric based in Buckinghamshire, Yasser Al-Habib.³⁷² As far back as 27 December 2020, Iranian state media was objecting to the movie:

*Lady of Heaven’ is a film produced by the UK-supported pseudo-Shia groups to cast division and aspersion between Muslims of the world so that the West can exploit the gap and expand its imperialism.*³⁷³

While admitting they were unaware of the full contents of the movie, on 6 January 2021 a group of seven Shia scholars in Britain, including ICEL director Seyed Hashem Moosavi, expressed their opposition in a joint statement addressed to ‘Dear Believers’.³⁷⁴

370. Kenan Malik (2009) op cit, p. 124

371. C Scott Jordan (2019). *A very British Muslim activist: The life of Ghayasuddin Siddiqui*. Manchester: Beacon Books and Media Ltd, p.110

372. For an overview of the protests, see Paul Stott (2022) Research Note: ‘The Lady of Heaven Latest Target of Islamist Blasphemy Activists’: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/%E2%80%98The-Lady-of-Heaven.pdf>

373. <https://iranpress.com/iran-s-shamkhani-slams-lady-of-heaven-film-as-west-s-strategy-of-division>

374. <https://twitter.com/aliasgharhanafi/status/1532850919238520832>

Joint statement from Shia Muslim scholars in UK regarding the film made about the life of Hazrat Zahra (sa)

Date: 6th January 2021

In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

Dear Believers,

Salaamun Alaykum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh,

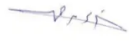
The Holy prophet PBUH said: Fatima (SA), leader of all women of the universe.
Saheeh Muslim Vol. 4 P 1904


Her Eminence Sayyida Fatima al-Zahra (as) is a very dear and beloved personality for all Muslims. She is the most esteemed and Ideal lady, who is a role model for all Muslims, men and women. In spite of her short life, she had a profound impact on all people around her and left behind a magnificent legacy.


She is an icon of faith, patience, chastity and sincerity. Her life is a testament full of support for the Seal of the Messengers, Prophet Muhammad (saw) and the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (as). Lady Fatima (as) nurtured the best children and set the perfect example for all to follow.

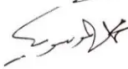
In recent weeks, it has come to our attention that some people have made a film on her life. Although we are unaware of the contents in detail, we wish to inform all our community members that anything that causes friction and disunity between Muslims is against our faith and not in line with the Fatwas of our honourable Maraje. We therefore urge all Muslims that any scenes depicting holy personalities of other Muslims which may cause sectarian conflict is not representative of the Shia faith.

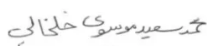
We pray for the safety of all faithful people across the globe.


Seyed Murtaza Keshmiri: 


Shaikh Ali Alemi: 

Seyed Fadhil Milani: 

Seyed Muhammad Mousavi: 

Seyed Mohammad Sa'eed Moosawi Khalkhali: 

Seyed Alireza Razavi: 

Seyed Hashem Moosavi: 

On 1 February 2021, the then Iranian Ambassador to the UK, Hamid Baeidinejad sought to engage directly with British Muslims, taking to social media to declare he had approached Islamic centres across the country, calling on them to press for the film to be banned.³⁷⁵

375. <https://twitter.com/baeidinejad/status/1356216986427158530>

← Thread



Hamid Baeidinejad

@baeidinejad

In a letter to the Shia and Sunni Islamic centres in the UK, I categorically condemned the film “the Lady of Heaven” produced in the UK as a divisive action, and expressed our concern over the attempts to create division and hatred among Muslims at this sensitive time.

12:25 · 01 Feb 21

14 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 44 Likes



Hamid Baeidinejad @baeidi... · 01 Feb 21

Such divisive attempt undermines the fundamental principles of Islam as well as the teachings of Prophet Mohammad(PBUH). Muslim community both Shia and Sunni, need to be vigilant and act in unity to condemn this film and resort to legal steps to ban the film in the UK.



4



19



Rahbar faqat Haider (a.s.) ... · 01 Feb 21

Replying to @baeidinejad

May Allah enumerate you and your leader

Tweet your reply



Whilst some of Ambassador Baeidinejad’s more controversial tweets were in Persian (for example a 24 December 2019 complaint about Rupert Murdoch being part of the Zionist media, and that Murdoch was following rules that Jewish owned media must support Israel)³⁷⁶ these messages were clearly written in English, for an English-speaking audience.

376. See <https://twitter.com/baeidinejad/status/1209558960883294208>

There then appeared to be something of a hiatus until shortly before the film was due to be released. In December 2021, the journalist Roshan Salih, formerly head of news of the Iranian broadcaster Press TV and now editor of the 5Pillars website,³⁷⁷ posted a review of *The Lady of Heaven* which described it as ‘pure unadulterated sectarian filth’.³⁷⁸ When advertisements for the movie began in May 2022, ahead of its scheduled June screenings, Salih returned to his theme, stating that ‘Complaints should be made to cinemas which are distributing this filth.’³⁷⁹ Protests, reported fully by 5Pillars and Press TV among others, began soon afterwards. The British opposition to *The Lady of Heaven* did not go unnoticed in Tehran, where the International Quran News Agency reported that the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), which it characterised as a ‘UK rights group’, had ‘slammed the screening of the movie, urging the Muslim community to unite to confront such malicious measures.’³⁸⁰

In a report for the Commission for Countering Extremism on blasphemy, Alexander Melegrou-Hitchens notes that during the *Lady of Heaven* controversy the Faizan-e-Islam mosque in Walthamstow, east London hosted ICEL’s Seyed Moosavi.³⁸¹ At a meeting dedicated solely to discussing the film, which brought together both Sunni and Shia clerics in their opposition, Seyed Moosavi was introduced as “the representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran.”³⁸² He then spoke of this being the 33rd anniversary of the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the importance of following what he called ‘pure Islam.’ Mainstream Shia, he stated, were against the film. When Moosavi finishes, the events compere reminds the audience that the ICEL is the office of Ayatollah Khamenei.³⁸³

After a series of protests outside cinemas across England, Cineworld removed the film from its screenings schedule.³⁸⁴ The same day, Iran’s chargé d’affaires Hosseini Matin reiterated his country’s agitation against the *Lady of Heaven*.³⁸⁵

377. 5Pillars, Our Team: Editor Roshan Muhammed Salih, <https://5pillarsuk.com/about/our-team/>

378. <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/12/24/lady-of-heaven-pure-unadulterated-sectarian-filth/>

379. <https://twitter.com/RmSalih/status/1529505988289744896>

380. <https://iqna.ir/en/news/3479188/uk-rights-group-calls-for-boycotting-controversial-movie>

381. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-and-responding-to-blasphemy-extremism> p.29

382. FaizaneIslam, *The Lady of Heaven* (Film), 8 June 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x73ox8hZ_HM The introduction is at 43:45

383. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x73ox8hZ_HM 50:30

384. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-61729392>

385. <https://twitter.com/smhmatin/status/1534554440711143424>



S.M. Hosseini Matin @smhmatin · Jun 8, 2022

Screening the Hateful film canceled: In a letter to the Shi'ite/Sunni Islamic centers in the UK we had condemned the film. **Now ask all Muslim figures/centers in UK to do so & take a divisive action against it** which creates division and hatred among Muslims.



theguardian.com

UK cinema chain cancels screenings of 'blasphemous' film after prot...
Cineworld cancels all showings of The Lady of Heaven after branches were picketed by Muslim activists

Although the UK does not have a blasphemy law, the Lady of Heaven protests, and the incidents outside Batley Grammar School in 2021,³⁸⁶ (which forced a school teacher who had shown his pupils a cartoon of Muhammad into hiding) serve as an indication that de facto blasphemy codes can be enforced on the streets if protestors commit to doing so, and there is no plan of action from the authorities in response. February 2023's events in Wakefield, where four schoolboys were suspended from school after one of them reportedly scuffed his own copy of the Qur'an, merely underlined the potential problems arising from this issue.³⁸⁷

The 2023 Independent Review of Prevent, conducted by William Shawcross, contained a section entitled 'Violence and intimidation associated with charges of 'blasphemy'', and a recommendation that the Homeland Security Group conduct research into this issue.³⁸⁸ The involvement of overseas states, such as Iran, was not mentioned, an oversight which needs to be addressed in any eventual investigation.

A new element in the struggle against Iranian subversion is that the UK now has the National Security Act 2023.³⁸⁹ Section 3 of this act is headed 'Assisting a foreign intelligence service' whereby it is a criminal offence to 'materially assist a foreign intelligence service in carrying out UK-related activities.' Section 14, devoted to foreign interference, covers interference in the political process, but also in what are referred to as 'convention rights.' Convention rights refers to 'the right to life, liberty, fair trials, and freedom of speech and assembly' as established by the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998.³⁹⁰ This could potentially be utilised against agents of a foreign power engaged in hostility towards members of a diaspora community campaigning

386. <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/year-prophet-muhammad-batley-school-23493076>

387. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>

388. William Shawcross, Independent Review of Prevent, 2023. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf

389. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/32/enacted>

390. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9958/>

politically in this country. Section 15, devoted to prohibited conduct, contains a clause devoted ‘to causing spiritual injury to, or placing undue spiritual pressure on, a person.’

Perhaps noting accusations that Iran has sought to use criminal elements to develop intelligence upon or to attack its foes, Section 17 makes it an offence to obtain material benefit from a foreign intelligence service. Core measures put in place by the Act came into force on 20 December 2023,³⁹¹ with the government promoting the Act in the following manner:³⁹²

The threat to the UK has evolved in recent years and Russia, China and Iran have all posed acute threats to the UK, through interference, poisonings and attempted kidnappings. This act makes it even more difficult for such activity to be undertaken on UK soil.

3.7 Conclusion

Given the information assembled in this chapter, one might ask again whether it is time for MI5 to take up once again the struggle against subversion, in order to safeguard the integrity of our democracy. It is not enough to merely tackle Iran via sanctions against IRGC leaders or by supporting Iranian dissidents targeted by the Islamic republic – the Iranian threat is multi-dimensional and needs a multi-dimensional response. Countering Iranian influence in this country also requires some particular skills – including languages. A search on the MI5 website under Farsi/Persian currently produces no hits,³⁹³ and the careers section of the Security Service website, where it features languages, refers specifically only to Chinese and Russian.³⁹⁴ Clearly, therefore, any redirection of MI5’s energies in this direction might well require a shift in resources as well as focus. But there are signs elsewhere that the security agencies are indeed re-evaluating the threat. As this report goes to press, Government Communications Head Quarters (GCHQ) is currently advertising for Persian Language Specialists for the three intelligence bodies – MI5, MI6 and GCHQ.³⁹⁵ The hope must be that this is not too little, too late.

391. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-security-laws-come-into-force>

392. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-national-security-laws-come-into-force>

393. Search conducted 31 January 2024

394. <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/careers/languages>
As at 31 January 2024.

395. <https://www.gchq-careers.co.uk/jobs/persian-language-specialist.html>

Conclusion

Britain is not the first country to misread the Ayatollahs. In 1978-9 France granted the Ayatollah Khomeini residence, a position he left in January 1979 to return to Tehran to take power. The UK takes an even more liberal position still. Permitting Iranian clerics to move in and out of the UK at will, at a time when the Islamic Republic of Iran's security apparatus is accused of threatening British citizens, including journalists, is intolerable. Among the many challenges for the UK following the 7 October attacks by Hamas, the authorities need to keep a close watch on Iranian agitation, in this country, on the Palestinian question. Whilst it is clear many in the British state are on a steep learning curve to better understand Iranian influence in the UK, this report takes some tentative first steps in considering certain pro-Iranian Shia organisations active in Britain. More such work needs to follow, if Tehran is not to pass the baton to its fellow travellers.

The need for a long-term approach can be seen as even more pressing when we consider the threat that Iran has posed to our social cohesion, most obviously around issues of blasphemy. There must be no compromise on the freedom to criticise, critique and debate religion. Those freedoms are too hard won to give away to Ayatollahs. Allowing the Iranian state to establish and develop institutions in this country is a bad mistake the United Kingdom made decades ago, which needs to be rectified as quickly and thoroughly as possible. That means responding to religious centres such as the Islamic Centre of England, whose importance should be clear to anyone who has read thus far. It is time Iran's mothership in this country was steered away from British waters, as part of a broader strategy designed to properly counter Iranian influence in the United Kingdom.

Appendix 1: Hostage Diplomacy? Disputed legal cases involving Britons and British-Iranians in the Islamic Republic of Iran

This research names twelve Britons jailed in disputed cases in Iran in recent years, commonly charged with spying and convicted in trials which egregiously failed to meet international standards (as with most trials in Iran). It is possible there are further cases not in the public domain. Iran refuses to recognise dual nationality, and so may not inform family members of an individual's location. In the case of Alireza Akbari, executed by the Iranian authorities earlier this year, HMG seems to have adopted its usual policy of quiet diplomacy, hoping that this would produce better results than publicity and a strategic communications campaign. It did not work. It rarely does.

Hostage diplomacy is not just about Britain, or the debt the UK owed to Iran for Chieftain tanks ordered by the Shah in the 1970s, which were never delivered.³⁹⁶ Cases of extremely dubious criminal convictions for 'spying' may be found involving nationals from other western countries, with seven French citizens currently held in Iran.³⁹⁷ In February 2022 Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele was jailed in Tehran for 40 years, with an additional sentence of 73 lashes.³⁹⁸ The Iranian government sought to swap Mr Vandecasteele for diplomat Assadollah Assadi, convicted in Belgium of terrorism offences, having plotted to blow up a conference of the Iranian dissident group -- the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, also known as Mojahedin-e-Khalq, MEK.³⁹⁹ On 26 May 2023 Vandecasteele left Iranian custody, and Assadi that of Belgium, and were exchanged in Oman. Assadi later received a hero's welcome in Tehran.⁴⁰⁰ This example reinforces the contention that Iran, as a matter of policy, takes hostages which it then seeks to trade with governments it is in dispute with. In 2021, for example, the *Guardian's* diplomatic editor, Patrick Wintour, suggested as many as thirty western dual nationals may be held in Iran.⁴⁰¹ Following the Assadi/ Vandecasteele exchange Amnesty International issued a withering statement arguing that Iranian dissidents abroad were now at increased risk of attack by agents of the Islamic republic, adding "Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the prisoner swap risks emboldening the Iranian authorities to continue to commit hostage-taking and other crimes under international law."⁴⁰²

396. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jul/26/court-ruling-over-tanks-debt-deals-new-blow-to-uk-iran-relations>

397. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230128-unbearable-distress-families-rally-for-french-held-in-iran>

398. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/01/31/condition-of-belgian-aid-worker-imprisoned-in-iran-deteriorating-says-closest-friend>

399. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/04/iranian-diplomat-jailed-for-20-years-for-planned-attack-in-france>

400. <https://apnews.com/article/iran-belgium-prisoner-swap-oman-caa4a1a0ad05711df8f484d83657a44a>

401. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/mar/14/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-kafkaesque-ordeal-will-need-a-diplomatic-fix>

402.

The organisation Hostage Aid Worldwide is a charity formed in September 2020 by individuals formerly held in such circumstances.⁴⁰³ It refers to a four stage ‘hostage business model’ operating in these cases:⁴⁰⁴

- Reconnaissance: An objective is set and a profile for suitable hostages designed to attract maximum media coverage in the home country.
- Weaponisation: Arrests are made to match the profile and a show trial arranged which “legitimizes” the hostage detention.
- Negotiation: Hostage assets are marketed via multiple diplomatic and other channels to authorities in the home country with the intention to barter the release.
- Exploitation: At some point a deal is agreed and the original or an equivalent outcome is realized. The deal is branded as a humanitarian gesture.

Here it must also be noted that the tactic of hostage taking for political advantage was adopted from the very beginning by the Islamic Republic. Following the decision of the United States to allow the deposed Shah of Iran to enter America for cancer treatment, the US embassy in Tehran was overrun and its employees’ taken hostage on 4 November 1979, precipitating a crisis that was to last for 444 days.⁴⁰⁵

Due to the increasing problem of dual nationals detained in Iran, on 17 May 2019 the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advised against all travel to Iran by dual nationals, and by any Iranian nationals who worked for organisations which could be perceived as close to the British government.⁴⁰⁶ Current Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) advice is that no British national should travel to the Islamic Republic. The FCDO states:

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Iran. British and British-Iranian dual nationals are at significant risk of arbitrary arrest, questioning or detention in Iran. Holding a British passport can be reason enough for the Iranian authorities to target you. If you are detained in Iran, you could face months or years in prison.

Travel advice had been liberalised after the JCPOA nuclear agreement in 2015, only to be sharpened again by July 2016, in order to warn dual nationals of potential risks following the first arrest of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.⁴⁰⁷

The table below details cases of Britons and dual nationals detained by Iran.

403. <https://hostageaid.org/about-us/>

404. <https://hostageaid.org/business-model/>

405. https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/research/hostage_crisis_in_iran. President Sadat’s subsequent decision to offer asylum to the Shah and his family in Egypt was a contributory factor in his assassination by Islamist terrorists in 1981, something gleefully welcomed by Ayatollah Khomeini. As at 8 April 2024

406. <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/iran> As at 29 October 2023.

407. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/jul/20/foreign-office-warns-british-iranian-nationals-of-detention-risk-in-iran>

Figure 4: Disputed legal cases involving British citizens and dual nationals in Iran

Name	Case
Kameel Ahmady	A British-Iranian anthropologist jailed for 9 years for 'collaborating with a hostile government'. He left Iran whilst on bail, to reappear in the UK early in 2021. ⁴⁰⁸
Alireza Akbari	Former deputy defence minister in Iran, and a dual national. He returned to Iran from the UK, where in 2019 he was convicted of spying. He was executed on 14 January 2023. Mr Akbari claimed a confession was made after prolonged torture. ⁴⁰⁹
Aras Amiri	An Iranian who worked for the British Council promoting Persian culture in the UK. Arrested in 2018 whilst visiting Iran. Later jailed for ten years for spying, she was released in January 2022, returning to Britain. ⁴¹⁰
Anoosheh Ashoori	A retired engineer from London who held dual British-Iranian citizenship. Jailed for ten years having been convicted of spying for Israel. Released in March 2022. ⁴¹¹
Kamal Foroughi	A British-Iranian businessman jailed for seven years in 2013, having been accused of spying for Britain. Released, aged 80, in 2020. ⁴¹²
Kylie Moore-Gilbert	A British-Australian academic. Arrested in 2018 after leaving an academic conference, she was jailed for ten years having been accused of spying. Released in 2020, in what Tehran described as a 'prisoner swap'. ⁴¹³
Roya Nobakht	Iranian-born resident of Greater Manchester. Arrested in 2013, subsequently jailed for 20 years for comments on Facebook in this country criticising the Iranian government as 'too Islamic' and 'controlling'. ⁴¹⁴ Information on her case appears extremely limited.
Mehran Raof	A 65-year-old British-Iranian trade unionist, who previously lived in Islington. He was detained in Tehran in October 2020, and reportedly jailed for 10 years in 2021 for membership of an illegal group. ⁴¹⁵
Shahram Shirkhani	A British-Iranian lawyer, he was sentenced to ten years in August 2020 for allegedly trying to recruit assets for MI6. ⁴¹⁶
Morad Tahbaz	A US-UK citizen of Iranian heritage. Tahbaz worked as a conservationist at the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation. He was jailed in 2019 for ten years for spying. In July 2022 it was reported he had been released with a tag, but was still in Tehran. ⁴¹⁷ He was released to the United States in September 2023. ⁴¹⁸
Abbas Yazdi	A British businessman based in the United Arab Emirates, Yazdi went missing in 2013, and is believed to have been taken forcibly to Iran. In 2015 three Iranians were convicted in the UAE of kidnapping him. ⁴¹⁹ It is unclear if Mr Yazdi is still alive.
Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe	Arrested in 2016, she was jailed for five years on national security charges, and was later re-tried in a second case, when she was jailed for 12 months with an additional one-year travel ban. She was released in March 2022, after a £400 million debt was settled with Iran. ⁴²⁰

408. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-55915942>

409. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-64273520>

410. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-59956831>

411. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-whats-happening>

412. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/04/01/british-grandfather-jailed-seven-years-iran-returns-home/>

413. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-55077744>

414. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/roya-nobakht-british-woman-imprisoned-in-iran-over-anti-government-facebook-comments-being-physically-tortured-say-campaigners-10391450.html>

415. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/07/uk-condemns-10-year-sentence-for-dual-national-in-iran-as-tensions-rise>

416. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tehran-names-shahram-shirkhani-as-iranian-british-lawyer-convicted-of-spying-wg-wvcfstv>

417. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/27/morad-tahbaz-has-been-freed-from-jail-in-iran-on-electronic-tag-uk-says>

418. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-66841137>

419. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/life-sentences-for-men-who-kidnapped-british-businessman-in-dubai-1.97103>

420. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/mar/16/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-to-leave-iran-after-six-years-in-detention-reports>

Appendix 2: Sponsors of the AI-Quds day march in London, 2006-2024

The only group to sponsor the march each year has been the IHRC.

Figure 5: Sponsors of the AI-Quds day march in London

Name	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
IHRC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
NK	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
InMinds	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
MPAC uk																	X	X	X
BLMC																	X	X	X
SPSC						X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5 Pillars													X	X			X	X	
FRFI																		X	X
UHURU																		X	X
JNP														X	X		X	X	X
AIM				X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
UISAE														X		X	X	X	
AIM Sis																	X	X	X
BARAC																	X	X	
Idara E-J													X				X	X	
Leb Sc													X	X	X		X	X	
Conviv																		X	X
CAMPAIN																			X
Leeds PALS																			X
NO2NATO																			X
PAL PULSE																			X
PK TRUST																			X
BAME L																	X		
Musl C E															X		X		
Cam StW											X	X					X		
SACC																	X		
MSC					X												X		

Name	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Imamian															X	X	X		
Foot AI													X	X		X	X		
ICEL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X				X	X			
FOA	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X				
CACC UK				X									X	X	X				
BUK											X				X				
ISAB	X			X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X				
Hastings													X	X	X				
Ahl ABS													X	X					
SFMNA										X			X	X					
Balfour													X						
JBIG								X	X	X		X	X						
LYZ													X						
PDF													X						
ISAL												X							
SWC	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X							
MAB	X			X	X	X	X	X		X		X							
LEB UK	X				X	X	X	X		X		X							
Malc X										X	X								
Mus Dir								X		X	X								
Pass IS								X		X	X								
Decolon												X							
Hidayat												X							
Ahlebaït												X							
AABS SC										X									
Fr o Lebn			X	X	X	X	X	X		X									
Scot PA										X									
UoPS									X										
MCB			X	X	X	X	X	X											
Sons o M								X											
UKIM						X	X	X											
Aloha P						X	X												
BIN							X												
IFE	X			X	X	X	X												
JAZ					X	X	X												
PLAF						X	X												
Lon BDS						X													
PRC	X		X	X	X	X													
FOSIS		X	X	X	X														
ABS					X														
IUS					X														
BMI	X			X															

Name	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
RESP	X		X	X															
CI	X	X	X																
HuT	X	X	X																
PI	X		X																
IMO	X																		
1990 T	X																		

List of groups names in full

- IHRC - Islamic Human Rights Commission
- NK - Neturei Karta
- InMinds
- MPACUK Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK
- BLMC - Black Lives Matter Coalition UK
- SPSC - Scotland Palestine Solidarity Campaign
- 5 Pillars
- FRFI – Fight Racism Fight Imperialism
- Uhuru Movement
- JNP - Jewish Network for Palestine
- AIM - Ahlulbayt Islamic Mission
- UISAE - Union of Islamic Students Associations in Europe
- AIM SIS - Ahlulbayt Sisters
- BARAC - Black Activists Rising Against Cuts
- Idara E-J - Idara-e-Jaajeriya
- Leb SC - Lebanese Society of Scotland
- Conviv - Convivencia Alliance
- CAMPAIN – Campaign against Misrepresentation in Public Affairs, Information and the News
- LEEDS PALSG – Leeds Palestine Solidarity Group
- NO2NATO
- PAL PULSE – Palestine Pulse
- PK TRUST – Peacekeeper Trust
- BAME L - BAME Lawyers for Justice
- Musl C E - Muslim Community of Essex
- Cam STW - Cambridge Stop the War
- SACC - Scotland Against Criminalising Communities

MSC – Muslim Student Council
Imamian - Imamians UK
Foot AI - Football Against Apartheid
ICEL - Islamic Centre of England
FOA - Friends of Al Aqsa
CACC UK - Campaign against Criminalising
Communities - UK
BUK - Bahraini Community in UK
ISAB - Islamic Student Associations in Britain
Hastings - Hastings & Rye PSC
Ahl ABS - Ahl Al Bait Society
SFMNA - Scottish Forum for MENA
Balfour - Balfour Declaration Centenary
Campaign
JBIG - Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods
LYZ - Labbayak Ya Zahra
PDF - Palestine Democratic Forum
ISAL - Islamic Students Association in London
MAB - Muslim Association of Britain

LEB UK - Lebanese Community UK
Malc X - Malcolm X Movement
Mus Dir - The Muslim Directory
Pass IR - Passion Islam
Decolon - Decolonising Our Minds Society
Hidayat - Hidayat TV
Ahlebait - Ahlebait TV
AABS SC - Ahl Al-Bait Society Soctland
Fr o Leb - Friends of Lebanon
Scot PA - Scottish Palestinian Alliance
MCB - Muslim Council of Britain
Sons o M - Sons of Malcolm
UKIM - UK Islamic Mission
Aloha P - Aloha Palestine
BIN - Boycott Israel Network
IFE - Islamic Forum of Europe
JAZ – Jews Against Zionism
PLAF - Palestine Legal Aid Fund
Lon BDS - London BDS
PRC - Palestine Return Centre
FOSIS – Federation of Student Islamic Societies
ABS - AhlulBayt Societies
IUS - Islamic Unity Society

BMI - British Muslim Initiative
 RESP - Respect Party
 CI - Crescent International
 HuT - Hizb ut Tahrir
 PI - Palestine Internationalist
 IMO - International Muslims Organization
 1990 T - 1990 Trust

The information in this appendix was taken from accessing the following sources:

Year	Source
2006	https://www.ihr.org.uk/event-the-annual-al-quds-day-march/
2007	https://www.ihr.org.uk/the-annual-al-quds-day-london-uk/
2008	https://web.archive.org/web/20090213035006/http://www.ihr.org.uk/show.php?id=3603
2009	https://web.archive.org/web/20090902104931/http://www.ihr.org.uk/events/9048-the-annual-al-quds-day-demonstration-2009-in-support-of-palestine
2010	http://www.inminds.com/qudsday2010-announce.php
2011	https://www.ihr.org.uk/al-quds-day-demonstration-uk-21st-august-2/
2012	https://www.ihr.org.uk/event-alert-al-quds-day-2012/
2013	https://web.archive.org/web/20140624141111/http://www.ihr.org.uk/events/10581-event-alert-al-quds-day-2013
2014	https://wilayah.info/en/protestors-march-through-streets-on-annual-al-quds-demonstration-in-london/
	https://web.archive.org/web/20140623215724/http://www.ihr.org.uk/events/11014-al-quds-day-2014
2015	https://www.ihr.org.uk/al-quds-day-2015/
2016	https://web.archive.org/web/20160624041240/http://www.ihr.org.uk/events/11668-al-quds-day-2016
2017	https://www.ihr.org.uk/event-report-al-quds-day-2017/
2018	https://www.ihr.org.uk/al-quds-day-2018/
2019	https://www.ihr.org.uk/al-quds-day-2019/
2020	https://www.ihr.org.uk/freedom-for-palestine-july-2014-2/
2021	https://www.ihr.org.uk/quds-day-2021-flytheflag/
2022	https://www.ihr.org.uk/al-quds-day-2022/
2023	https://www.ihr.org.uk/international-al-quds-day-2023-rally/
2024	https://www.ihr.org.uk/huge-crowd-expected-for-al-quds-day-rally-in-london/



£10.00
ISBN: 978-1-917201-02-5

Policy Exchange
1 Old Queen Street
Westminster
London SW1H 9JA

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